

Government Response to the *Forum for Truth and Recognition* and Systemic Review into Historical Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian Government Schools

Background

The Board of Inquiry into historical child sexual abuse in Beaumaris Primary School and certain other government schools (Beaumaris Board of Inquiry) exposed serious failures to protect children in some Victorian government schools. Its report was tabled on 6 March 2024.

The Victorian Government accepted all nine recommendations of the Beaumaris Board of Inquiry and committed \$48.3 million, as part of the 2024-25 Budget, to implement them.

In response to the Inquiry's recommendations, Government established two further processes:

- a systemic review of historical child sexual abuse (Systemic Review), overseen by Independent Monitor Ms Julia Griffith PSM, which examined hundreds of civil claims and other reports of historical child sexual abuse in Victorian government schools before 2000
- the Forum for Truth and Recognition (Forum), chaired by Ms Angela Connors, which provided a place to hear directly from victim-survivors.

On 31 March 2026, the Department of Education provided the Systemic Review Report to the Minister for Education.

On 29 May 2026, Ms Connors delivered the Forum Report to the Premier.

Together, these reports deepened our understanding of what happened, why it happened, and the consequences still felt today.

What we heard

The Systemic Review examined 483 civil claims of child sexual abuse by staff in Victorian government schools. The Forum heard from 38 victim-survivors.

Together, the Systemic Review and Forum identify catastrophic institutional failings and an unacceptable breakdown in systems of oversight and accountability during the 1950s to 1990s, and their impacts.

These failures caused profound and lasting harm to victim-survivors.

The reports identify several factors that allowed abuse to occur and continue, including:

- cultures that failed to place children's safety first
- poor understanding of grooming behaviours
- school environments and supervision arrangements that left children vulnerable
- inadequate policies and oversight that allowed perpetrators to move between schools despite concerns about their behaviour.

Government response

The Victorian Government acknowledges the courage of every victim-survivor who shared their experiences through the Forum, through civil claims or by reporting what happened to them in other ways. The Victorian Government also acknowledges that there will be many victim survivors who have

not reported or shared their stories, some who are sadly no longer with us, others because the pain is too raw.

To all victim-survivors of child sexual abuse, you are seen and heard. Supports are available when reporting historical abuse. The reports make clear that the education system failed many children over many years.

We recognise the failings of the past.

The failures of the past continue to inform our responsibility today. Protecting children requires constant vigilance, strong leadership, effective safeguards and a culture that prioritises child safety.

Changes to better protect children

Victoria's schools today operate within a very different child safety framework than existed when this abuse occurred. Important reforms – such as the introduction of Victoria's Child Safe Standards, the Reportable Conduct Scheme and criminal laws of 'Failure to Disclose', and 'Failure to Protect' – have strengthened how schools prevent, identify and respond to child sexual abuse.

Child Safe Standards foster safe school environments

All schools in Victoria must comply with the Child Safe Standards. These standards require schools to build environments where children's safety and wellbeing are central to leadership, governance and everyday practice.

Schools are supported by the Department of Education and regulated by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority to meet these obligations.

Recently, the department has revised and relaunched its PROTECT guidance and resources, including improved information on identifying grooming behaviours and responding to abuse in school settings.

Better screening and stronger safeguards

Adults working with children in all Victorian schools are now subject to child safety screening before they begin work.

They receive ongoing child safety training, must comply with child safety codes of conduct, are required to report concerns immediately and remain subject to ongoing supervision and monitoring.

Safeguards are also in place to reduce the risk of staff moving between government schools without appropriate child safety checks.

Stronger reporting and investigation

Today, allegations of sexual misconduct or sexual offences involving children by adults working in all schools must be reported under Victoria's Reportable Conduct Scheme.

Dedicated child safety investigation teams investigate allegations, regardless of whether the conduct occurred inside or outside school.

Victoria has also introduced criminal offences for failing to disclose child sexual abuse and failing to protect children from abuse. These offences carry significant penalties, including jail time.

Specialist expertise

The Department of Education established the Sexual Harm Response Unit in 2023 to oversee responses to allegations of child sexual abuse involving adults working in Victorian government schools.

The Unit works with schools to ensure children's safety is prioritised, affected students and families receive support, and lessons from incidents are used to strengthen future practice. The Unit promotes child safety within schools by conducting post-incident reviews, and together with the department's dedicated Child Safety Investigation and Compliance teams, ensures that appropriate risk mitigation strategies are in place in response to incidents.

Education for children to keep them safe from abuse

Children and young people are now taught age-appropriate education about respectful relationships, consent, body autonomy, recognising grooming and abuse, and seeking help.

The Child Safe Standards also require schools to ensure children understand their rights, are heard and are taken seriously.

Strengthening our approach

Keeping children safe in schools is work that is never done. The Victorian Government's goal is that every child should feel safe and be safe when they are at school.

At the heart of the work to achieve this goal are school leaders who drive a culture of child safety. This work goes beyond compliance – this is about a culture that puts child safety at the centre of the school. Everyone has a responsibility to create a safe environment for children and young people.

Protecting children requires continual learning, strong accountability and ongoing improvement. The Government will continue strengthening child safety while supporting victim-survivors whose lives continue to be affected by this abuse.

The Victorian Government remains dedicated to continuously building a culture of child safety across all Victorian schools, reviewing our governance, systems, processes and guidance regularly. We are also committed to supporting former students who were sexually abused while students in Victorian government schools. This is why we are taking the following actions:

1. Deliver the statewide public apology to victim-survivors

The Victorian Government will deliver a formal apology to victims and survivors on 30 July 2026. The apology will be informed by the experiences shared through the Forum and the Systemic Review, and the contributions of individual victim-survivors, their families and loved ones.

This responds to recommendation 1 of the Beaumaris Board of Inquiry.

2. Table the Forum's report in Parliament

The Victorian Government will table the unredacted Forum report in Parliament by August 2026. Government will also deliver copies of the report to Victorian public libraries for public access, and make digital, easy read and animated versions of the summary publicly available online for at least 50 years.

This responds to recommendation 1 of the Forum for Truth and Recognition.

3. Better protection of victim-survivors' privacy when engaging with formal inquiries

Victim-survivors should be able to participate in inquiries without fearing that deeply personal information may later become public.

The Government is therefore considering law reform options to strengthen protections for personal information provided during public inquiries, including possible amendments to the Inquiries Act 2014.

This work builds on existing protections under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 and the Public Records Act 1973, which allow documents to be withheld where disclosure would unreasonably reveal personal information or where records are of a private nature and not suitable for public release.

This responds to recommendation 9 of the Beaumaris Board of Inquiry and recommendation 2 of the Forum for Truth and Recognition.

4. Continue embedding child safety into organisational leadership, governance and school culture

The reports reinforce that child safety depends on leadership, culture and accountability.

Child safety is now embedded at every level of the Department of Education. A Child Safety Committee of the Executive Board is chaired by the Secretary and provides strategic oversight of child safety policies and practice and supports continuous identification and management of child safety risks.

The Department of Education provides hands-on support to every Victorian government school to implement the Child Safe Standards, visiting each school regularly and supporting them in reviewing and updating their child safety policies, processes and practices. As part of this ongoing monitoring and support work, the Department of Education works with schools to:

- identify and mitigate any child safety risks arising from their school environment, activities and student cohort
- ensure all schools are implementing required strategies to prevent institutional abuse, such as child safety suitability screening during recruitment practices, staff training on the signs of harm and responding and reporting obligations, and delivery of sexual abuse prevention programs to all students.

The Department of Education will continue strengthening implementation of the Child Safe Standards by:

- incorporating lessons from the reports into guidance for schools
- using examples from the reports in training for school leaders and staff
- ensuring staff supporting victim-survivors understand the experiences described in the reports
- continuing to identify and respond to emerging child safety risks across the education system.

5. Further strengthen school regulators

Strong independent regulation is essential to protecting children.

Victoria's Child Safe Standards commit schools to ensuring that child safety and wellbeing are embedded in the leadership, governance and culture of all schools.

Recent reforms have strengthened Victoria's regulatory framework by bringing the Child Safe Standards, Reportable Conduct Scheme and Working with Children Check together under the Social Services Regulator. These reforms were supported by a \$126.7 million investment, with a further \$5.1 million in the 2026-27 Budget to strengthen the new functions.

The 2026-27 Budget also invested \$8.4 million to strengthen the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority's ability to oversee schools and support compliance with child safety requirements.

6. Continue supporting victim-survivors

The Victorian Government will continue improving support for victim-survivors of historical child sexual abuse in Victorian government schools. This includes:

- a restorative engagement program that gives victim-survivors the opportunity to share their experience and receive a personal acknowledgement or apology from a senior leader from the Department of Education (this responds to recommendation 4 of the Beaumaris Board of Inquiry)
- a dedicated website and phone line for victim-survivors of historical sexual abuse at Victorian government schools (this responds to recommendation 6 of the Beaumaris Board of Inquiry)
- improved policies and guidance for schools responding to historical sexual abuse (this responds to recommendation 2 of the Beaumaris Board of Inquiry)
- a dedicated website where victim-survivors (and others) can obtain information about finding their school records (this responds to recommendation 5 of the Beaumaris Board of Inquiry).

Work is also underway on pilot sites for a coordination, navigation and advocacy function for all victim-survivors of child sexual abuse, as well as uplifting capability for sexual assault support services (this responds to recommendation 7 and 8 of the Beaumaris Board of Inquiry).

Looking ahead

The Systemic Review details the historical failures of the education system to protect children.

The Forum Report tells victim-survivors' truth about what happened to them in Victorian government schools and the failures that allowed the abuse to continue. They also remind us that protecting children is an ongoing responsibility.

We cannot change what happened.

We can learn from it, support those who continue to live with its impacts, and do everything possible so that every child attending a Victorian government school is safe from abuse.