



STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES GUIDELINES



VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



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Introduction

The purpose of the guidelines

The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards – Students with Disabilities Guidelines* provides teachers in all schools with guidelines that link the rationale and structure of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards to individual program development and assessment for students with disabilities.

The guidelines reflect current educational reform at a state, national and international level, and are informed by inclusive education principles and practices.

Inclusive education, a term that has been used to articulate the rights of every student to participate in, or have access to, the full range of programs and services offered by the education system, supports and celebrates the diversity found among all learners.

The guidelines contain a framework for planning inclusive curriculum so teachers can equip all students with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to help them succeed in a world that is increasingly complex, rapidly changing and rich in information and communications technology.

The framework is linked to a whole-school approach to curriculum planning, and reflects the three core strands of essential learning in Physical, Personal and Social Learning, Discipline-based Learning and Interdisciplinary Learning.

While focusing on students with disabilities the approaches outlined in the guidelines are valuable for all students.

Links to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards

Background

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards outline what is crucial for all students to achieve from Prep to Year 10. They provide a framework for planning the whole-school curriculum by setting out standards for students to achieve in core areas. Schools will use the Victorian Essential Learning Standards to plan their teaching and learning programs, including assessment and reporting of student achievement and progress.

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards are based on:

- exemplary practice in Victorian schools
- national and international research
- emerging data on how people learn and the developmental stages of learning that young people experience at school
- widespread consultation with school communities, professional associations and community groups.

Educational principles

The guidelines have been developed to reflect the five educational principles which underpin the Standards and schooling for all students. They 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 perform at their best.
- **Engagement and effort** – acknowledging that student ability is only one factor in achievement and, 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.

Three strands of learning

To succeed beyond the compulsory years of schooling, all students need to develop the capacity to:

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

To ensure the school curriculum develops students with these capacities, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards are embedded within three core, interrelated *strands*. For students with disabilities, teaching and learning within these strands should focus on understanding what students need to know for success in the future.

Each strand is divided into *domains* that are further divided into *dimensions*.

The domains describe the knowledge, skills and behaviours considered essential in the education and development of students to prepare them for further education, work and life. They also include the standards by which student achievement and progress is measured. Standards are written for each dimension.

The three strands for the curriculum and their associated domains are:

Physical, Personal and Social Learning

- Health and Physical Education
- Interpersonal Development
- Personal Learning
- Civics and Citizenship

Discipline-based Learning

- The Arts
- English
- Languages Other Than English
- The Humanities – Economics
- The Humanities – Geography
- The Humanities – History
- Mathematics
- Science

Interdisciplinary Learning

- Communication
- Design, Creativity and Technology
- Information and Communications Technology
- Thinking Processes

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	

Using the Victorian Essential Learning Standards

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards provide a strong foundation for improving the learning of all students. They outline key principles that enable schools to provide enriching educational experiences for students while preparing them to live in an inclusive society that can meet modern and globalised demands.

The educational principles imply that schools are responsible for developing a wide range of appropriate teaching and learning strategies for all students. For schools, this means developing curriculum described in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards but tailored to individual circumstances.

The educational principles within the Standards also imply that schools, teachers and students have responsibility for ensuring student success in learning and can be applied when developing individual learning plans for students with disabilities. They provide a strong foundation for improving the learning of all students and a framework for integrating planning for students with disabilities into a whole school curriculum. Working within a whole school curriculum plan, a student's program support group will decide how to meet learning standards for individual students.

Key understandings

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards are designed for all students. Programs for students with disabilities will be planned within the curriculum described in the Standards.

For schools, this may mean examining:

- organisational structures
- relationships with parent/guardian/carer/s and the community
- curriculum design, delivery and adaptation
- available resources and expertise
- types of supports that are utilised
- links from the curriculum to the wider community.

What is expected from schools in providing curriculum for students with disabilities?

All students, irrespective of the school they attend, where they live or their social and economic status, have an entitlement to a high-quality school education and a genuine opportunity to succeed.

Blueprint for Government Schools 2003

Every student is entitled to a quality education. The Victorian Essential Learning Standards have been put in place for all schools to achieve this. The Standards acknowledge the diversity of student needs in the community. Schools have an obligation to respond to this challenge by tailoring curriculum and organisational arrangements to cater for different learning needs.

Disability Standards for Education were formulated by the Commonwealth Attorney-General under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. The Disability Standards clarify the obligations of education and training providers to ensure that students with disabilities are able to access and participate in education without experiencing discrimination.

Planning an inclusive curriculum

In planning an inclusive curriculum schools and teachers can support students with disabilities through a number of whole school structures and classroom-based approaches.

Whole school structures

All students, given sufficient time and support, can learn and achieve.

Organisational approaches that schools may choose to implement include:

- **Collaboration with parent/guardian/carer**

As the primary source of knowledge about the student, parent/guardian/carer involvement is central to achieving student success. Involving the family in curriculum planning is an approach that recognises the student as a functioning member of the broader community. Acknowledging and involving the student's family can establish positive relationships and promote communication.

- **Implementation of a whole school curriculum plan**

There is no single approach to curriculum planning. However, an inclusive approach incorporates the belief that all students can learn and progress, and a commitment to a collaborative relationship between students, family, school and the community (see Attachment 1, page 14).

For students with disabilities units of work can be linked to the Standards by:

- developing a whole school plan
- identifying key concepts from the learning focus statements
- incorporating domains across the three strands
- identifying relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours from the relevant domain
- setting goals and developing individual learning plans
- providing alternative learning pathways for demonstrating achievement of the Standards.

- **Use of appropriate language**

Undertake curriculum program planning using a plain language model to ensure the student and parent/guardian/carer are comfortable within the process, and are not excluded by technical terminology or jargon.

- **Implementation of a program support group**

The program support group (PSG) is a team of people that work collaboratively to develop, write, monitor and evaluate the individual learning plan – a document which links the specific needs of the student to the three strands.

The PSG represents a collaborative partnership in the educational planning process between the parent/guardian/carer, the student and the school. It works towards developing a pathway plan for educational progress for students with disabilities.

Membership of the PSG comprises the student (where appropriate), parent/guardian/carer of the student, a parent/guardian/carer advocate, principal or the principal's nominee and a class teacher (primary) or teacher/s nominated as having responsibility for the student (secondary). The PSG may also co-opt other members with knowledge or information relevant to the educational and social needs of the student.

When planning and developing programs for a student with a disability, the PSG is advised to use the following sequence as devised by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The PSG should:

- share an understanding of the student as a learner so as to deliver the most effective educational program for the student
- identify student strengths, skills, preferences and abilities
- identify the preferred learning style and those which need strengthening
- understand the learning environment by considering the layout and location of facilities and equipment requirements
- focus on planning for future education and training, employment or desired life style
- set educational goals for both the long and short term (see following for more detail)
- set goals that are appropriate for individual students
- decide on what needs to be taught when program planning, ensuring content relates to that which the rest of the class is learning
- select priorities for the content to be taught so that it builds on and extends the strengths of the student
- select teaching methods
- determine organisational strategies
- develop evaluation and review procedures.

Further information is available at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/default.htm>

The PSG establishes shared goals for the student's educational future. Important considerations for the PSG when setting educational goals are to:

- build on the strengths and skills of the student
- ensure the goals are a priority for the student
- reference personal and program goals to the Standards
- develop goals within the appropriate curriculum level for the student
- ensure that all parties are in agreement with the goals
- ensure they are achievable, measurable and have a review date
- set goals to enable effective reporting
- understand the difference between long- and short-term goals.

In association with classroom teachers, the PSG assesses individual requirements for achieving within the classroom and then collaboratively develops long-term and short-term goals at the appropriate curriculum level within the strands, domains and dimensions of the Standards.

- **long-term goals** are broad general statements of expected learning outcomes that may focus on social, academic or life skills. Expectations of the parent/guardian/carer, the student and the school are key factors to consider.
- **short-term goals** are measurable. They identify the sub-skills that are required for a student to achieve a long-term goal. Written in observable and measurable terms, they indicate what is to be accomplished within a short period of time.

Evaluate the learning environment

An evaluation of the general layout of the school and specific classroom settings may result in modifications to ensure individual access and equity to learning opportunities.

Access mainstream services and community supports

Access mainstream services and community supports that promote social inclusion, positive learning environments and participation in school settings.

Classroom-based approaches

Teachers are responsible for planning and implementing the curriculum for their students. Within teaching and learning environments, teachers aim to meet the needs and goals of all students through developing an appropriate curriculum that is referenced against the Standards.

When planning teaching and learning programs, teachers:

- collaborate with the student, parent/guardian/carer, education and health professionals to develop criteria for agreed understandings and responses about a student's behaviours, needs, communication skills, learning styles and preferences

- allow for teaching and learning strategies to be adapted according to a student's background experiences, individual personality and individual goals
- provide opportunities for students to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours in a range of domains and contexts
- develop an age-appropriate curriculum that includes PSG goals
- allow all students to participate in classroom activities with other students.

Develop individual learning plans

The individual learning plan (see Attachment 2, page 15) process provides structures for ensuring students with disabilities are engaged in the classroom curriculum. The primary purpose for developing an individual learning plan is to provide a framework and guide that links the specific learning needs of the student to the three strands.

Individual learning plans:

- stem from whole-school curriculum planning
- link to a student's short- and long-term learning goals developed by the PSG
- include age appropriate learning activities and assessment tasks
- allow for alternative learning pathways for demonstrating the Standards
- include suggested home activities, if appropriate
- identify next steps in a student's learning
- have an agreed date for review of the learning plan.

Developing and implementing individual learning plans ensures all individuals are valued and accommodated within the school environment and promotes student self-determination, positive growth and recognition.

Assessment and reporting

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards are a framework of essential learning for all students. The Standards outline the learning students need to concentrate on at each level and the expectations for student achievement.

All students will participate in programs that allow them to achieve the maximum extent possible in the Standards. For schools, this may mean developing individual learning plans for students with disabilities that are tailored to individual circumstances and designed within the curriculum described in the Standards. Through Standards-based assessment and reporting, valuable information about student progress is provided.

Assessment

A key purpose of assessment is to improve student learning, and so curriculum planning and the development of teaching and learning goals are crucial. To help schools develop effective assessment, a set of ten assessment principles has been developed. The key principles are:

- the primary purpose of assessment is to improve student performance
- assessment should be based on an understanding of how students learn
- assessment should be an integral component of course design and not something to add afterward
- good assessment provides useful information to report credibly to parents on student achievement
- good assessment requires clarity of purpose, goals, standards and criteria
- good assessment requires a variety of measures
- assessment methods used should be valid, reliable and consistent
- assessment requires attention to outcomes and processes
- assessment works best when it is ongoing rather than episodic
- assessment for improved performance involves feedback and reflection.

For further information, see

vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/support/tla/effective_assess.html.

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards are based on three interrelated strands. To assess student performance schools may decide to take an integrated approach to assessment across a range of domains. Some students with disabilities will make similar progress in a number of domains as their peers. Goals developed for students from PSG meetings will provide alternative ways of achieving specific standards.

In assessing students, teachers:

- develop a common understanding of the learning focus statement and standards
- collaborate with students and parents on the assessment process

- collect a variety of evidence through using a range of strategies
- make on-balance judgment as to whether students have demonstrated achievement against the standards after taking into account all available evidence
- consider alternative or authentic ways in which students can demonstrate achievement based on the goals developed in the individual learning plan.

Reporting to parents

It is reasonable to expect that reports to parents will provide information on what students know, what they can do and how they can improve. The PSG goals and individual learning plan provide an important focus for reporting to parents. Program modifications and alternative learning pathways for demonstrating the standards should be considered in the reporting process.

Reporting student achievement to parents can also be facilitated through student work samples, portfolios, parent/student/teacher conferences, communication diaries and student self-assessment on their progress.

While reporting of student achievement will be decided at the local level, the VCAA provides advice and support to assist education sectors and schools in aligning reports on student achievement around the Victorian Essential Learning Standards strands and domains. However, the primary responsibility for developing reporting guidelines and formats rests with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and schools.

Further reporting advice from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website

<www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/studentreports/default.htm>

Resources

The following resources provide schools with additional support for implementing an inclusive curriculum.

General information

www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability

A curriculum toolkit for schools and teachers

www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/stuman/wellbeing/CurriculumToolkit2006.pdf

The curriculum toolkit provides information; strategies and tools that are designed to assist school leadership teams and teachers achieve improved or enhanced learning and teaching practices for all students including those with disabilities.

Planning & resourcing: Program and student groupings

www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/curriculum/preptoyear10/guidelines/phase2/psg/buildpicstudents.htm

Teachers are presented with a series of questions relating to curriculum planning and the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.

Planning & resourcing: Pedagogy

www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability

www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/curriculum/preptoyear10/guidelines/phase2/psg/buildpicstudents.htm

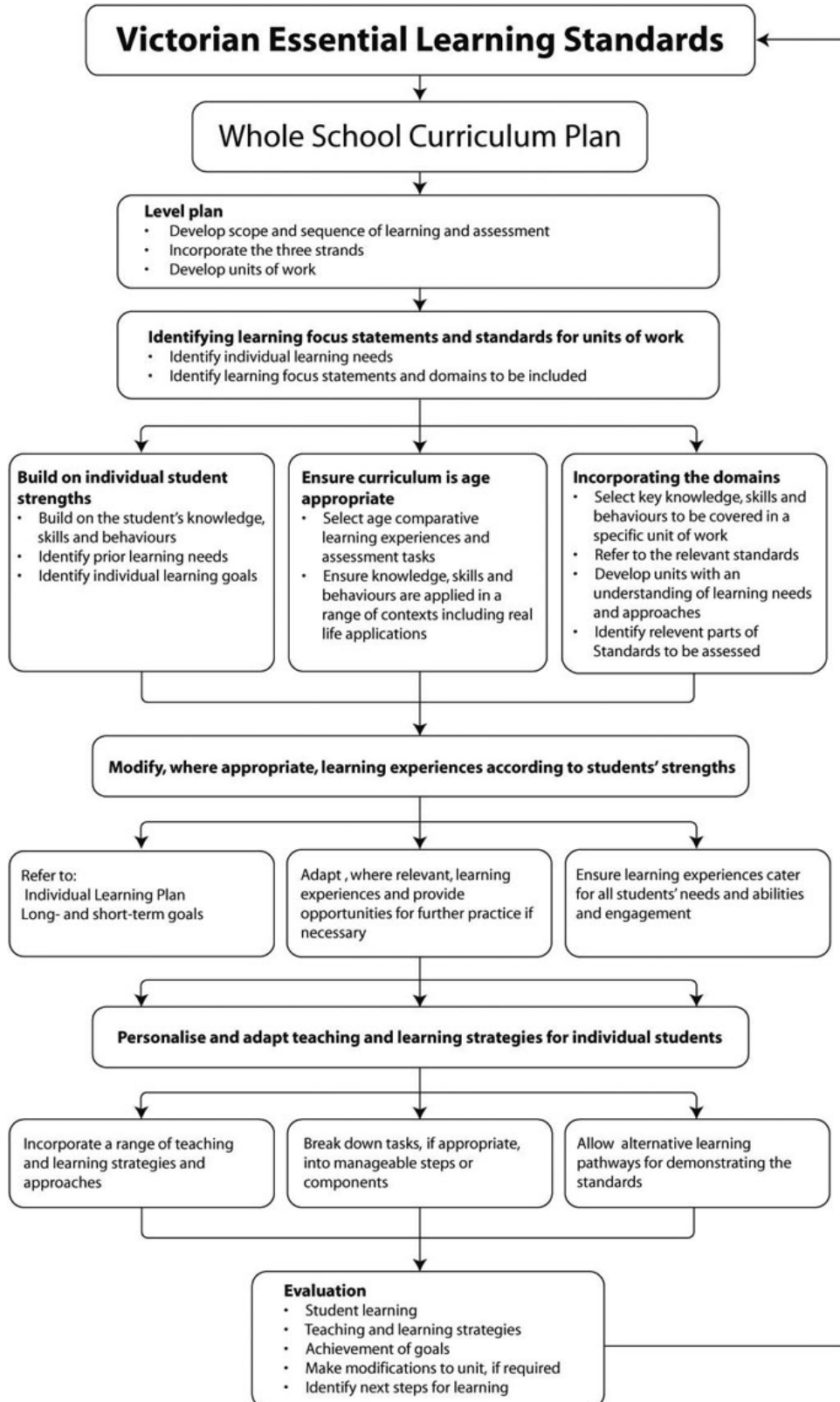
Principles of teaching practice are outlined to help teachers select a focus which could be considered when planning curriculum at the program and student grouping level.

Ministerial Statement: Blueprint for Government Schools

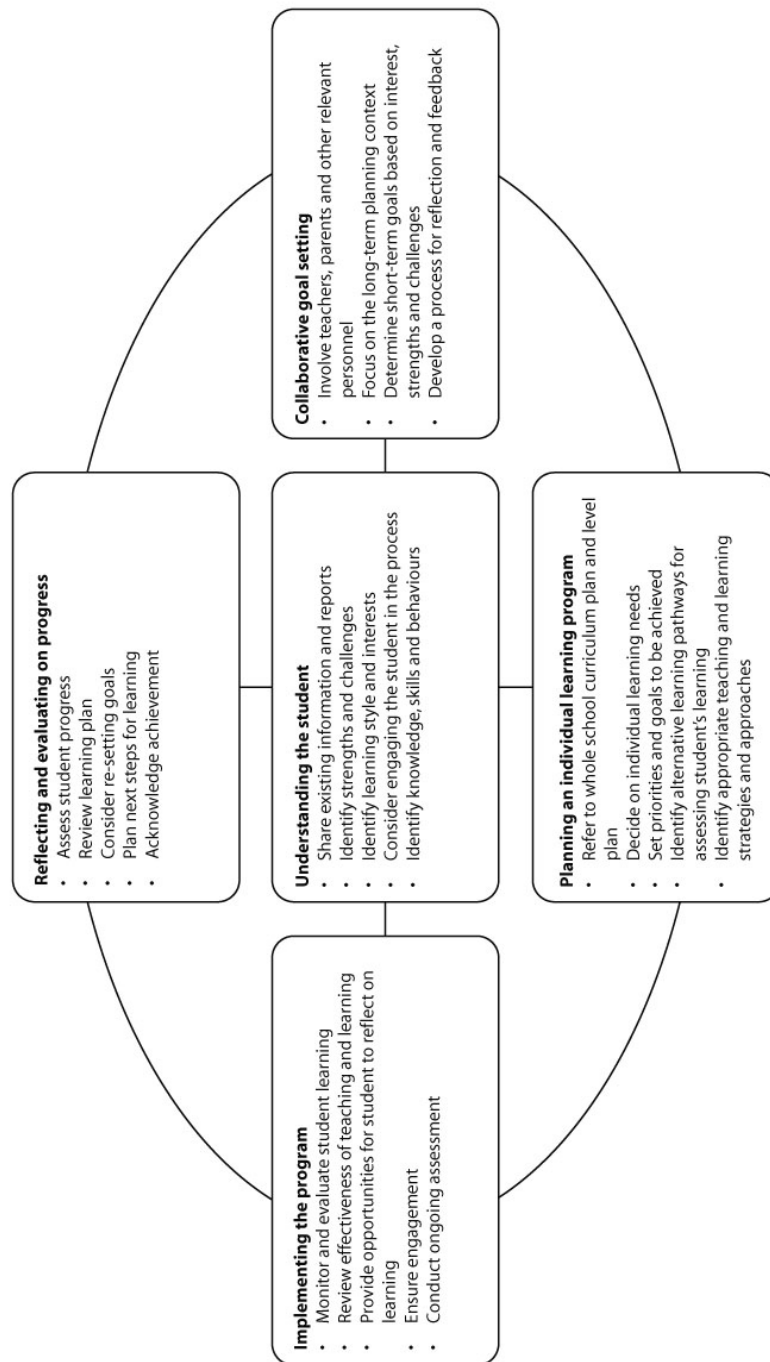
www.education.vic.gov.au/about/publications/policy/blueprint.htm

The Ministerial Statement, published in 2003 by the Minister for Education and Training, outlines seven flagship strategies and incorporates a range of initiatives including recognising and responding to diverse student needs.

Attachment 1: Developing a whole school curriculum plan



Attachment 2: Developing an individual learning plan





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