

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:

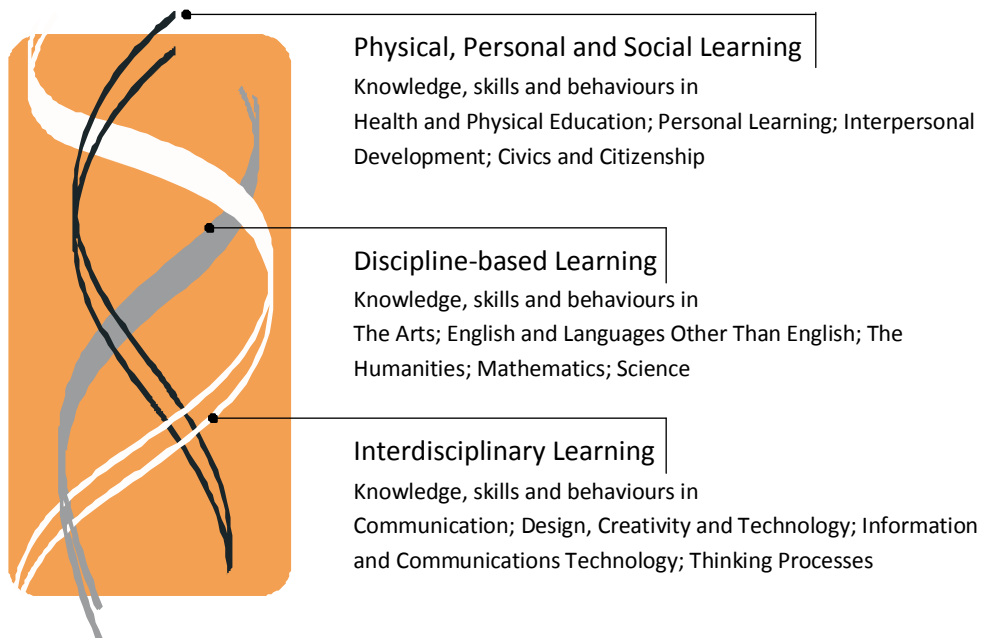
manage themselves and their relations with others

understand the world and

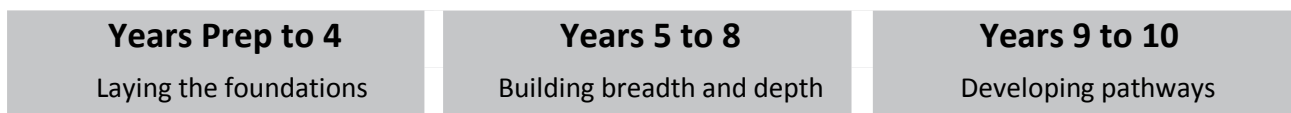
act effectively in that world

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	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 Communication	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.

