

Delivering high-quality and inclusive early childhood and school education

SIGNIFICANT INITIATIVES

Early childhood education

- **Foundational supports for people with disability** \$2.4 billion over 5 years to jointly fund Foundational Supports under the *National Agreement on Foundational Supports*. This includes funding for *Thriving Kids* to support children aged 0-8 years with developmental delay and/or autism with low to moderate support needs, and their families and carers. The phasing of funding and the roll-out of further components of Foundational Supports to be determined through Commonwealth–Victoria agreements.
- **Early Childhood Sector Supports and Regulation** \$3.2 million in 2026-27 is provided to continue to deliver early childhood intervention services such as inclusive education and therapy supports for children with disability or developmental delay who are not eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme due to their residency status.
- **Essential funding for the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority** \$7.5 million in 2026-27 (\$26.2m/4 yrs) to support the establishment of the new Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority as an independent regulator and to implement the Rapid Child Safety Review Recommendations.
- **Early Childhood Language Program** \$3.6 million in 2027-28 to continue the Early Childhood Language Program, allowing Four-Year-Old Kindergarten services to offer free, weekly learning programs in multiple languages.

School education

- **Additional Supports for Students with Disabilities** \$265.2 million in 2026-27 (\$2.13b/ 4 yrs) towards sustaining Victoria’s Disability Inclusion reforms, meeting demand for individualised

disability support in government schools. This supports adjustments and assistance for students with disability with high and complex needs.

- **Strengthening child safety in schools** \$2.1million in 2026-27 (\$8.4m/4 yrs) is provided to enhance the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority's regulatory capacity.
- **Improving outcomes for First Nations learners** \$0.6 million in 2026-27 (\$2.4m/4 yrs) to continue the First Nations' Curriculum Clusters Project to support the teaching of First Nations' histories, cultures and perspectives in selected schools.
- **High Intensity Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)** \$0.7 million in 2026-27 (\$24.1m/ 4 yrs) to continue support for existing Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services with high educator-to-child ratios at specialist schools. This includes high intensity OSHC at 31 specialist schools.
- **Students with disabilities transport program** \$39 million in 2026-27 to continue transport assistance for eligible students to travel to government specialist schools. This includes new buses to be purchased to replace older models and new services to be introduced from the 2027 school year to meet growth in demand.
- **Continuing Vocational Education and Training (VET) and applied learning in school** \$10.3 million in 2026-27 (\$69.3m/4 yrs) to continue supports for students to access high-quality vocational and applied learning pathways including VET administration funding for schools, VET cluster coordinators to provide schools with specialised assistance with VET provision and VET transport funding for rural and regional students.

WHAT'S GOOD

- The Budget's investment in Victoria's Disability Inclusion reforms is a strong commitment to improving equitable access to education for students with disability. Funding to expand individualised disability supports, improve accessibility, and provide safe, free transport to specialist schools will make a meaningful difference, particularly for students with high and complex needs. Funding for free, high-intensity Outside School Hours Care at 31 specialist schools is also welcome and will support greater workforce participation for parents and carers. VCOSS notes that significant systemic barriers remain, and further work required to ensure inclusive education delivers meaningful change for students with disability and their families.
- VCOSS was pleased to see funding to continue delivery of new and expanded early learning infrastructure as part of the nation-leading Best Start, Best Life reforms. The funding in this budget will progressively deliver more hours of funded Four-Year-Old-Kindergarten. There is also \$9.8 million for Kindergarten Building Blocks to support early learning infrastructure. This investment will continue to boost participation in early childhood education and care.

- Funding to implement the Rapid Child Safety Review Recommendations is an important pathway to ensuring all children can access safe, high-quality, inclusive early childhood education and care. However, as called for in our pre-budget submission, this budget was a missed opportunity to allocate additional funding to lift standards by providing targeted intensive support services, and resourcing the sector to conduct-in-person facilitated mandatory child safety training.
- VCOSS welcomes the suite of targeted funding to support migrant, refugee and Australian-born children and young people with English as an additional language. This budget provides \$3.6 million in bilingual kindergartens through the Early Childhood Language Program, supporting 197 kindergartens to teach 21 languages. There is also funding for the English as an Additional Language Program in the 2027 school year and some funding to meet demand for interpreting and translating services in schools. Continued investment would support more equitable access to these learning and school communities.
- Victorian families are under significant cost-of-living pressure, often forced to choose between school costs and essentials. VCOSS welcomes the \$3.5 million in 2026-27 (\$59.4m/4 yrs) injection towards cost of living supports for students and families including Affordable School Uniforms Program, expansion of Glasses for Kids Program and additional funding to State Schools Relief to assist disadvantaged Victorian students and their families.
- VCOSS continues to advocate for partnering with the community sector to improve school inclusion for students at risk of justice system involvement. We know that education is key to lifting people out of poverty, reducing socio-economic, political and health inequalities and reducing the likelihood of contact with the criminal justice system. Funding of \$1.9 million in 2026-27 to continue the Early Years Program, educator professional development through Foundation House, and the Learning Beyond the Bell Homework Clubs will support students to feel safe, stay engaged in education, and reduce the risk of justice system contact.

WHAT'S MISSING

- While VCOSS welcomes the significant investment into Education this budget, notably in promoting equal access to education, we still call for the Victorian Government to recommit to providing 75% of the School Resourcing Standard by 2028 through the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement. Fully resourcing government schools is the most effective way to achieve excellence and equity, strengthen student learning and wellbeing and enable schools to respond to complex student needs.
- In our pre-budget submission, VCOSS called for new Family Engagement Officer roles to be funded at 50 low socio-economic primary and secondary schools. This budget was a missed opportunity to fund these roles which would act as the 'glue' between students, families,

schools and community support agencies. The roles strengthen coordination between schools, families and community services, and linking families with services to support early intervention

- VCOSS welcomes cost of living supports for students and their families, but VCOSS would have liked to see further investment to increase the Get Active Kids Voucher from \$200 to \$300 for eligible primary and secondary students and the introduction of a \$300 Get Creative Kids voucher for low-income primary and secondary school students. These measures would better support equitable access to sport and creative activities that are increasingly out of reach for many families.

Please see the Children & Families, Inclusive Communities, Justice and Cost-of-living sections for further information.