

Association of School Councils in Victoria

Independently pursuing excellence in educational governance since 1914

Responding to “Towards Victoria as a Learning Community”

ASCIV is very appreciative of the opportunity to respond to the proposals for educational reform across Victorian government schools as expressed in *Victoria as a Learning Community, New Directions for School Leadership and the Teaching Profession* and *The Compact*.

ASCIV has chosen to organise its responses according to the framework shown in *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community* for Working Groups (attachment 4 on page 15). This should assist in directing the ASCIV responses to those charged with implementation.

ASCIV responses to the TVLC framework are prefaced by directing attention to three major concerns that apply generally to the *Victoria as a Learning Community* reforms as outlined below:

TVLC Working Group membership

The TVLC describes the establishment of ‘a new dynamic based on consultation, collaboration and professional trust’ which is strongly welcomed by ASCIV. It is considered that this dynamic is not reflected in the composition of the membership of the four TVLC Working Groups which consist entirely of DEECD senior executive personnel. It is recognised that consultation is planned by the Working Groups but a broader representation at this key level would be appreciated. It is noted that the Working Groups memberships are to be extended and the inclusion of PCOs would be enthusiastically welcomed.

School Governance

Possible changes to school governance are central to the reform agenda and changes will impact on the delivery of other reforms. School governance is included in the framework under Enhanced Accountability, point 1.5. Positioning governance in this way is considered unrepresentative of its importance and its potential impacts in other areas. It also emphasises the accountability aspect without direct reference to the intended increases in school autonomy and changes to governance to enhance participation and capacity in local decision making. A modified framework is suggested in the diagram below depicting governance as a distinct entity and central to the overall agenda.



The purpose of governance

It is proposed that new developments in governance should address the distinction between a focus on participatory democracy where elected members represent constituent interest groups and policy based governance where elected members participate in the process of developing future policies and directions designed to optimise the learning and wellbeing of all students. School Councils should be about positioning the school to prepare students for their future rather than about protecting the interests of specific groups.

Traditionally Councils have had approximately equal representation between parents and teachers. Consideration should also be given to increasing the proportion of parents and community as well as reducing Council membership to workable sizes. Consultation processes can be used to underpin decisions and ensure representation. Councils need to be more than stakeholder interest groups.

A high quality training program is required to support the work and development of Council Members. This should be an ongoing Government commitment to ensure that empowering local communities has the best chance of optimising student learning for the future.

The separation of Policy and Operation matters

The distinction between policy and operation matters has become increasingly blurred in Victorian government education. With increased professional trust and enhanced autonomy and governance it is considered opportune to re-visit the distinction between DEECD's role at the policy level on key issues in identifying goals, guidelines and accountabilities, and the ways and means for achievement at the school level that are appropriately the responsibility of the school in a highly devolved system. Blurring of this distinction has occurred as policies have extended into the implementation area. The outcome has been a diminution of the flexibility at the school level to design and implement programs in the best interests of students. ASCIV welcomes the possibilities within the TVLC to address this issue.

.....
President ASCIV

.....
CEO ASCIV

Association of School Councils in Victoria

Independently pursuing excellence in educational governance since 1914

Responding to “Towards Victoria as a Learning Community”

School Governance

Additional autonomy: There is support in general for the development of new options for school governance and enhanced autonomy tempered with some concern if limited to long-term, high performing schools. It depends on the definition of ‘high performing’. There would be less concern if the definition related to ‘value-added’ and if new options could be subject to school based trials and available to eligible schools as a choice.

Employment of principals: The potential of Councils to employ principals and manage their performance is not supported in general. It is assumed that this possibility would only apply where schools are eligible for additional options in autonomy and governance. At this time there is a lack of clarity as to liability and legal frameworks as well as the process of accountability to DEECD. ASCIV has yet to be convinced of any advantages in Councils directly employing principals but would consider the possibility as a choice for schools with this inclination, particularly in relation to federations of schools.

Teacher career structures: ASCIV is supportive of increased flexibility to determine staff career structures but questions the relevance to the EBA as a limiting factor. There is recognition that flexibility would be exercised within the parameters set by Fairwork Australia.

Corporate approaches: These possibilities are not entirely opposed but questions remain in relation to maintaining the moral purpose of schools in the face of external influences that can result from expert membership and partnerships. It could be considered as a choice for schools and their councils.

Federated models: Experiences with federated models are mixed and it is evident that success in improving school performance is predicated on context and relationships. Support would be dependent on the development of federations being a choice for schools with choice inclusive of whether the federation would be ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ in its operation.

School intervention: The necessity for intervention in certain circumstances is supported. It is doubted if intervention can be designed to support the school’s autonomous operation. Intervention presumes the need to override local decisions.

Workforce, Funding & Infrastructure

4.1 Workforce flexibilities and local control: Proposals are fully supported. The establishment of a workforce management advisory service for principals needs to be underwritten by expertise to ensure credibility and effectiveness. The introduction of open, merit based recruitment processes and enabling principals to more efficiently deal with underperforming teachers are strongly supported. The enabling of principals to also determine commencement salaries, accelerate high-performers, and higher salaries on attraction or retention grounds is also strongly supported with the proviso that these actions are not subjected to excessive ratification processes.

4.2 Extension of local control over budgets: The development of local administrative bureaus is supported on the basis of school choice for inclusion. The incorporation of further funding within the SRP is supported subject to transference of the full amount of current expenditure on current activities. Broadbanding funding lines is supported in general but questionable in relation to transparency. There needs to be credibility in the processes of inclusion in relation to the retention of value.

The accreditation of business managers is supported but there is recognition that it may take up to five years to retrofit current personnel. A purpose-built and specific qualification needs to be investigated and introduced in consultation with practising business managers.

The capacity building of principal technical leadership is supported with both an induction component and ongoing availability of training to principals on a needs basis. For instance, PCEs should be confident of access to such programs as “Dollars and Sense” within two weeks of lodging a request.

4.3 Developing a capital works pipeline: This would be supported on the proviso that there is input from schools as a precursor and that the pipeline would include the choice for schools to increase their flexibility in undertaking capital works programs. The provision of fit-for-purpose teaching spaces to a specified standard should be an integral criterion in pipeline processes.

4.4 Funding following the student in alternative settings: This is supported in principle but caution is proposed as schools can be left with ‘unfunded’ provision following the transfer of the student. It is proposed that negotiations may be necessary in some cases.

Enhanced Accountability

1.1 Internal and external accountabilities: Support for the elements within this issue is mixed. There is agreement that effective accountability comes from within the profession, with the system intervening only when necessary. However, clarification is required as to

criteria for intervention, sensitivity to context and support for school leadership. There is also uncertainty about the term 'coasting' with a need to include the use value-added data in any definition.

Peer-led accountability is not supported. It is recognised that it can work in networks that are strong on collegiality and focus on outcomes but does not work in the absence of these characteristics. Peer review needs to also be by invitation rather than external appointment.

Schools already participate in planning and evaluation cycles based on evidence of performance and operations. Four years is viewed as the optimum cycle length to enable progress to be achieved in complex developments and operations. It is considered that communities have the right to hold opinions about school performance but that accountability rests with the employing authority. There is support for a graduated process for school reviews based on performance thresholds with consideration being given to value-adding as a key determinant.

1.2 School performance portal: There is support for the development of a school performance portal incorporating a single point of entry for a comprehensive raft of information, provision of at-a-glance pictures of performance, and replacement of the school level report. This support is predicated on there being differentiated access to data and the provision of training to prospective users on access and interpretation.

1.3 Review of admin and compliance burden: This review process is strongly supported. The distinction between policy compliance and flexibility on operation and implementation needs to be addressed in line with greater professional trust. The 'controlling' of schools through compliance checklists is at odds with school autonomy.

The development of a performance portal is welcomed in relation to reporting to parents as it would enable ongoing reporting on outcomes and developments rather than stipulations on mid-year and end-of-year reports.

1.4 The compact: There is agreement that profession-led improvement requires clear understanding and expectations about respective responsibilities of schools and the Department. There is also agreement that the compact should clarify roles and responsibilities in the government school system and describe the resources, guidance and support that will be offered. However, there is concern that information currently available is limited to warm statements of intention without the procedural detail. The development is welcomed and there is expectancy about the final outcome.

Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting

2.1 Adapt and implement the Australian Curriculum: This proposal is supported by ASCIV with the proviso that adequate professional learning is available for all teachers. There is also some concern about the prescription of Health/PE for all students in all year groups. This is at odds with the principle of greater curriculum freedoms particularly in relation to

the senior years of secondary. There is also some concern over the inclusion of the word 'integrated' in 'At each stage of learning schools will construct a high quality, integrated curriculum that provides access to each of the other nine domains'. This degree of integration may not always be practical.

Although there is support for the priority area of languages as detailed in the *Vision for Language Education*, caution is expressed concerning the level of resources to be provided and the availability of suitably trained teachers. Concern was also expressed that a second language does not, in itself, make children engaged and informed global citizens.

2.2 Increase schools' senior secondary options: This possibility is supported with the caution that introduction of a Victorian Bacculaureate could reduce the range of VCE and VCAL subjects offered in secondary schools due to funding considerations. The Industry Pathways Program is also questioned in some localities due to the lack of access to public transport. It was also proposed that groups of schools could offer a network solution with different specialisations. The Wolverhampton model was named as an exemplar in this respect.

2.3 Foster, promote and support school specialisation: School specialisation is supported although one participant expressed reservations. Questions were raised about who decides on which specialisation a school will pursue and concerning the need/difficulties for schools to coordinate timetables. There was also discussion of the need for additional resources if the specialisation requires students to significantly increase their onsite learning time as is the case with some of the existing specialist schools.

2.4 On-demand assessment tools through a new online platform: All proposals related to this issue were supported although there was some concern as to whether online assessment tools could become 'a big brother' development at the expense of curriculum flexibility and autonomy. Concern was expressed in relation to who owns the data as there could be temptation to use data for comparative purposes rather than the first intended purpose of assessment to assist learning. Summative assessment is not mentioned. Can it be assumed that the new platform would be entirely formative? The platform could be valuable for informing parents of ongoing progress.

2.5 Review current reporting requirements: All proposals related to this issue were supported. The hope was also expressed that any new developments would continue the practice of being jargon free. Again a definition of 'high performing' is required to be inclusive of schools adding value.

Leadership & Professional Practice

3.1 Support to principals to lead professional practice: The proposals on high quality preparation, ongoing development and a systematic approach to succession planning are

fully supported. It is expected that coaches and mentors would be very high quality and not just the principal next door.

3.2 Support teacher professional practice: The proposals to not mandate a single model but to provide a selection of high quality evidenced based models teaching practice and to support staff to adopt common practices within schools are fully supported.

3.3 New performance management processes developed for teachers: These proposals to build a culture of evidence based performance, to exit teachers who are unable to improve, to trial incentive schemes, and to improve professional development are supported by ASCIV with the exception of incentive pay trials where the question is asked, 'how much more research do we need?' However, there is support for ongoing trialling of non-financial incentives to motivate teachers. Logically there are still questions to be asked including in relation to the EBA and the nature of detail.

3.4 New performance management processes developed for principals: Proposals to attract and prepare school leaders, to evaluate leaders and to enable continuous improvement are supported, with two exceptions: (i) allowing applicants for school leadership positions from beyond the teaching profession and (ii) linking principal performance to ambitious targets around school improvement supported by clear evidence including incorporation of peer review. Difficulties are also expressed in relation to peer review in the earlier section on enhanced accountabilities.

In relation to providing principals with the flexibility and the means to manage teacher performance, provision needs to include the flexibility to differentiate between satisfactory performance as a teacher and unsatisfactory performance as a staff member.

3.5 Develop tools to assist in student behaviour management: Proposals to provide quality assured tools, models and examples of quality practice are welcomed and supported. Similarly the retention of the responsibility by principals to facilitate student referrals to other settings is supported although there is a need to sharpen and define the processes even for those who won't accept difficult children as all children need to be supported and funded.

3.6 Guarantee principals the right to require behaviour standards: This proposal with application to students and parents as a condition of enrolment is fully supported by ASCIV.

3.7 Support schools to create self-determined school improvement networks: The proposals for self-determined networks are supported; however, concern is expressed on the possibility of new principals not being able to access established networks. This concern is expressed particularly in relation to first appointment principals and those appointed from interstate where they do not necessarily have prior established connections. Possibly any such difficulties could be resolved through the planned appointment of coaches and mentors to guide the development of new appointments.

3.8 Support partnerships and invest where practicable: Reservations were expressed concerning partnerships in the earlier section on corporate approaches on page 3. These concerns were again expressed in this section in making the distinction between partnerships that are supportive of the moral purposes of the school and partnerships that may result in conflicts of interest. Concerns were also expressed in relation to the possible distribution processes of additional resources to clusters of schools and partnerships between non-government and government schools. Other concerns expressed related to the time taken to manage partnerships in relation to the additional benefit to the school.

Attachment from TVLC implementation document:

TVLC Working Groups

Working Group	Enhanced Accountability	Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting	Leadership & Professional Practice	Workforce, Funding & Infrastructure
Chair	Ian Burrage	David Howes / Dina Guest	Arthur Townsend	Nino Napoli
Members	Andree Butler Stephen Fraser Sara Glover Wayne Craig John Sullivan Chris Thompson David Philips <i>Others TBA</i>	Ian Burrage Xavier Csar Cathy Beesey Karen Weston <i>RSG Representative</i> <i>Others TBA</i>	Raylene Dodds Bruce Armstrong Dina Guest Tony Bugden Andree Butler Kris Arcaro Sara Glover <i>Others TBA</i>	Dean Tighe Tony Bugden Kris Arcaro Chris Keating <i>RSG Representative</i> <i>Others TBA</i>
Actions	1.1 Internal and external accountabilities 1.2 School Performance Portal 1.3 Review admin and compliance burden 1.4 The Compact 1.5 Review school governance	2.1 Adapt and implement the Australian Curriculum 2.2 Increase schools' senior secondary options 2.3 Foster, promote and support school specialisation 2.4 On-demand assessment tools through a new online platform 2.5 Review current reporting requirements	3.1 Support principals to lead professional practice 3.2 Support teacher professional practice 3.3 New performance management processes developed for teachers 3.4 New performance management processes developed for principals 3.5 Develop tools to assist in student behaviour management 3.6 Guarantee principals the right to require behaviour standards 3.7 Support schools to create self-determined school improvement networks 3.8 Support partnerships and invest where practicable	4.1 Advice on workforce flexibilities and local control 4.2 Extend local control over budgets 4.3 Develop a capital works pipeline 4.4 Implement funding that follows the student and guidelines on alternative settings