



VPA Position Paper

Occupational Health and Safety Requirements

The Victorian Principals Association (VPA) is concerned that there has been a new strategy implemented by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to address Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) issues. Each school is being rated in an OH&S audit. The process is very time consuming and unwieldy. It distracts from the core functions of educational leadership and further increases the arduous compliance burden for schools.

Purpose

The VPA seeks to address the recent OH&S system management requirement imposed by the DEECD. It seeks to outline how the system needs to provide additional and specialised staff to implement this new initiative.

Background to the VPA Position

The VPA position has been determined in the following context:

- The OH&S audits are unduly time consuming in the initial and subsequent reporting stages
- The subsequent work arising from the report requires many hours of work. The actual audit involves over 88 forms and 389 pages to complete and address
- The whole process has created new tasks for principals that is taking them away from their core educational leadership role and is a threat to the “instructional leadership” role
- Principals are re-inventing the same process in each school. There are no economies of scale as there has only been one support person per region to assist in the process of ensuring compliance, which does not help individual principals in schools
- This initiative should be funded appropriately across networks to facilitate employment of specific personnel with expertise and knowledge
- Many small schools do not have anyone who can complete the arduous tasks except the principal
- The process should be external to schools unless a maintenance person takes on the role
- Obsessive compliance results in further stress for Principal Class Officers (PCO) due to concern over completing or meeting OH&S workload
- Principals expected to fulfil a role for which they have not been properly trained
- Insufficient funding for training of elected OH&S staff and/ or resources needed to meet requirements
- Asbestos Management;
 - 2005 audits out of date
 - Insufficient support and expertise
 - Lack of resources to undertake corrective or preventative action

VPA Position

The VPA advocates for:

- Staff with expertise to be employed at a network level to undertake OH&S compliance work for schools. Maybe use a network approach based on a model similar to PPP schools
- OH&S compliance requirements to be streamlined and relevant to the workplace
- Follow the PPP example of people on site who have the necessary expertise and a Facilities manager, to be employed in every school or across networks, with specific and targeted funding coming from DEECD from outside the schools' current Student Resource Packaging (SRP)
- Revisiting the whole OH&S initiative to assess relevance & viability
- Monitoring of system requirements to keep tasks at a reasonable level including the impact on Principal wellbeing and workload
- Additional and sufficient OH&S funding and support for all schools to meet the demands legislation and requirements that the result from the OH&S audit process
- Compliance requirements for inspections to be adequately funded in the SRP as the number of inspection requirements increase every year
- OH&S should be a DEECD responsibility and not to be offloaded to Principals