State Government Victoria

The Victorian Government's Vision for Languages Education

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The Victorian Government's Vision for Languages Education

Languages education offers significant benefits for Victorian students, their families and communities. At school, it helps our children and young people to develop their first language literacy, problem-solving, intercultural and communication skills, and it equips them for a wide range of careers. More broadly, it contributes to social cohesion, underpins Victoria's increasingly globalised and export-oriented economy and enables speakers of the languages to maintain or reclaim their languages.

For all of these reasons, the Victorian Government has made a strong commitment to languages education. For this Government the teaching and learning of languages in our schools is not an optional extra for students – it is essential.

The Victorian Government wants all students to be given the opportunity to learn a language and to achieve proficiency in that language. We want Victoria to have one of the world's most diverse and effective languages education programs. We will settle for nothing less.

The Victorian Government is fortunate to have many partners supporting the delivery of languages programs. We pay tribute to those in education and in the community who have worked tirelessly to strengthen languages education over many years, and look forward to continued collaboration with these partners.

This statement affirms the Victorian Government's strong commitment to languages education and explains why we are making languages education a priority. It describes the commitments we have made so far and the principles on which our approach to languages education is based. Finally, it announces key actions that have been taken as a first step toward achievement of our vision for languages education, and sets out our approach to planning for the long term.

We trust this statement will be the start of a conversation about languages education with the Victorian community and look forward to developing our long-term plan with you.

The Hon. Martin Dixon, MP
Minister for Education

The Hon. Nicholas Kotsiras, MP
Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship

Why we are making languages education a priority

The ability to speak two or more languages has never been more important for Victoria's children and young people. Life and work in the twenty-first century is characterised by global mobility, interconnection and exchange.

Whether they live in our capital, a regional centre or rural area, Victorian students will increasingly need to engage and communicate with people from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. *The Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians* articulates the importance of equipping young Australians with the skills to communicate, not only within and across Australia's linguistically and culturally diverse society but also in an increasingly interconnected global world. High-level language and intercultural skills will be critical if our students are to respond with confidence to the challenges and opportunities resulting from globalisation.

The Victorian Government knows that languages education offers students many benefits. We know that the learning of languages enhances first language literacy, including the development of English literacy for students with English as their first language. Top performing education systems around the world offer extensive and compulsory languages education programs and continue to achieve strong student outcomes, because languages learning contributes to the development of students' cognitive, communication and problem-solving skills. Languages learning also offers students new ways of understanding their own identity and culture and the cultural perspectives of others.

Languages education provides significant benefits for the Victorian community. It enables Victorian Aboriginal communities to revitalise and reclaim Language as a core element of their culture and it provides an avenue for our non-indigenous culturally and linguistically diverse communities to maintain their languages and cultures. Languages learning underpins social cohesion because it supports communication and respect across cultures.

Creating a multilingual society through increased and improved languages education will also deliver benefits to the Victorian economy. One of the main requirements for doing business internationally is strong language capabilities.

Victoria's economic growth will increasingly depend on the ability of Victorian companies to do business in non-English-speaking markets. In particular, Victorian businesses will increasingly look toward Asia's growth markets, and will require cultural and linguistic skills to succeed. In order to be competitive Victorian businesses must become multilingual. Through increased support for languages education, the Government is creating a future workforce that will better meet the needs of businesses engaging and expanding globally.

Strengths and challenges

Victoria is uniquely positioned to become a languages education leader. We are a dynamic, multicultural community: one quarter of Victorians were born outside Australia, and half of us are migrants or the children of migrants[1]. We speak over 200 languages[2]. This is a strong foundation on which we can build a world-class languages education program.

We have the highest participation rate in languages education of any state or territory in Australia. We offer a diverse range of languages, with 21 languages taught in Victorian government primary schools and 17 in secondary schools and more than 17.4 per cent of our VCE students study languages. Our well-established complementary providers, Community Languages Schools and the Victorian School of Languages, offer out-of-school-hours classes to over 50,000 students in 45 languages. There are 14 bilingual programs in 12 government primary schools across the state.

There is also current legislation that requires all Victorian schools to substantially address the learning area of languages. This registration requirement, as detailed by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA), is supported by the inclusion of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) within the discipline-based learning strand in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). The VELS outlines what is essential for all Victorian government school students to learn during their time at school from Prep to Year 10. It also provides a set of common statewide standards that all schools can use to plan student learning programs, assess student progress and report to parents. This provides the Government with a sound platform for the introduction of compulsory languages learning for all students in government schools, Prep to Year 10, by 2025.

1. 2006 Census: 23.8% of population born overseas and 43.6% of population had at least one parent born overseas.
2. 2006 Census.

Yet, in spite of these many strengths, we also face significant challenges. The number of government schools, and particularly primary schools, offering a languages program has fallen alarmingly over the last decade, with a 27.7 per cent decline in the number of primary schools providing a program between 1999 and 2010 (from 1,244 to 847 schools). The decline in relation to secondary school languages provision was 12.4 per cent over the same period (from 304 to 272 schools).

There has also been a significant decline in the percentage of students learning a language, from 88.7 per cent of government primary school students in 1999 to 69.4 per cent in 2010 (from 272,694 to 205,015 students) and from 54.2 per cent of secondary school students in 1999 to 41.1 per cent in 2010 (from 115,015 to 91,657 students).

Table 1 Percentage of government schools offering a languages program

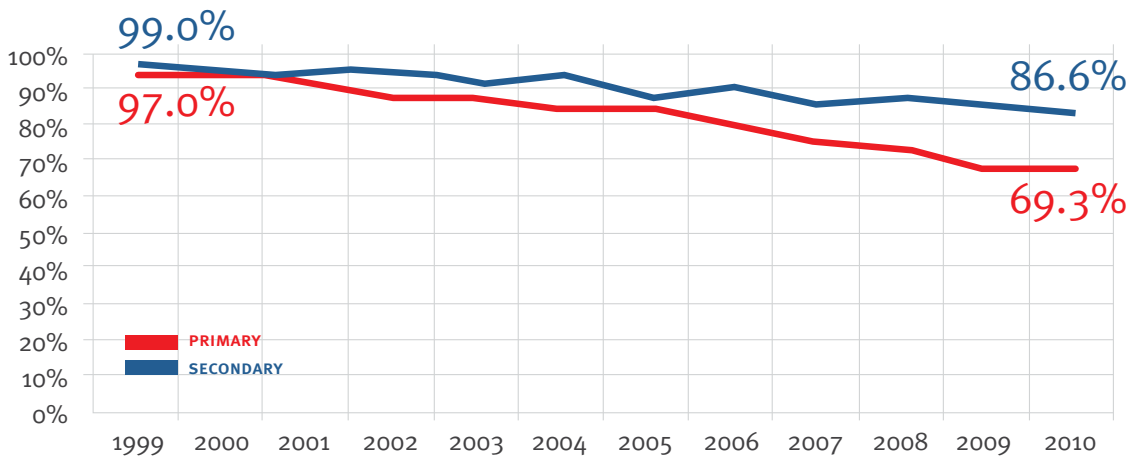
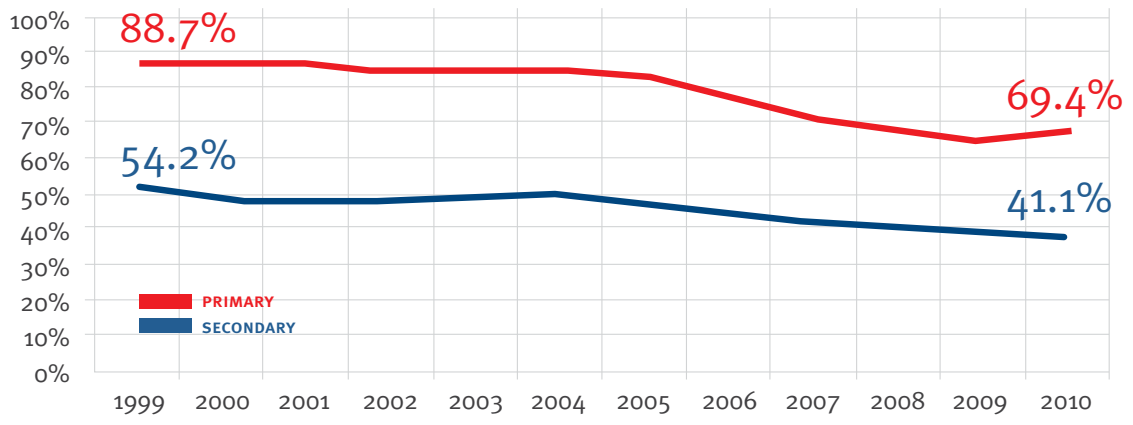


Table 2 Percentage of government school students participating in a languages program



Of those schools that offer a language program, many do not dedicate sufficient time each week to languages education, and program quality is variable. Teachers face a challenging learning environment: needs vary between students – students learning their first language have very different needs from those learning their second language – and some languages require a greater time commitment in order to achieve proficiency than others[3]. A lack of continuity of provision between and within schools, and limited opportunity to use the language they learn at school as part of 'real life', also hampers student languages learning.

There are other significant challenges. Victoria faces a shortage of languages teachers, particularly in regional and rural areas. Teacher shortages and the inability to replace languages teachers that leave, leads to disjointed, discontinuous languages programs and disaffection and disillusionment with languages. Consequently, members of our community, including many students, parents and school leaders, remain unconvinced of the value of languages education.

The Government needs to build demand for an increased number of high quality languages teachers in Victorian schools and work with universities to develop long-term and sustainable strategies to increase the number of university places and training opportunities available for current and potential languages teachers.

Government needs to more effectively use and leverage off our current resources such as our Language Assistants, student and teacher-exchange programs and resources in our community to provide native speaker support for our students.

Collaboration between schools, government and non-government, and complementary providers could also be enhanced, particularly for some languages, to enable improved opportunities for students to learn languages.

The Government needs to better communicate the benefits of languages education including its importance to Victoria's economic future. Seventy per cent of Victoria's goods exports are directed to non-English speaking countries with more than 60 per cent of world economic output generated in these markets. As the twenty-first century continues to unfold, the importance of non-English speaking countries to the Victorian economy will only increase as global economic power shifts from traditional English-speaking countries towards Asian and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) economies. Without effective languages education, Victorian businesses stand to be at a monolingual disadvantage.

The Government needs to work with and build stronger partnerships with business, including identifying and promoting career opportunities and pathways for students with languages skills at the local, regional and international level. This will include engaging with agencies such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Australian Industry Group, the Business Council of Australia and the Victorian Multicultural Business Advisory Council to build a stronger multilingual workforce with skills in a range of global and community languages so as to strengthen Victoria's long-term productivity.

The challenges are considerable but the stakes are high for our students and our state – that is why this Government is making languages education a priority.

3. The 'average competent learner,' for instance, 'will take 3.5 times longer to master Chinese than s/he would take to master a European language'. See Orton, J., The Current State of Chinese Language Education in Australian Schools, Melbourne: The University of Melbourne and Confucius Institute 2010.

What we stand for

The Victorian Government wants to create one of the world's most diverse and effective languages education programs.

While all Victorian schools are currently required under legislation to substantially address the learning area of languages it is clear that provision is variable. The Victorian Government wants to remove this variability and ensure that all Victorian students have the opportunity to engage in quality languages learning. This is why we have committed to ensuring that compulsory language classes are a reality in every Victorian government school, by developing a plan to provide languages education for all Prep to Year 10 students by 2025.

To achieve this commitment, this Government will need to support schools to draw upon a wide range of resources including online resources, the expertise of language assistants, community members, Community Languages Schools and the Victorian School of Languages. A one-size-fits-all approach will not do; if we are to see high-quality languages education in all Victorian schools, we must give schools the flexibility they need to establish a program that suits their local context.

Teachers have a critical role to play. The Victorian Government has therefore committed to increasing the number of qualified languages teachers and to qualifying and training languages teachers to the highest standard.

Delivery of these commitments will require considerable and sustained effort from the Government, schools, community languages providers and our other partners, and our approach to this work will be grounded in four key principles.

Our key principles

- **Participation** – the provision of quality, compulsory languages education to all government school students in Prep–Year 10, regardless of student background, school location or size, will enable all students to participate in languages learning.

- **Quality** – quality programs will be underpinned by flexible delivery, effective use of online resources, best-practice teaching, and provision of regular opportunities to learn and meaningfully use a language throughout schooling.

- **Diversity** – schools will work with their school community to select languages that suit their context. They will continue to have the opportunity to select from a diverse range of languages, including Aboriginal Languages[4]. Students will continue to have the opportunity to learn a language in schools as well as with complementary providers.

- **Partnership** – locally-driven partnerships across sectors, with surrounding and feeder schools, including between government and non-government schools, sister schools, foreign governments and other partners will support continuity of learning, additional time on task and opportunities for real-world language use. This will be supported by greater collaboration between mainstream government and non-government schools, the Victorian School of Languages and Community Languages Schools.

4. Aboriginal Communities are consulted about the schools in which Aboriginal Languages are taught.

What we are planning

A plan to achieve our 2025 Commitment

The Victorian Government's 2025 commitment to ensure every government school student from Prep to Year 10 is engaged in languages learning requires serious and sustained action on many fronts. We are aware of the complexities and the challenges and we will work with our languages partners to develop a long-term plan to meet this commitment.

The plan will be grounded in the four key principles of Participation, Quality, Diversity and Partnership. The plan will be informed by the actions this Government has started, as well as by our ongoing work with schools, communities and with other stakeholders. It will include milestones that will allow us to track our progress towards our goals. We will commence working on the plan in the second half of 2011.

The Victorian Government understands that the plan will need to support schools and communities to engage in languages education that meets their shared needs, and to encourage all Victorians to understand the need to be bilingual or multilingual within the current and future global context. It will also support schools to use flexible, locally driven approaches to deliver high-quality languages education that makes use of community, interstate and overseas resources and meets the needs of students learning languages in the twenty-first century.

The plan will support and build upon the work already being undertaken in communities across Victoria. It will support Victorian Aboriginal communities in their ongoing work to reclaim and revive Aboriginal Languages and cultures. It will support Community Languages Schools and the Victorian School of Languages to continue provision of a wide range of community languages, including during school hours.

The Australian Curriculum: Languages provides a unique opportunity to revisit how languages programs are provided in schools. The Victorian Government needs to ensure that our schools are well positioned to provide quality languages learning over coming decades in a rapidly changing world. The plan will consider how Victoria can use the implementation of the Australian Curriculum to infuse a new enthusiasm for languages learning in our students and schools.

This Government will not direct schools to teach particular languages. The selection of languages to be taught, whether they are languages of global significance, community languages or Aboriginal languages must be made at the local level and reflect local community needs and interests and the resources available. We will work with schools, however, to help them assess their languages education options and provide them with an understanding of the language needs of Victorian businesses today and into the future.

So we will develop a long-term plan, with detailed milestones, in order to support the achievement of our goal of having one of the world's most diverse and effective languages education programs. This long-term plan will also build on our immediate actions – actions designed to launch our approach to reforming languages education in all Victorian schools and to ensure that our long-term plan is evidence-based and influenced by world's best practice in languages teaching and learning.

What we are doing in the short term: 2011–13

While the challenges are considerable, they also provide opportunities for new actions, actions that are grounded in the four key principles and designed to develop a flexible, locally-driven approach to languages learning.

Ministerial Advisory Council

A Ministerial Advisory Council for a Multilingual & Multicultural Victoria has been established chaired by the Hon. Nicholas Kotsiras, MP, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship, which reports directly to the Hon. Martin Dixon, MP, Minister for Education.

This Advisory Council is made up of people representing a broad range of stakeholders including school sector organisations, community groups, teacher and principal associations, business, industry and universities. The Government's ongoing commitment to working with our stakeholders in a meaningful way recognises that we need to work together in order to build one of the world's most diverse and effective languages education programs. The members of the Ministerial Advisory Council will work together to advise us on the best way forward in order to reach our 2025 commitment.

Policy commitments

This Government's long-term commitment will require sustained effort from many partners working together over a long period of time. It is therefore important that we maintain the momentum and raise the profile of the Government's commitment to revolutionise languages education by implementing a number of immediate and short-term strategic initiatives all of which will support and complement our longer-term plan. These initiatives are fully funded and are a first step toward achieving our vision for languages education.

Immediate support: 2011

Community Languages Schools

In order to continue to grow and improve the diversity of languages that are being taught across Victoria this Government has committed to enhancing and supporting the role of Community Languages Schools by increasing, from 2011, per student funding from $120 to $190. We will also develop a rental agreement framework for use between mainstream schools and Community Languages Schools to enable them to access school facilities for after-hours classes at a fair and reasonable rent. This commitment will provide stronger support to Community Languages Schools and enable them to continue to focus on the provision of quality languages education for more than 36,000 Victorian students. The 2011/12 State Budget provided $16.3 million over four years for this initiative.

Sister School program

As the Victorian Government continues to explore models of partnership that strengthen languages education and equip our students for global citizenship, we will look at how we can strengthen Victoria's Sister School program. Relationships with sister schools assists students who are learning a language to immerse themselves in another language and culture and engage in real-life communication with students, and others, who speak that language. The 2011/12 State Budget provided $.3 million over four years for this initiative.

Short-term strategic initiatives: 2011–12 (Phase 1)

$2.5 million has been allocated through internal reprioritisation by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for the following strategic initiatives, which have recently commenced.

Learning from High-performing Systems

If Victoria is to become among the world's leaders in languages education, the Victorian Government needs to identify what makes outstanding languages education programs work so well and be able to clearly articulate this to school communities so that our school leaders are supported and able to communicate a strong case for learning languages to all their school community.

This Government is conducting research into a number of bilingual and multilingual school systems that are regularly represented at the top of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings to develop an understanding of their approaches and strategies to languages education. Our research is focusing on the impact that languages education has on overall student achievement, as well as identifying the common strategies across these systems that could be introduced in Victoria.

The recommendations from this research will inform the development of a compelling, evidence-based rationale for the teaching and learning of languages in Victorian schools for a range of audiences, including school leaders, teachers, students, parents and the broader community.

Piloting Innovative Language Learning Projects in Clusters of Schools

Greater collaboration with local schools enables schools to share resources and ideas, and support greater continuity of learning for students moving between schools in a locality.

Fourteen clusters of schools have been selected to participate in pilot projects that explore diverse and flexible modes and methods of languages education. The clusters' approaches, including the target language/s, have been determined at the local level and include content and integrated languages learning (learning a language through a subject such as science, history etc), blended languages learning (combination of face-to-face teaching, use of on-line languages resources, video and web-conferencing etc), a range of real-life learning opportunities that provide practical language use with native language speakers, partnerships with complementary languages education providers, sister schools, and the use and development of online language learning resources to enhance their languages education programs.

These pilots will be independently evaluated to assess the impact of the different approaches on students' language learning outcomes and the recommendations from the pilot projects will be used to shape the advice on best-practice approaches to languages education for Victorian schools.

Supporting Content and Language Integrated Learning

Content and language integrated teaching, which uses the target language to teach the content of another subject, such as history or mathematics, is a strategy that is effectively used in many international jurisdictions and within our own primary bilingual programs. It requires high levels of target language proficiency as well as deep pedagogical content knowledge across multiple domains of learning. It provides a real-world application of languages, which may also provide a way through what is perceived as the 'crowded curriculum' debate.

The Victorian Government has commissioned the University of Melbourne to pilot the delivery of a content and language integrated learning teacher training course for qualified languages teachers. This action will provide our current language teachers with the skills and strategies they need to lead their school communities in developing new approaches to languages learning.

Developing Resources to Support the Teaching and Learning of Aboriginal Languages

Providing support to Aboriginal communities to extend the teaching and learning of Aboriginal languages is a priority, both in terms of improving the learning outcomes of Indigenous students and developing in all students a richer knowledge and appreciation of Aboriginal cultures.

This Government has provided $100,000 in grants to support the development of learning resources and pilot new teaching programs in three locations, including both metropolitan and regional sites that will utilise information and communication technologies to enable teaching and learning programs in Aboriginal languages and cultures.

Short-term strategic initiatives: 2012–2013 (Phase 2)

Languages Start-up Grants

The Victorian Government has committed to providing $1 million in languages start-up grants to schools taking up languages education programs for the first time. This will support these schools to work with their teachers, students and families, as well as their broader community and neighbouring schools, to develop and resource a languages program that is right for the local context.

Languages Scholarships

This Government knows that we need to develop the languages workforce in order to reach our 2025 commitment. We also know that we need to act now to increase the number of qualified language teachers. For this reason, we have committed to build on our current languages teacher supply initiatives and introduce languages scholarships for undergraduate and qualified teachers to study languages to become qualified language teachers. This will support teachers to engage in the professional learning required to build a world class languages program.

The Government will also maximise the use of our language assistants, expand our sister school relationships, and partnerships with overseas governments, business, universities and the community to provide native-speaker support across more schools.

Certificate IV in Community Languages Teaching

The Victorian Government knows the critical role that Community Languages Schools play in supporting the teaching and learning of languages in Victoria. We also recognise the importance of the professionalisation of Community Languages instructors and managers and the need for a recognised course with consistent standards, course content, and relevant outcomes. That is why we have developed a Certificate IV Course in Community Languages Teaching.

After following the processes required by the VRQA, including consultation with representatives of teachers and principals in Community Languages Schools in Victoria through a survey and focus group discussions, a Certificate IV training package has been developed and accredited by the VRQA. This training package has compulsory generic units of competency, followed by units which are relevant to principals, administrators and prospective managers of Community Languages Schools.

Graduates of this course will be able to undertake the role of a community languages teacher, and/or a senior management role such as curriculum director, manager, or principal of a Community Languages School.

How we can work together

This Government cannot build a diverse and effective languages education program alone. We must embrace the many people, schools and universities, businesses and industry that are eager to contribute to the planning and development of Victoria's world-class languages education program. The Government must work with all Victorians to build an understanding of the importance of speaking two or more languages and engage with all schools to position languages teaching and learning in the twenty-first century.

The Victorian Government looks forward to working with the Victorian community to meet the challenge of revolutionising languages education in Victoria in order to create an engaging, challenging and effective languages program for every student across the state.

This statement and the actions it describes, are the first step on Victoria's journey to having one of the world's most diverse and effective languages education programs. It is a journey we will travel together.