

Auditor-General's Report: School Buildings: Planning, Maintenance and Renewal

Introduction

One of the Victorian Government's highest priorities is to provide a quality education for the 540 000 students attending government schools. The government wants these students to receive a high quality education and have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of where they live or their socio-economic background. Achieving this objective requires good teachers, a challenging and appropriate curriculum, and facilities that adequately support learning and the modern methods used to deliver courses.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (the department) is responsible for supervising and managing the 29 000 government school buildings in Victoria. The department provides funding for buildings maintenance, selecting schools for inclusion within the government's building programs to construct and modernise schools. Schools are responsible for the day to day maintenance of school buildings and for planning and supervising the completion of building works.

The department spends \$60 million on average each year on the maintenance of school buildings that have a depreciated replacement value of \$4.3 billion. The government's 2006 *Building Futures Policy* sets out the process for guiding all infrastructure investment in Victorian government schools. The policy puts improved education outcomes for students at the core of all planning and investment decisions.

The audit assessed the department's management of programs to build, rebuild and maintain government school buildings.

Conclusions

Most of today's school buildings were constructed quickly between the 1950s and the 1970s in response to a period of rapid population growth using lesser quality materials. In subsequent decades, the level of investment in school buildings had not been sufficient to renew and maintain facilities to provide the type of environment needed to develop students' learning potential.

Recognising this legacy, and the need to address it, the government's *Victorian Schools Plan* committed to rebuild or renew all government schools by 2017. The initial funding of \$1.8 billion will more than double annual expenditure on school construction and rebuilding between 2007 and 2011.

Given this period of transition and renewal, we found that the department had made improvements to the processes it uses to plan, implement and evaluate asset management programs.

However, there is more to do and the audit identified areas that the department needs to improve. The most important areas for improvement are:

- strengthening and making more transparent the way schools are selected for inclusion within the government's building programs
- upgrading the department's existing asset management information systems
- improving the way school buildings are maintained through longer term maintenance planning

- strengthening the processes used to evaluate asset management programs and highlight areas for further development and improvement.

Transforming the way buildings are maintained is of critical importance if the government is to reap the full benefits of its investment in rebuilding government schools. The department has researched sustainable approaches to maintenance planning and procurement and is testing these approaches through pilot applications.

The department needs to use this information to present a cohesive framework of relevant options to government so that it can make an informed choice about how renewed school buildings should be maintained.

Recommendations

The report has seven recommendations directed at improving the department's management of programs to build, rebuild and maintain government school buildings.

This report was tabled in the Victorian Parliament on 12 November 2008.

The full text of the report is available on VAGO's website: <www.audit.vic.gov.au>

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