

Victorian Essential Learning Standards

Overview





Victorian Essential **Learning Standards**

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Foreword

All young Victorians need a high quality education that equips them with a broad range of knowledge, skills and personal qualities to confidently meet the challenges of life in a complex, information-rich and constantly changing world.

In releasing the Blueprint for Government Schools in November 2003, the Minister for Education and Training, Lynne Kosky MP, asked the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) to develop a new framework of essential learning for all Victorian schools that would both reinforce standards and promote flexibility at the school level.

The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards*, the VCAA's response to this request, provides the framework for schools to deliver teaching and learning programs that support students to develop capacities to confidently manage themselves and their relationships with others, make sense of the world in which they live and effectively participate in that world.

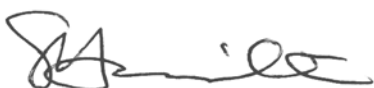
The Standards are based on the best practice in Victorian schools, national and international research and widespread consultation with school communities, educators, professional associations and community groups. They represent an outstanding collaborative achievement by all sectors of the Victorian education community.

During the consultation phase in 2004 the VCAA received over 1200 written responses which strongly endorsed the proposed direction for curriculum reform. This support continued throughout the development process, with hundreds of practising teachers, academics and other educators involved as writers or critical friends or responding to draft papers as members of reference groups. The VCAA also worked closely with the Department of Education and Training's Office of Learning and Teaching, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and the independent sector in the development of the Standards.

The VCAA Board particularly acknowledges the commitment to and leadership of this reform by its P-10 Curriculum and Assessment Committee and Curriculum Reform Working Party.

Throughout the State, principals and curriculum leaders have embraced the new curriculum approach, and are enthusiastic about how the Standards will support the work they are already doing to meet the learning needs of all students.

We look forward to schools using the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* as the basis for developing whole school curriculum planning, effectively monitoring student achievement, and reporting to parents and the community.



Stuart Hamilton
Chair



Michael White
Chief Executive Officer

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Overview

Introduction

The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* provide a new approach to organising the curriculum in schools. They give parents and the community confidence that rigorous standards have been set for students throughout Victoria. At the same time they recognise the responsibilities of principals and teachers to devise the best programs for their students to achieve these standards.

The Standards identify what is important for students to achieve at different stages of their schooling, set standards for those achievements and provide a clear basis for reporting to parents and for planning programs.

This curriculum approach directly addresses:

- the economic and social changes associated with the development of our global, knowledge-based world and their implications for schools; and
- the growing evidence base about how people learn and its implications for teaching that works.

Schools have a key role to play in developing skilled, flexible, responsible and creative young people. To date, however, we have been slow to adapt our curriculum to the broad demands that society places on young people. This has led to pressure to include ever more content without establishing clear priorities. Our curriculum has not provided sufficient support in systematic ways to the notion of developing learners who can apply their knowledge beyond the classroom to new and different situations.

Essential learning

The Essential Learning Standards are a framework of *essential learning* in two ways. First, the framework is based on the premise that there are three components of any curriculum which are necessary to enable students to meet the demands of a modern, globalised world. These components are:

- the processes of physical, personal and social development and growth
- the branches of learning reflected in the traditional disciplines; and
- the interdisciplinary capacities needed for effective functioning within and beyond school.

In the Standards, these components become the three core strands; Physical, Personal and Social Learning, Discipline-based Learning and Interdisciplinary Learning.

Second, the Standards clarify the core elements of each component which students need to acquire if they are to succeed in further education, work and life.

The traditional discipline strand is balanced in the Standards by a set of broader interdisciplinary capacities (the domains of Communication, Design, Creativity and Technology, Information and Communications Technology and Thinking Processes), and linked to physical, personal and social development (the domains of Health and Physical Education, Interpersonal Development, Personal Learning and Civics and Citizenship), with all three strands being equally necessary. Together, the three strands provide the basis for students to develop deep understanding – an ability to take their learning and apply it to new and different circumstances.

Priorities at different stages

The Standards have been developed in response to the growing body of evidence on how people learn and the developmental stages of learning that young people experience at school. This research recognises that while student learning is a continuum from Prep through to Year 10, and that different students develop at different rates, they broadly progress through three stages of learning from:

- Prep to Year 4 (laying the foundations), where the curriculum focuses on developing the fundamental knowledge, skills and behaviours in literacy and numeracy and basic physical and social capacities which underpin all future learning; to
- Years 5 to 8 (building breadth and depth), where students progress beyond the foundations, their literacy and numeracy becomes more sophisticated, and important discipline-based and interdisciplinary capacities are progressively introduced; to
- Years 9 and 10 (developing pathways), which constitute a bridge to the post-compulsory years and where students begin to focus more clearly on areas of particular interest related to both their future schooling and intended pathways beyond school while developing their understanding of, and connection to, the community in which they live.

Recent research¹ has provided new understanding of the learning process and the development of competent performance in different intellectual domains, with the result that teaching and learning is focusing on student understanding and the application of knowledge to different contexts.

Of particular importance as far as the Standards are concerned, is the way in which students progress from being novice to more expert learners as they move through school. Research suggests the development involves: noticing features and meaningful patterns of information; acquiring relevant content knowledge that is organised in ways which reflect a deep understanding of the subject matter; applying the knowledge in ways appropriate to context, rather than merely exercising one's memory; retrieving important aspects of knowledge with a degree of automaticity; and approaching new situations in flexible ways.

That is why the Interdisciplinary and Physical, Personal and Social Learning strands are intertwined with the commonly accepted core bodies of knowledge (disciplines) which are central to any curriculum framework. The Standards do not replace the core disciplines. The disciplines are related to the other strands in a new and integrated manner.

By combining all three strands in a common framework for creative implementation by schools, the Essential Learning Standards provide a comprehensive curriculum response to the challenges of today's globalised knowledge economy, consistent with research findings on how students learn.

At Levels 1 and 2 the focus is largely on foundational literacy and numeracy skills and the development of physical, personal and social capacities.

It is not until Level 3 that students are expected to achieve standards in disciplines such as Science and the Humanities. At Levels 4 and 5 it is appropriate that students be supported and expected to achieve the full range of knowledge and skills in each of the three interrelated strands that comprise the Standards.

At Level 6 the Standards are designed to enable schools to construct coherent programs which include: each of the five broad disciplines; a strong focus on developing the full range of interdisciplinary and physical, personal and social knowledge, skills and behaviours; and the capacity for students to pursue pathway-related studies which meet their needs, and dovetail with the programs available in Years 11 and 12.

By focusing on what is *essential*, the Standards achieve two important objectives. First, they reduce the reporting requirements in some domains at some levels to better reflect the development of student learning. Second, they give formal recognition to the knowledge and skills being developed by schools in the areas of physical, social and personal learning and in interdisciplinary areas by providing a common language for teaching and learning, assessing and reporting.

Building the future

The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* propose that students need to develop a set of knowledge, skills and behaviours which will prepare them for success in a world which is complex, rapidly changing, rich in information and communications technology, demanding high-order knowledge and understanding and increasingly global in its outlook and influences. To succeed in that world, all students need to develop the capacities to:

- manage themselves as individuals and in relation to others
- understand the world in which they live; and
- act effectively in that world.

Students will need to create a future which:

Is sustainable – developing an understanding of the interaction between social, economic and environmental systems and how to manage them.

Is innovative – developing the skills to solve new problems using a range of different approaches to create unique solutions.

Builds strong communities – by building common purposes and values and by promoting mutual responsibility and trust in a diverse socio-cultural community.

Each of these purposes is embedded within the three core strands of the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards*, and incorporated into specific standards.

For example, environmental sustainability will not only draw on the full range of interdisciplinary domains but will also be embedded within such discipline areas as Science, Geography and Economics, and programs to develop students' physical, personal and social capacities. Similarly, community building is likely to be a core component of the Civics and Citizenship and the Interpersonal Development domains.

Educational principles

The Essential Learning Standards are underpinned by a clear set of educational principles which reflects the community's expectations for schooling in Victoria.

Specifically, the educational principles are:

Learning for all – proceeding on the basis that all students can learn given sufficient time and support, and that good schools and good teaching make a positive difference to student outcomes

Pursuit of excellence – seeking to accomplish something noteworthy and admirable individually and collectively, and performing at one’s best

Engagement and effort – acknowledging that student ability is only one factor in achievement and that if students work hard and make an effort, they improve

Respect for evidence – seeking understanding and truth through structured inquiry and the application of evidence to test and question beliefs

Openness of mind – being willing to consider a range of different views and consider different ways in which evidence is perceived and solutions can be reached.

Using the Standards

In many ways this approach is not new. Many schools are already doing valuable work in building students’ knowledge, skills and behaviours in the areas identified in the Standards. For example, many schools explicitly set out to build good social and interpersonal skills in their students. Other schools promote a thinking-oriented curriculum and much of what is in the three core strands is already part of the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) on which the existing school curriculum is based.

What is new, however, is that Victoria now has a set of standards for ensuring that all three strands, and their domains, are addressed by all schools in their teaching programs and in their assessment and reporting practices.

The Standards have not been designed as an organisational template on which to develop timetables or school structures. They are designed to be used for whole school curriculum planning. School teams will decide how to meet the essential learning standards. For some this may be through explicit teaching focused on a particular standard and for others it will be by creating units of work which address a number of standards at the same time. The key to using the Standards successfully will be the development of a whole school curriculum plan. Figure 1 on page 6 illustrates this approach.

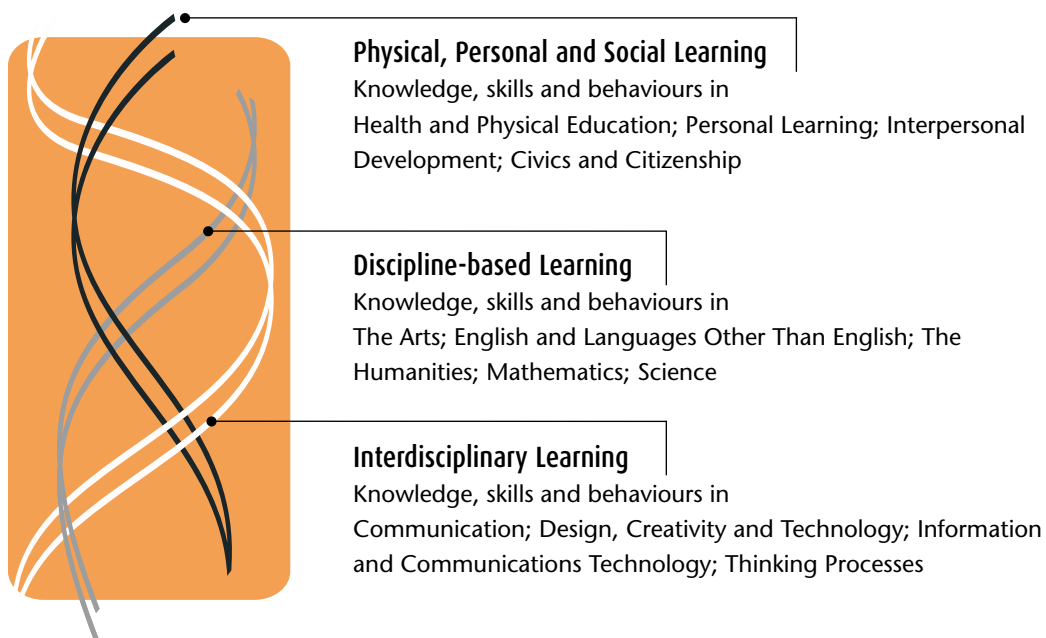
VICTORIAN ESSENTIAL LEARNING STANDARDS

A WHOLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Three interwoven purposes

To equip students with capacities to:
manage themselves and their relations with others
understand the world and
act effectively in that world
to prepare them for success in education, work and life.

This is achieved through the three core, interrelated strands of



across the stages of learning



underpinned by educational purposes, principles and values

to form

Victorian Essential Learning Standards a framework for whole school curriculum planning

Schools plan their teaching and learning programs, using the three strands, to enable their students to achieve the essential statewide learning standards.

Figure 1: Whole school curriculum plan

Structure

Within each strand of learning, the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours are organised into *domains* with further divisions into *dimensions*. Standards are written for each dimension. The relationship between the strands, domains and dimensions is shown in Table 1.

Strand	Domain	Dimension	
Physical, Personal and Social Learning	Health and Physical Education	Movement and physical activity Health knowledge and promotion	
	Interpersonal Development	Building social relationships Working in teams	
	Personal Learning	The individual learner Managing personal learning	
	Civics and Citizenship	Civic knowledge and understanding Community engagement	
Discipline-based Learning	The Arts	Creating and making Exploring and responding	
	English	Reading Writing Speaking and listening	
	Languages Other Than English	Communicating in a language other than English Intercultural knowledge and language awareness	
	The Humanities	Economics	Economic knowledge and understanding Economic reasoning and interpretation
		Geography	Geographical knowledge and understanding Geospatial skills
		History	Historical knowledge and understanding Historical reasoning and interpretation
	Mathematics	Number Space Measurement, chance and data Structure Working mathematically	
Science	Science knowledge and understanding Science at work		
Interdisciplinary Learning	Communication	Listening, viewing and responding Presenting	
	Design, Creativity and Technology	Investigating and designing Producing Analysing and evaluating	
	Information and Communications Technology (ICT)	ICT for visualising thinking ICT for creating ICT for communicating	
	Thinking Processes	Reasoning, processing and inquiry Creativity Reflection, evaluation and metacognition	

Table 1: The structure of the essential learning strands

The domains in each of the three strands comprise two interrelated elements:

- Learning focus statements; and
- Standards.

Learning focus statements

Learning focus statements are provided at each level for each domain. They outline the learning that students need to focus on if they are to progress in the domain and achieve the standards at the levels where they apply. In the main, they suggest appropriate learning experiences rather than defining a syllabus or prescribing specific teaching methods. Teachers can draw from these statements to develop relevant teaching and learning activities.

In some disciplinary domains however, such as History and Geography, key content is specified to ensure coverage of subject matter which is crucial to further learning in the domain and/or part of what the community expects all young people to learn (for example the study of Australia's history including such issues as the history of indigenous peoples and the impact of white settlement and Federation in Australia).

Standards

Standards define what students should know and be able to do at different levels of schooling and are written for one or more dimension within each domain. They are, in effect, outcomes against which student achievement will be assessed and reported on and provide valuable information about student progress which can form the basis of further teaching and intervention.

By clearly specifying the standards appropriate at each of the six levels, broadly equivalent to Prep and Years 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10, the Standards provide a clear picture of the sequence of development a student should progress through in the three strands. The standards enable teachers, parents and students not only to determine the knowledge and skills a student currently demonstrates, but also what that student needs to know and be able to do to progress to the next level, through to the end of Year 10.

The standards are set at a challenging, not minimum, competence level in age and developmentally appropriate ways. This helps to ensure that students are stretched to learn, rather than doing work they may find easy and uninteresting.

The standards do not represent specific tasks to be completed in narrowly defined ways. Students will be required to demonstrate their achievement of the standards using a wide variety of learning activities and tasks. Nor do the standards determine how teachers will assess. For example, if a standard involves explaining a key idea or concept, this could be demonstrated through a performance, test or assignment.

Relationship between the learning focus statements and the standards

Learning focus statements are provided for each domain at all six levels and are broadly associated with two years of learning and teaching. The standards specify the knowledge and skills students should be aiming to achieve at the end of those two year periods, where it is essential and developmentally appropriate for standards to apply. For example, students may learn basic economics knowledge and skills in the early years of school, such as the need to spend within their means, but it is not developmentally appropriate to specify standards until Level 4 when more sophisticated and comprehensive concepts and capacities are involved.

While Table 2 below outlines a general expectation of when students will achieve the various standards, students will develop at different rates. Some students in Year 5, for example, may still be working towards achieving the standards at Level 3 while others need to be introduced to knowledge and skills covered by the learning focus statement at Level 5.

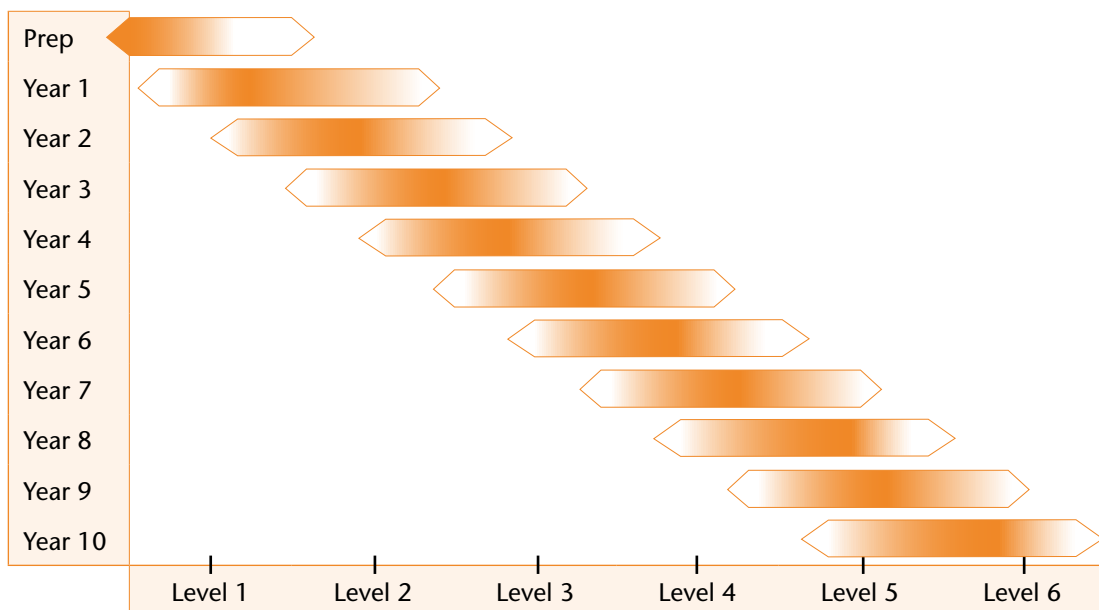


Table 2: Relationship between years of schooling and levels in the Essential Learning Standards

Table 3 provides a summary of the levels in each domain that have formal standards against which student achievement will be assessed and reported. Standards are introduced where they are central to future learning and success and where research suggests they are developmentally appropriate.

Levels with standards for assessment and reporting							
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Physical, Personal and Social Learning	Health and Physical Education	*	*				
	Interpersonal Development						
	Personal Learning						
	Civics and Citizenship						
Discipline-based Learning	The Arts	*	*				
	English						
	The Humanities						
	Economics						
	Geography						
	History						
	Languages Other Than English						
	Mathematics						
	Science						
Interdisciplinary Learning	Communication						
	Design, Creativity and Technology						
	ICT						
	Thinking Processes						
* Standards in one dimension only							

Table 3: Summary of levels with standards

Formal standards apply to those levels shaded in each domain in Table 3, while only learning focus statements are provided for the levels that are unshaded. (Learning focus statements for Economics, Geography and History at Levels 1 to 3 are included within the Humanities. Levels 4 to 6 outline separate learning focus statements for Economics, Geography and History.)

This does not suggest that students should not or cannot be introduced to concepts from particular domains before standards apply, such as Science or Geography in the early years (Levels 1 and 2) where there are no formal standards for assessment and reporting. The purpose of the learning focus statements at these levels is to give advice about learning experiences that will assist students to work towards the achievement of the standards in later years when they apply.

Using the Economics example provided on page 9, the setting of standards from Level 4 means there is no formal requirement for schools to assess and report on Economics until the end of Year 6. However, the learning focus statements at Levels 1 to 3 provide advice about appropriate learning experiences for schools including basic ideas about Economics before Level 4. For example, at Level 2 – *Students begin to understand how local resources are used to make products which meet local people’s needs and the needs of people in other places* – introduces a concept of economics in a developmentally appropriate way, without requiring a particular standard to be met at this stage.

In Languages Other Than English (LOTE) standards are introduced for assessment and reporting at Level 4. While it is clear that students gain most benefit from the study of another language when they begin this study in the early years, it is acknowledged that some schools choose to maximise the effect of their resources by introducing LOTE programs at different year levels with appropriate time allocations. In recognition of the cumulative nature of language learning, the LOTE domain includes progression measures which provide a typical sequence of second language development leading to Level 4. Regardless of the level at which the study of a LOTE is introduced, students will need to develop the knowledge and skills described in the progression measures before they attempt the learning associated with the Level 4 standards. These progression measures also assist those schools that provide LOTE programs prior to Years 5 and 6 to assess and report effectively on student achievement.

Learners of English as a second language

Many students in Victorian schools learn English as a second language (ESL). They are of all ages and at all stages of learning English, and have varying educational backgrounds in their first languages. While the broad objectives of English programs will ultimately be the same for all students, those learning English as a second language need time, support and exposure to English before being expected to reach the learning standards described in the English domain and will come to this achievement via a range of pathways. Teachers need to devise appropriate teaching and assessment practices for these students.

The *English as a Second Language Companion to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards* was published in December 2005 and provides a framework for assessing student achievement and developing effective learning programs for the many students in Victorian schools who are learning English as a second language.

In the domains other than English, ESL learners usually need to express their understanding using English. It is therefore important that assessments of progress in these domains are made in the context of the learner's development as a learner of English. The ESL Companion will assist in assessing such development.

For more information on the *ESL Companion to the VELs* visit:
<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/support/esl/esl.html>

Students with disabilities

The Standards are designed for all Victorian students. They provide a whole school curriculum planning document for the development of individual programs for students with disabilities. These programs should be developed at the school level in conjunction with program support groups. Individual programs should be tailored to individual circumstances. Reporting of student achievement will be decided at the local level. All such programs, however, should be designed within the curriculum described in the Essential Learning Standards.

The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards – Students with Disabilities Guidelines* provide a framework for teachers to develop programs for students with disabilities that are consistent with the VELs by linking the rationale and structure of the VELs to individual program development and assessment for students with special needs.

For more information on the Guidelines visit:
<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/support/disability.html>

Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) II

The CSF will remain an important curriculum resource to help teachers in writing teaching and learning programs. Direct comparisons can be made between the documents because the Standards have retained the six level structure of the CSF.

From 2006 the school curriculum and reports to parents will be organised around the new *strands* and *domains* and not around the eight key learning areas defined in the CSF. This will mean that schools are able to give greater recognition to the knowledge, skills and behaviours which are part of the Interdisciplinary and Physical, Personal and Social Learning strands.

A major difference between the documents is that the key learning areas are no longer the main organising feature for the curriculum. The role of physical, personal and social along with interdisciplinary learning has been made explicit, in acknowledgment of the work that schools already do, and the value they place, on developing these areas.

The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* replace the CSF. The Department of Education and the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria provide advice to schools about reporting against the VELs.

National Benchmarks

National Literacy Benchmarks are used for reporting achievement in three aspects of literacy – reading, writing and spelling – at Years 3, 5 and 7.

National Numeracy Benchmarks are used for reporting achievement in three aspects of numeracy – ‘Number sense’, ‘Spatial sense’ and ‘Measurement and data sense’ at each of Years 3, 5 and 7.

For purposes of comparison and ease of reporting, the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks have been embedded in the Standards in the English and Mathematics domains. However, these benchmark performance indicators articulate nationally agreed *minimum* acceptable standards, and the Standards are set at a *challenging* level. This means, for example, that even though there is an expectation that students in Year 7 will be working towards achieving the standards at Level 5, the National Benchmarks for Year 7 are embedded at Level 4.

Implementing the Standards

Fundamental to the Essential Learning Standards is the integrated focus on the three strands to develop deep understanding in learners which can be transferred to new and different circumstances.

The Standards are not intended as a total curriculum for schools. They instead seek to describe what is *essential* for students to achieve during the compulsory years of school (Prep to Year 10). Schools will construct appropriate curriculum programs which ensure these essential outcomes are achieved, in ways which reflect the resources and expertise available, and the particular needs and interests of the school community.

Implementation of the Standards therefore requires an holistic, whole school response. There are many ways in which schools can structure programs. The VCAA and the Department of Education have developed a number of support materials to assist schools to implement the VELs including the Curriculum and Planning Guidelines and support materials such as sample units.

- Schools may opt to use an integrated approach where one or more disciplines and other relevant domains are combined and addressed through key questions or themes. A number of schools are, for instance, constructing curriculum programs around such high level questions as an investigation of the human genome project and its implications, which draw on a number of disciplines (English, Science, History, etc.) and a range of physical, personal and social and interdisciplinary domains. The role of the school as a whole is to ensure full coverage of the Standards as appropriate to the level involved.
- Schools may, choose to incorporate the interdisciplinary and physical, personal and social strands of the Standards into existing discipline-based subjects and broaden their focus in this way. For example, teachers of different subjects within an existing curriculum can determine collectively the extent to which other domains are addressed already in their teaching and learning programs (for example, Thinking Processes, ICT, Interpersonal Learning, etc. within English, or History, etc.) and the opportunities to extend this so the full range of relevant standards can be met. Under the leadership of the principal, the school as a whole will then need to ensure appropriate coverage of the Standards across the relevant developmental levels, and that areas of shortfall are addressed.
- Schools may seek to combine all three strands in the context of extended projects that students are to complete. Students in Years 9 and 10 in particular can benefit from extended projects which require them to learn and apply knowledge and skills across many, interrelated domains. For example, students may participate in a comprehensive, extended, city-based project involving significant investigation and research, visiting and interviewing, report writing and presentation of results, and more. As with each example listed above, the school must ensure that students' learning experiences throughout the year will enable them to meet the full range of standards which apply to the level in which they are involved.

There is, however, no single approach. Schools have responsibility for, and control over, the educational program they develop to enable their students to achieve the standards.

For more information on the Curriculum Planning Guidelines go to the Department of Education website at:
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/curriculum/default.htm>

VCAA support materials are available at:
<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/support/index.html>

Assessment

The VCAA and Department of Education and Training have developed a set of assessment principles² which have been published on the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* and Student Learning websites. Applying these principles to the structure of the Essential Learning Standards will require some careful initial planning.

Assessment should reflect the integrated nature of the Essential Learning Standards. Rather than treating every standard as discrete there should be an integrated approach to assessing performance. This not only ensures a more efficient approach to student assessment that avoids unnecessary duplication of assessment tasks and subsequent reports, but also more clearly reflects how students actually learn.

The following example helps illustrate the point.

A common assignment in many secondary humanities classes requires students to write a letter to a public official about an issue of concern to the student and/or the class. More specifically, the student might be asked to:

- Write a letter to a public official about an issue of concern to you.
- Make sure that your letter clearly states your opinion on the issue, and provides well thought-out reasons for your view.
- Use the common conventions of formal letter writing.

The same assignment could, however, be structured so it is more of a learning task in its own right, where the student is required to:

- Select a public issue of concern to you.
- Read about this issue from a minimum of four sources, two of which support your viewpoint and two of which oppose it.
- Then identify a public official who has some decision-making authority in relation to this issue and write a letter to this person which: clearly states your position; provides evidence (for example, survey data, reports, etc.) to support your view; acknowledges and rebuts an opposing view; and suggests a solution to the issue.
- Use the common conventions of formal letter writing and ensure your letter has an introduction and a conclusion as well as the central arguments you advance.
- Seek feedback on your draft letter from at least one other member of the class and one adult from within the school or your family and rewrite it as needed. Provide also an accompanying note which outlines the feedback you received and how it led you to either change your letter, or leave it the same.

While the product essentially is the same, the quality of work required and demonstrated for the latter assignment is significantly higher and, arguably, more engaging. It requires a higher level of intellectual achievement to complete, and a deeper level of student involvement.

In addition, because it is a much richer task, it provides assessment information across a range of domains, thereby enhancing the student's demonstration of their learning, and enabling the teacher to assess some physical, personal and social, and interdisciplinary as well as discipline specific knowledge and skills. This in turn helps limit the need for more assessment related to these other strands.

In practice, this approach to assessment is characterised by:

- assessing a range of appropriate standards and not just what is easy to measure or grade;
- focusing on more complex, contextualised demonstrations of what has been learned, rather than a number of smaller, disconnected tasks;
- inviting students to use knowledge and skills in new contexts and/or to produce a product or complete a performance so the focus is on tasks worth completing;
- ensuring adequate time for students to plan and complete their work including, where appropriate, working with others and evaluating and revising work; and
- being varied, interesting and valued, but also efficient for students to complete and teachers to assess.

A question that will undoubtedly arise is, 'When has a student achieved the standard?'

Each set of standards describes a range of things that a student should know, understand and be able to do. It cannot be considered that a student knows or understands something unless they are able to use that knowledge, or apply that skill, in a range of contexts, including those that are new to them. Consequently, achievement of a standard has to be demonstrated across a range of tasks and situations allowing the teacher to make an on-balance judgment regarding performance over time.

The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* are accompanied by assessment support materials, including assessment maps and progression point examples, to assist teachers to make reliable, on-balance judgments of student achievement at various levels and assessment tasks that exemplify appropriate assessment in relation to specific aspects of the standards from the relevant domain standards.

In addition, sharing, reflection and collaborative assessment processes using the sample material as needed, will enable teachers to develop common understanding of the standards and to make valid judgments about student performance that are consistent within their own classes, with their colleagues in their own school, and around the state.

For more information on assessment support materials visit:
<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/index.html>

End Notes

¹ Bransford, John D, Brown, Ann L and Cocking, Rodney R (eds) 1999, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School*, National Academy Press, Washington DC

² Victorian Essential Learning Standards website:
<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/assessprinciples.html>
Blueprint for Government Schools website:
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au>

The development of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards is a key initiative in the Government's education reform agenda. The Department of Education provides the Government with policy and planning advice for the delivery of education and training.

For more information on the Blueprint for Government Schools and other Department of Education initiatives visit:
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au>

Websites

Department of Education
www.education.vic.gov.au

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
www.vcaa.vic.edu.au

Victorian Essential Learning Standards
<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au>

Validation of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards

A validation of the VELs was conducted during 2005. Data was collected about the VELs structure, standards and learning focus statements through a broad-based online questionnaire, an independent evaluation of the standards, a comparability study of the standards and learning focus statements in five learning domains with comparable national and international curriculum documents, and an assessment project with 45 schools. The validation confirmed the structure of the VELs and the strands, domains and dimensions were retained. Changes to the learning domains resulting from the year of validation were minimal, generally relating to issues of clarity of purpose, consistency of language and provision of further examples. The title of the 'Thinking' domain was changed to 'Thinking Processes' to clarify the focus of the domain.

More information on the validation is available on the VELs website:
<http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/about/background/validation.html>



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