

# ***Victorian Essential Learning Standards: Overview***

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005

## **Overview of the document**

17 page overview document introducing the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) which arose from the Blueprint for Government Schools. The document was distributed to schools in April 2005 and it explains the main features of VELS, which include a focus on essential learning, three stages of learning (P-4, 5-8, 9-10) and three core interrelated strands of learning (physical, personal and social learning; discipline-based learning; and interdisciplinary learning).

## **Keywords**

Essential learnings; knowledge, skills and behaviours; best practice; benchmarking; globalised knowledge economy; complex, rapidly changing world; high-order knowledge; learning for all, excellence, engagement and effort; physical, personal and social learning; discipline based learning; interdisciplinary learning; appropriate learning experiences; competence; developmentally appropriate.

## **Table of Contents**

INTRODUCTION

ESSENTIAL LEARNING

PRIORITIES AT DIFFERENT STAGES

BUILDING THE FUTURE

EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLES

USING THE STANDARDS

STRUCTURE

    Learning focus statements

    Standards

    Relationship between the learning focus statements and the standards

LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

CURRICULUM AND STANDARDS FRAMEWORK (CSF) II

NATIONAL BENCHMARKS

IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARDS

ASSESSMENT

## **Summary of Content**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- Notes that the VELS is a new approach to organising curriculum.
- Notes that the standards identify what students should achieve at different stages of schooling.
- Notes that 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.
- States “Schools have a key role to play in developing skilled, flexible, responsible and creative young people.” (p. 1)
- Argues that to date curriculum has not effectively responded to the challenge of

providing “sufficient support in systematic ways to the notion of developing learners who can apply their knowledge beyond the classroom to new and different situations.” (p. 1)

### **ESSENTIAL LEARNING**

- States that 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.” (p. 1)

### **PRIORITIES AT DIFFERENT STAGES**

- Identifies three stages of learning:
  - Prep to Year 4 (laying the foundation).
  - Years 5 to 8 (building breadth and depth).
  - Years 9 and 10 (developing pathways) – which constitutes a bridge to the post-compulsory years. (p. 2)
- Notes that students progress from being novices to more expert learners.
- States that “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.” (p. 3)
- Describes VELs as a “comprehensive curriculum response to the challenges of today’s globalised knowledge economy”. (p. 3)
- Notes that the focus on essential learnings reduces reporting requirements and gives formal recognition to the knowledge and skills being developed in areas of physical, social and personal learning.

### **BUILDING THE FUTURE**

- Notes the challenge of an increasingly complex world which is rich in information technologies and requires high-order knowledge. Argues that “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.” (p. 4)
- Argues that students will need to create a future that is sustainable, innovative and builds strong communities.

### **EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLES**

- Identifies the educational principles underpinning the VELs as:
  - Learning for all;
  - Pursuit of excellence;
  - Engagement and effort;
  - Respect for evidence; and
  - Openness of mind. (pp. 4-5)

## **USING THE STANDARDS**

- Acknowledges that “many schools are already doing valuable work in building students’ knowledge, skills and behaviours”. (p. 5)
- Argues that what is new here is that Victoria now has a set of standards to ensure that all three strands are addressed by schools in teaching programs and in assessment and reporting.
- Argues that standards provide the template for whole-school curriculum planning to equip students with capacities to:
  - manage themselves and their relations with others;
  - understand the world;
  - act effectively in that world; and
  - to prepare them for success in education, work and life. (p. 5)
- Provides a figure which illustrates the approach. (p. 6)
- Illustrates that the approach is achieved through the three core, interrelated strands of
  - Physical, Personal and Social Learning: Knowledge, skills and behaviours in Health and Physical Education; Personal Learning; Interpersonal Development; and Civics and Citizenship.
  - Discipline-based Learning: Knowledge, skills and behaviours in The Arts; English and Languages Other Than English; The Humanities; Mathematics; and Science.
  - Interdisciplinary Learning: Knowledge, skills and behaviours in Communication; Design, Creativity and Technology; Information and Communications Technology; and Thinking Processes. (p. 6)

## **STRUCTURE**

- Notes that within each strand, essential knowledge, skills and behaviours are organised into domains, and then divisions.
- Notes that domains and strands comprise two interrelated elements:
  - Learning focus statements; and
  - Standards.

### **Learning focus statements**

- Notes that learning focus statements are provided at each level for each domain and that these suggest appropriate learning experiences rather than prescribing syllabuses or teaching methods.

### **Standards**

- Notes that the standards define what students should be able to do at different levels of schooling, constitute the outcome against which students should be assessed and provide a picture of the sequence of development through the three strands.

### **Relationship between the learning focus statements and the standards**

- Notes that learning focus statements are broadly associated with two years of learning and teaching while the standards specify the knowledge and skills students should be aiming to achieve at the end of the two year periods in terms of what is essentially and developmentally appropriate.

## **LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

- Acknowledges that many Victorian students learn English as a second language and

that they need time and support to before being expected to reach the learning standards. Notes that an ESL companion to the VELs will be developed.

#### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

- Notes that the VELs has been designed for all students.
- Notes that programs for students with disabilities should be developed in conjunction with program support groups and tailored to individual circumstances and that reporting will be decided at the local level.

#### **CURRICULUM AND STANDARDS FRAMEWORK (CSF) II**

- Notes that the CSF remains an important resource to help teachers in writing teaching and learning programs and that direct comparison can be made between the VELs and the CSF because the VELs has retained the CSF's six level structure.
- Notes that from 2006, curriculum and reports will be organised around the new strands and domains, not the eight key learning areas defined in the CSF. Notes that the main difference is that "the role of physical, personal and social, along with interdisciplinary learning has been made explicit." (p. 12)
- Notes that during 2005 schools will continue to use the CSF for curriculum planning, assessment and reporting.

#### **NATIONAL BENCHMARKS**

- Notes that national benchmarks are used for reporting achievements in three aspects of literacy and three areas of numeracy at Years 3, 5 and 7 and that the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks have been embedded in VELs in the English and Mathematics domains.

#### **IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARDS**

- Argues that integrated learning is fundamental to the Essential Learning Standards.
- Notes that the standards are not intended to form the total curriculum but to cover essential learning.
- Argues that implementation requires a whole-school approach and notes that schools will have responsibility for, and control over, the educational programs developed to meet these standards.

#### **ASSESSMENT**

- Notes that a set of assessment principles have been developed to complement VELs.
- Argues that assessment should reflect the integrated nature of the VELs and approaches should be 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. (p. 16)