

**150 Years of Public Education**

Teaching and Learning Resources

for Level 3 - 4

**Level 3 - 4**



Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land, and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

These lessons are about the history of education, and we would like to acknowledge that education in Victoria began more than 60,000 years ago when Aboriginal communities and Elders taught the youngest people the life skills and values that they wished them to embody.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this resource may contain images and content about deceased persons.

Some material in this resource or the recommended further reading may reflect the period in which the item was written or created and may not be considered appropriate today. These do not reflect the views of the authors and are provided only for historical context.

Introduction

To commemorate the 150th anniversary of public education in Victoria, the Department of Education and Training has published a collection of resources that link the history of education and schooling to the relevant parts of the curriculum at all levels F-6. Teachers should confer with colleagues to ensure that students encounter a variety of these topics and develop a breadth of historical skills during their progress through the school.

This unit introduces students to the changing face and role of education over time, with particular focus on education in pre-Colonial and early Colonial Victoria. It introduces students to the passing of The Education Act of 1872 which enacted free, compulsory and secular education. A range of activities are provided in this learning sequence, which addresses learning descriptors from the Level 3-4 History curriculum from the Victorian Curriculum. Choose the activities that you feel would most benefit your student’s learning and support the development of historical and critical thinking skills.

# Victorian Curriculum Connections

## Victorian Curriculum Achievement Standards

### History

By the end of Level 4, students explain how and why life changed in the past and identify aspects of the past that remained the same. They describe the experiences and perspectives of an individual or group over time. They recognise the significance of events in bringing about change.

Students sequence events and people (their lifetime) in chronological order to identify key dates, causes and effects. They identify sources (written, physical, visual, oral), and locate information about their origin and content features. They describe perspectives of people from the past and recognise different points of view. Students create a narrative or description which explains continuity and change and cause and effect using historical terms.

### Key Questions addressed:

* How has our community changed? What features have been lost and what features have been retained?
* What is the nature of the contribution made by different groups and individuals in the community?
* What was life like for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples before the arrival of the Europeans?
* What was the nature and consequence of contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and early traders, explorers and settlers?

## Relevant Victorian Curriculum Content Descriptions:

## Identify the origin and content features of primary sources when describing the significance of people, places and events [(VCHHC067)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCHHC067)

Describe perspectives of people from the past [(VCHHC068)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCHHC068)

Identify and describe continuity and change over time in the local community, region or state and as a result of the effects of European exploration [(VCHHC069)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCHHC069)

Identify and explain the causes and effects of European settlement and exploration [(VCHHC070)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCHHC070)

The significance of Country and Place to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who belong to a local area [(VCHHK072)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCHHK072)

A significant example of change and a significant example of continuity over time in the local community, region or state/territory [(VCHHK073)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCHHK073)

The role that people of diverse backgrounds have played in the development and character of the local community and/or other societies [(VCHHK074)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCHHK074)

## Significance of days and weeks celebrated or commemorated in Australia and the importance of symbols and emblems, including Australia Day, ANZAC Day, Harmony Week, National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC week and National Sorry Day [(VCHHK076)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCHHK076)

## The diversity and longevity of Australia’s first peoples and the significant ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are connected to Country and Place (land, sea, waterways and skies) and the effects on their daily lives [(VCHHK078)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCHHK078)

## Learning Intentions

Learners will:

* understand the difference between primary and secondary sources
* record key events using a timeline
* understand that education has occurred in Australia/Victoria for at least 65000 years, and that formal education in schools has occurred in the last 230 years
* understand the significance of the passing of The Education Act of 1872, and the impact that this law had
* understand the perspectives of children who had different experiences of education, both before and after the passing of the Education Act of 1872

## Success Criteria

Learners can:

* Describe the difference between primary and secondary sources and explain the different ways we use them.
* Identify significant events and milestones in Australian/Victorian history and create a timeline to represent these
* Explain that education occurred in Victorian for tens of thousands of years prior to colonisation
* Identify some of the impacts that resulted from the passing of the Education Act of 1872.
* Recognise and describe diverse perspectives arising from different experiences of education since colonisation.

# Learning Activities

## Materials and Texts

* Slide pack resource, indicated by 
	+ includes student prompts and graphic organisers to support student learning activities
* Tablet or camera to take images around the school (optional)
* Graphic Organiser – Timeline
* Graphic Organiser – KWL Chart

## Get started

Introduce the unit of study to students, explaining that they are going to learn about changes to education throughout Victoria’s history. The teacher will provide explicit teaching of historical information to establish a common framework of understanding. Background reading for teachers is available in the [background reading](#_Background_reading_for) section of this document, with more extensive information available on [FUSE](https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Teacher).

Students will learn and practice their historical inquiry skills by investigating educational experiences of Aboriginal people prior to colonisation, the impact of Colonisation and passing of the Education Act of 1872, and the changes that have occurred in education and school throughout the twentieth century up to the present day.



Students complete the “What I Know” and “What I Wonder” sections of a KWL Chart. Create a question wall as a visual classroom display or to share on your class digital platform, adding students’ questions from their “What I Wonder” section of their KWL. To accelerate the learning process and support the learning of students of diverse abilities, the teacher should answer some of these questions, and identify others as topics for potential inquiry. Encourage students to continue adding their questions, as well as recording any answers they find throughout the unit of work.



Introduce and teach vocabulary to support student learning in the unit. Students may not be familiar with some of the words we use when we talk about history and the past.



Introduce students to primary sources and secondary sources, how they differ and their purpose and use. Watch [Historical Inquiry: Types of Sources](https://online.clickview.com.au/libraries/videos/3712994/types-of-sources) on ClickView (sign into ClickView using your department credentials) video resource. Discuss the difference between primary and secondary sources, and list and identify different types of resources as primary or secondary sources. Discuss why you might use primary and secondary sources, and what should be considered when using these resources (e.g. bias, perspective etc). Create a ‘primary and secondary sources’ anchor chart for later referral.



Show students the [150years of public education in Victoria](https://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-public-education-victoria) website and read the dot points explaining why the anniversary is important. Explain that prior to the passing of the Education Act of 1872, children were not required to attend school, and many worked from a young age to support their family. By passing the Education Act of 1872, education in Victoria became free, secular and compulsory for children.

Lead a discussion with students about what they think might have changed for students following the passing of the Act. Use prompting questions such as:

* Do you think that all children had the same opportunities to attend school?
* What might have happened on farms and workplaces when children had to attend school?
* How do you think children might have felt about having to go to school?
* What subjects do you think students learnt at school in 1872?
* What do you think secular means?



Watch the “Then and Now” video available on the [150years of public education in Victoria](https://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-public-education-victoria) website which includes images of past and current schools as an introduction to the topic. Lead a discussion on the things they noticed about the video compared to their own experiences of school. Examples might be the size of classrooms, uniforms, the leaving age or the different opportunities available for boys and girls. Discuss whether the information shown in the video is a primary or secondary source. Students explain their reasoning for their response.

### School life in the past

Before commencing this activity, check with colleagues and students whether students have completed this activity at a previous year level, in which case an alternative activity from this learning sequence should be completed instead.

Explain to students that they are going to investigate what school was like in the past by conducting an oral history interview with an older person, such as a parent, grandparent, teacher or other older person. Ask students to identify whether this would be a primary or secondary source of information, and to justify their response. Ask students how conducting an oral history interview will provide them with one perspective on the past.



Watch [How to conduct an oral history interview](https://vimeo.com/566545569) by the History Teachers Association of Victoria (HTAV) with students prior to planning their interview. Review the steps students need to take to create an oral history interview. You might also like to watch [History Detectives – How to Undertake an Oral History Interview](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFL81mfLg8w) which provides additional information on oral history interviews.

Ask students to brainstorm their ideas for question topics for the interview, before joining with a partner to share their ideas. Questions should focus on learning what schools and education were like in the past. Each pair selects and records their top three questions to share with the class. Model how to write suitable interview questions based around these topics. Examples of questions might include:

* What school did you attend?
* Did you go to childcare or kindergarten before you began primary school?
* What grade or year level did you start in?
* How old were you when you started school?
* How old were you when you finished school?
* At what age could you leave school?
* How did you get to school?
* What subjects did you study?
* Were there subjects that you were not allowed to study?
* How many students were in your classes in primary school?
* Did you have to wear a uniform? If so, what did it look like?
* What do you think was similar about your schooling and education and mine?
* Were there children at your school who you think might have experienced or remembered it differently?
* What kind of jobs was your school preparing you for?

Form students into groups to plan their oral history interview, following the steps identified from the video and utilising questions drawn from the generated examples, and other questions they would like to ask.

Consider using a bank of common questions that all students ask, to enable students to collate, classify and analyse responses, as well as additional questions that students want to investigate further.

**Enable** students by collaboratively creating questions and preparing a question sheet they can use to conduct their interview.

**Extend** students by encouraging them to develop their own additional interview question to personalise their interview, and to consider how they might present the information in an interesting way.

Support students to plan, film and edit their oral history interview and determine how they might share these with others, for example in a shared class digital platform.

Ensure that students have asked appropriate permission from interviewees to share their interview information. Provide students with a form to give to their interviewees explaining the activity and seeking permission to share the interview information with the class or more broadly.

*Go further:* Create a class display that collates the interview responses, using statistical measures where appropriate (such as average starting and leaving age, the year the respondent was born or started school, where they went to school etc). Ask students to analyse the collated information and share and identify anything that they find surprising or interesting.

### School history investigation

This activity introduces students to timelines, which will be explored further in the Going deeper section below. See the [Teacher Materials and Resources](#_Teacher_Materials_and) and [Background Reading for Teachers](#_Background_reading_for) sections for additional advice and information on how to conduct an historical investigation of your school.

Explain to students that they are going to create a timeline that records the significant events for your school. If possible, immerse students in the history of your school by creating a display of historical documents or artefacts, such as books that were produced by previous classes, photographs, and any other memorabilia. If your school is a relatively new school, students can research the previous schools that used to exist in the area following the passing of the *Education Act 1872*.

Useful sources that students can use to conduct research include the [State Library of Victoria’s Online Collection](https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/), the [150 years of Public Education in Victoria](https://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-search-school-profiles) website, the [Public Record Office Victoria](https://prov.vic.gov.au/), your own school’s archives and memorabilia, interviewing past students, or a local historical society or library. Historical newspapers can be searched using [Trove](https://trove.nla.gov.au/), part of the National Library of Australia (NLA). Remind students to search using the school’s current name, and any previous names the school was known by. The [Museums Victoria online collection](https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/search?classification=Play+%26+childlore) has a large archive dedicated to childhood objects, stories, poems, jokes, songs and games.



Take students on a walking tour around the school grounds, looking for sources of evidence that tell something about the history of the school. For example, students may find a Foundation Stone, the school sign and number, different types of buildings, or honour boards. If possible, have students take photos or draw the historical artefacts that they find.

Form students into pairs to research the history of the school. Remind students to use primary sources, such as the historical artefacts, information from the oral history interviews, documents and photographs available, as well as secondary sources such as newspaper reports to build a good understanding of the history of the school.

Select a small number of events in the history of the school, and demonstrate how to construct a timeline, firstly using an open timeline, with events sequenced in order, and secondly showing a scaled timeline, where events are placed on a scaled line that represents the total life of the school.



Students work in their research pairs to construct a scaled timeline of the history of your school, including at least 6 significant events that have occurred since the school opened.

*Go further:* Consider making a large display of the timeline, which students can illustrate, to hang in the classroom or in a prominent place in the school. Invite members of the school community to contribute information, photographs and other memorabilia that help to tell the story of the school.

Watch [Developing an inquiry question](https://vimeo.com/517924555) from the History Teachers Association of Victoria. Students select one of the historical events and conduct further research into it, identifying the key protagonists, why that event occurred, the perspectives of some of the different people involved and any other relevant information. Students create a presentation in the format of their choice to share about that event, for example an oral presentation, a quiz, a short documentary film.

## Going deeper

### Traditional Aboriginal education

***Before teaching this section, review this*** [***teacher guide***](https://www.datocms-assets.com/19924/1656294948-beforeyouusethissequence.pdf) ***from the department’s*** [***Learning Sequences***](https://learningsequences.educationapps.vic.gov.au/) ***website which provides advice and protocols for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives content respectfully and inclusively.***

***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this resource may contain links to images and voices of deceased persons.​
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Discuss with students that the previous activities have helped us to explore primary and secondary sources, and to develop history research skills. Review the timeline activity that students completed to review the history of their school. Explain that they will build on these skills in this activity, as they explore histories of Australia prior to colonisation.



Share the [Timeline of Australia’s Defining Moments](https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/) with your class. Discuss that evidence shows that First Nations people have lived in Australia for over 65,000 years. Explore the timeline entries prior to 1770 with students. Lead a discussion with your class about why there are fewer entries from this time. Examples include their oral rather than written cultural practices, permanent architectural structures were less common (for example compared to Egyptians and Romans who built large structures) as the cultural practices of Aboriginal people were strongly linked to caring for their ancestral lands, informed by seasonal change and shaped by the particular environment and landscape in which they lived. Encourage students to explore entries on the [Timeline of Australia’s Defining Moments](https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/) or the [Deadly Story: History timeline](https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/history) more deeply.



Use a scaled timeline to support students to develop a conceptual understanding of the length of time that Aboriginal people have lived in Australia. For example, measure out a length of 65m on the oval or hardcourt, and have students stand on the timeline to represent key events from the [Timeline of Australia’s Defining Moments](https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/). Each 1m represents 1000 years.

This activity will support students to develop an understanding of the length of time that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lived in this land, supporting an understanding of the resilience of ongoing cultural practices. The timeline will assist students to consider the very recent arrival of Europeans and other more recent migration, and the impact that colonisation and subsequent dispossession of lands has had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples over a very short period of time.

### Learning about our Traditional Owners

Introduce this activity to students by asking them what they know about the Traditional Owners of the Country where your school is sited. Support students to identify your Country using the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) [Map of Indigenous Australia](https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia) or the [interactive map](https://achris.vic.gov.au/weave/wca.html) on the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council website.



Explore the significance of Country with your students, to help build their understanding of the relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with Country. Share the [Significance of Country – What is Country?](https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/welcome-country) video with your students, and discuss the ideas raised by Ngunnawal Elder Jude Barlow about what Country means to her.

Explore the languages, place names and stories about some of the significant places on the Country where your school is sited using the [First Languages Australia interactive map](https://gambay.com.au/placenames/). Discuss with students the importance of hearing the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when listening to these stories.



Share Uncle Colin Walker’s recollections of his traditional and cultural education from the slide pack, then watch [Wutiyeti: Bunyip from Ackle Bend](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfNRrpmKiJw) and [The journey of the Bogong Moths](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPI-YlOW6-A), both produced by ABC Indigenous. Discuss with students how these stories help us to understand how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people educated young people, the importance of learning on Country and through story, and the importance of learning First languages.

Share [Deadly Story – Songlines](https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/Life_Lore/Songlines) with students. Discuss with students why Songlines were used and how they helped Aboriginal people travel safely. Watch the video ‘Yingabeal’ and discuss with students why markers like the ‘Yingabeal’ scar-tree are important. Ask students what is meant by a ‘cultural passport’, and why these were needed to enable respectful travel over different Countries. More information about [Yingabeal](https://victoriancollections.net.au/stories/yingabeal-indigenous-geography-at-heide) is available on the Victorian Collections website.

*Go further:* Museums Victoria offers an online learning incursion [First Peoples of Victoria: Knowledge of Country](https://museumsvictoria.com.au/bunjilaka/learning/school-programs-and-resources/first-peoples-of-victoria-knowledge-of-country/) which explores the knowledge systems and scientific understandings of the First Peoples of Victoria. This virtual learning program explores the similarities between intergenerational knowledge of First Peoples complex understandings of all that exists on their Country, and Western science skills taught in schools today, and addresses History, Geography and Science curriculum outcomes. [Teacher resources](https://museumsvictoria.com.au/bunjilaka/learning/school-programs-and-resources/back-at-school-activities/) for First Peoples are also available from Museums Victoria.

### Budj Bim eel trap system

This activity provides an opportunity for students to use the historical research skills they developed in previous activities and apply them to learn about a significant Gunditimara site, the Budj Bim eel trap system. This site was recently awarded [World Heritage status](https://www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/about/world-heritage) and is estimated to be at least 6000 years old.



Explain to students that they are going to conduct research into the Budj Bim eel trap system, which is found on Gunditjmara Country in South Western Victoria. Share the [Deadly Story Budj Bim](https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/history/Gunditjmara_people_build_sophisticated_Budj_Bim_eel_trap_system) website page with students to build students’ background knowledge. The Dreaming Story about the creation of Budj Bim is available at [Dhauwurd Wurrong: The Creation of Budj Bim](https://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/aboriginal-culture/nyernila/dhauwurd-wurrong-the-creation-of-budj-bim/) and includes a glossary of Dhauwurd wurrong words.

Form students into small groups and guide them on how to develop an inquiry question. Watch [Developing an inquiry question](https://vimeo.com/517924555) from the History Teachers Association of Victoria to assist students if needed.

Model for students how to gather information and organise their research and ideas. Sources of information include [Budj Bim Cultural Landscape](https://www.budjbim.com.au/), UNESCO World Heritage Convention – [Budj Bim Cultural Landscape](https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1577/), Parks Victoria – [Budj Bim National Park](https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/budj-bim-national-park) and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water National Heritage Places – [Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape](https://www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/places/national/budj-bim). Video resources include [Preserving Budj Bim’s rich cultural heritage and languages](https://youtu.be/akMqRFcWF2s), [Technology reveals ancient wisdom at Budj Bim](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-MKbagnoK8) and [Budj Bim – One year on](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtPOzOWa4Xs), from the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.

Prompt students with questions that explore how the evidence of scientific understanding, mathematics and engineering at Budj Bim provide us with insights into the importance of education for the Gunditimara people.

Encourage students to present the findings of their research in an interesting way, for example as a documentary or newsletter article or a song. Demonstrate to students how to include and cite information from the Gunditimara people about Budj Bim, to ensure that the voice of traditional owners is prioritised.

### Impact of colonisation of Victoria’s First Nations people

This activity explores the impact of colonisation of Victoria on the Traditional Owners of the land. For background reading prior to teaching this activity visit the [Aboriginal Cultural Capability Toolkit](https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/html-resources/aboriginal-cultural-capability-toolkit/aboriginal-culture-history/#:~:text=European%20colonisation%20had%20a%20devastating,in%20the%20name%20of%20protection) website.

The impact of European colonisation was devastating for Aboriginal communities and cultures, with mass killings, the introduction of deadly diseases, displacement from traditional lands and loss of languages. Relocation of Aboriginal peoples onto missions and reserves became common practice. Despite this Aboriginal people, families and communities remain strong and resilient and their kinship systems, customs, deep knowledge and traditions continue to be taught and practiced.



Share the [Invasion of Victoria](https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/history/Invasion) page from Deadly Story with students. While some of the language used in this resource may feel confronting, it provides an opportunity to discuss with students how language is used by different groups to represent different perspectives about an historical event. Additional resources can also be found on the [State Library of Victoria Early History – Aboriginal Australians](https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/Victoriasearlyhistory/aboriginalaustralians).



As students read and view the information on the page, they complete a “See, Think, Wonder” chart, recording key information from the text, video and images, record their thinking about the information, and any questions that the information provokes.

Prompt students with questions including:

* How did the arrival of Dutch and Portuguese navigators differ from the arrival of Captain Cook?
* Why do Aboriginal peoples view the arrival of the English and colonisation as an invasion rather than a settlement?
* Why were the First Fleet sent to Australia?
* Why do you think Aboriginal people might have thought that the English arriving on the First Fleet could have been relatives returning from the spirit world?
* How do you think the information on this page differs to accounts in newspapers and other resources published by the colonists at the time? Why might these views be different? Resources can be found on the [State Library Victoria](https://guides.slv.vic.gov.au/Victoriasearlyhistory/timeline) timeline for comparison.
* What do you think happened to Aboriginal people as they were dispossessed from their lands? While many Aboriginal people were killed, many others were forced off Country onto [missions, reserves and stations](https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/missions-stations-and-reserves#:~:text=Missions%20were%20often%20created%20by,the%20government%20for%20this%20purpose.) where they had little to no agency or control over own their lives, language and cultural practices. In many cases, basic human rights were ignored.
* What impact do you think this had on learning and education for Aboriginal people in Victoria?

*Go further:* The National Museum of Australia’s resource [‘How did Cook’s Endeavour voyage change Australia forever?’](https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/learning-modules/how-did-cooks-endeavour-voyage-change-australia-forever) provides a comprehensive resource with student activities to explore European and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s perspectives about Cook’s voyage, prompt discussion about historical concepts and the sources of evidence relating to the voyage.

**Aboriginal schooling following colonisation**

Review previous learning with students about education for Aboriginal children prior to colonisation. Remind students that during this time, Elders were responsible for the education of Aboriginal children, passing on the culture and way of life through stories and play that expanded as children grew older. Children learnt about the history of their communities, wayfinding, spiritual stories, art, sewing garments such as possum skin cloaks, weaving containers, woodworking of tools and weapons, bush medicine, cultural protocols, and how to hunt and gather food.



Explain that following colonisation, many Aboriginal children in Victoria were required to attend mission schools, where cultural and traditional practices and Aboriginal languages were banned. Many missions and stations were operated by churches. Information about missions and mission schools can be found at Deadly Story – [Creation of reserve system](https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/history/Creation_of_reserve_system), [The Mission](https://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/aboriginal-culture/missions/the-mission/) on the Culture Victoria website, or on the [Aboriginal Schooling](https://victoriancollections.net.au/stories/school-days-education-in-victoria/aboriginal-schooling) page on the Victorian Collections website. Students investigate the impact that the passing of The Education Act of 1872 had on the education of Aboriginal children.



Lead a discussion with students about how the removal of communities from Country onto missions and the disruption of traditional cultural ways and languages impacted on the learning, health and wellbeing of Aboriginal students. Explain that most missions were closed in the last century, with Lake Tyers Mission the last closed in 1971, after being handed back to the Aboriginal community. Refer back to the timeline explored earlier and note how mission experiences and attendance at some mission schools is very recent (in living memory).

### The Education Act of 1872

Share the [150th Anniversary of public education in Victoria](https://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-public-education-victoria) page with students and lead a discussion about the dot points outlining why the anniversary important. Students can view a copy of the original Act at the [Education Act 1872 (Vic)](https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item-sdid-25.html) page on the Museum of Australian Democracy website, and a copy of the front page is included in the slide pack resources.



Read [Fostering ‘an educated community’](https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/free-education-introduced) with students, from the Australia’s defining moments digital classroom. Summarise the main information from this page, highlighting that after the Act was passed, education became compulsory for students aged 6-15, was free and was secular (not religious).



Explain that the Education Act 1872 also introduced a standardised education, outlining the subjects that would be taught in Victorian schools. Core subjects were Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar and Geography. ‘Extras’ were some form of physical activity (drill or gymnastics), and sewing or needlework for female students. Education prepared students for future work. The Victorian Collections [School Exercise books collection](https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/5f18f086d9d6851c74cc468a) provide examples of school workbooks around 1900, including examples of copperplate handwriting.

As a class, create a collaborative ‘Before’ and ‘After’ chart to compare and record the effect of the passing of the Education Act of 1872. Lead a class discussion on the wider societal impact of the law, for example on farms and other workplaces where children were commonly employed.

## Reflect and consolidate

### Resilience and strength

Lead a discussion, asking students to reflect on the vast 65,000-year history of the First Nations of Victoria, and the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people over the last 230 years. Explain that despite the suffering and harsh treatments that Aboriginal Communities have endured, they remain resilient, strong and proud.

Discuss how today, important dates and events are acknowledged throughout Australia that recognise the historical events of the past and help share understanding of Aboriginal cultures with all Australians. Understanding amongst the wider Australian community is now growing about the knowledge and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and particularly their knowledge, understanding and skill in caring for the environment, and [science, technological and engineering knowledge and skills](https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/Life_Lore/Science), such as demonstrated at Budj Bim.

Form students into small groups, and have them research one of the key events that is recognised each year, for example using the list on the Deadly Story – [Annual Days of Significance](https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/Annual_Days) web page. Students can prepare an information report about the significance of that day and plan an activity that the class or whole school could participate in to commemorate that event.

# Teacher Materials and Resources

## How to research and present the history of your school

### Where should I look for information on my school?

Many Victorian primary schools have a long and rich history.Even if your school is in a new suburb, or was recently built, there is probably historical information that students can research as, there probably are or were older schools that existed in your area.

The Education Act 1872 stipulated that students were only excused from attending school if they lived further than two miles (3.2 km) away from any school. Consequently, the Department of Education worked to establish schoolhouses in both metropolitan and regional Victoria. The suburb where you live might once have been an agricultural area or a mining region that would certainly have had schools for the children of farmers or miners. Your current school may have replaced several schools or amalgamated (been joined with another one). If your school is new, you might have students research one of the schools that used to exist in your area instead.

*150 Years of Public Education school profiles*

Students can begin their research by checking the [150 Years of public education](https://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-search-school-profiles) website. The website includes histories from 300 closed schools from across Victoria that students can investigate. If your school is not listed, students have some great sleuthing ahead!

*School archives*

Does your school have an archive? The best person to ask is your school librarian and the administration staff. Sometimes, historical documents, photos and artefacts can be found tucked away in storerooms.

The sort of things that might be found in your school archive could include:

* photographs of past students, teachers or buildings
* documents from the 100th anniversary of public education in Victoria in 1972, including your school’s entry in [Vision and Realisation: A Centenary History of State Education in Victoria](https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/1590782/Cite)
* a publication from your school’s 50th, 100th or 150th anniversary or other significant milestone
* research on your school’s history collated by past students
* a time capsule made by past students from your school
* audio or audiovisual recordings
* past school uniforms or bags
* student workbooks
* Previous learning technologies such as a typewriter, slide projector, film reels or an inkwell.

You might ask to borrow some items to display in a school exhibition, discuss in class or photograph for a research project.

*Interview past students*

Using the historical records you find; your class can contact past students or teachers and organise to interview them about their experiences at your school.

Watch [this video](https://vimeo.com/user18540706) to get some inside information about how to conduct a great historical interview.

A helpful way to get your interview candidates reminiscing about their school experiences is to show them pictures.

*Social media*

You can use your school’s social media accounts to let your school community know that you are seeking historical information and memories about local schools. You can send a request to your students’ families to do a call-out through their social media networks.

There are several Facebook accounts with the title ‘I Grew Up In …’ (e.g., I grew up in Collingwood). People regularly post photographs and memories from their school days.

*Local historical society*

Most suburbs or shires have a historical society staffed by volunteers. They collect both records and memories from local residents so that the history of the area can be documented and preserved. Most would be very pleased to help you research the history of your school or past schools in your region.

The volunteers at the historical society might also be long-term residents of the area and potential interviewees.

*Local library*

Your local library is one of the best places to find books on your suburb or shire. The librarian might also be able to point you towards any files relating to local schools held in the collection. Library noticeboards can also be a good place to let the community know that you are looking for information about the history of your school. Make sure that all correspondence is sent directly to the school rather than your personal contact details.

*Trove*

Do a search of historical newspapers using [Trove](https://trove.nla.gov.au/). Make sure that you try both your school’s current name and any other iterations of the name from the past. For example, the oldest school still in operation in Victoria, Bacchus Marsh Primary School (No. 28) went through several name changes.

The school opened in May 1850 and amalgamated with three other small schools in April 1863 to become Bacchus Marsh Central Common School. It later became Bacchus Marsh State School and was renamed Bacchus Marsh Primary School in 1970.

If you are searching online records, you will need to try ‘Bacchus Marsh school’ and all of these different school names as key search terms. Also, be aware that there may be schools with similar names in other states.

*Museums Victoria online collection*

[Museums Victoria](https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/) has a large archive dedicated to childhood. It doesn’t just contain objects, but also stories, poems, jokes, songs and games.

## How can students share what they have learnt?

### Historical timelines

One of the most effective ways to show how education in Victoria and your school has evolved is through a timeline. There are many innovative ways that your class can share your findings with visitors to a school. Some ideas include:

* create a giant timeline going down the hall of your school, in the gym or playground
* decorate a series of classrooms to each represent a decade of education in Victoria or at your school
* make a digital timeline to go on your school website (You can use the [150 Years of Public Education](https://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-public-education-victoria) website to see what kind of information you might include.)
* videorecord a mini documentary about an aspect of life at school in 1872, 1917, 1972 and today? It could be about an example of the curriculum, how students spoke to their teachers, or the kind of equipment used for their school lessons.

Remember to acknowledge on your timeline that education was occurring in your area before European settlement through the types of education experienced by children in local Aboriginal communities.

### Engaging your audience

Brainstorm ideas with your students of different ways they could share what they have learnt with the wider school community. Some ideas include:

* use mannequins to show changes in uniform or clothing worn by children over time
* hold a historical fashion parade
* write and perform some short scenes at your school assembly on how students learnt in the past
* work with your school art teacher to recreate historical lessons such as making an embroidery sampler
* create a session on how students used to exercise at school or play games at recess. Your class could lead a session for other year levels to try them out
* Invite a guest into your classroom to act as a ‘school inspector’ and to give a report on you and your students. Read some of the inspector reports available on the [150 Years of Public Education website](https://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-public-education-victoria). [Here](https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/18524863-F6C0-11E9-AE98-9FEC939EC28A?image=1) are some examples from Brown Hill Primary School near Ballarat. They contain reports by inspectors from between 1914 and 1922.
* The ‘then and now’ method of display is an effective way to show change over time. It can be achieved with images, report cards, video clips, everyday school items, 3D displays, samples of student work, or demonstrations. Some examples of topics for research and discussion are listed below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Then | Now | Reflection |
| Teachers used blackboards, chalk and dusters. | Teachers used whiteboards with markers or interactive whiteboards. | Both technologies were designed to enable teachers to write and erase information repeatedly. Chalk dust was messy and considered unhealthy. |

### Suggested Excursions and Incursions

*National Trust of Victoria*

The National Trust of Victoria offers a [Mrs Sargood goes to school incursion](https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/educationprograms/mrs-sargood-goes-to-school/) where students in Years F-6 can experience the nineteenth-century Victorian approaches to education, manners and punishment. Incursions such as these can be an excellent way to inspire your historical research.

Heritage centres and Museums

Local heritage centres, parks and experiential centres provide opportunities for students to experience life in the past. Examples include:

* [Budj Bim Cultural Landscape](https://www.budjbim.com.au/visit/cultural-tours/student-tours/)
* [Brambuk National Park and Cultural Centre](https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/grampians-national-park/attractions/central-grampians/things-to-do/brambuk-the-national-park-and-cultural-centre)
* [State Library of Victoria](https://www.slv.vic.gov.au/learn/listing-schools-programs)
* [Museums Victoria](https://museumsvictoria.com.au/learning/)
* [Walhalla Historic Township](https://www.visitvictoria.com/regions/gippsland/destinations/walhalla)
* [Eureka Centre, Ballarat](https://www.eurekacentreballarat.com.au/)

Commercial operators such as Sovereign Hill in Ballarat, Coal Creek in Korumburra, Old Gippstown in Moe, Pioneer Settlement in Swan Hill, Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum and Village in Warrnambool and the Port of Echuca Discovery Centre also offer opportunities for students to explore the past.

# Background reading for teachers

This background reading material is adapted from material prepared by the History Teachers Association of Victoria to support the 150years of public education in Victoria program. Copies of the full teacher resources are available on [FUSE/the 150th](https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Teacher) website.

### *Introduction*

Education in Victoria occurred prior to the *Education Act 1872*, with children having received schooling in both formal and informal environments. For over 60,000 years, children from Aboriginal families learnt traditional knowledge such as creation stories and oral histories, hunting and gathering food, cultural protocols, and making tools, weapons, and shelters.

### Aboriginal education history

The [Education Act 1872](https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/vic8_doc_1872.pdf) (Parliament of Victoria) was founded on Western principles of what children needed to learn. When researching the history of your school, it is important to consider how children were educated in your area before European colonisation. What do you know about the Aboriginal history of your area? How did parents, Elders and communities educate young people? What was considered an important life skill?

Objects and artefacts can tell us a great deal about the types of knowledge and skills that Aboriginal children would have been taught growing up in their Community. These included learning to build bark shelters, weaving nets and baskets to be used for fishing traps, collecting and storing food, and objects used in religious ceremonies. Aboriginal children also learnt the values, beliefs and cultural practices of their communities from their Elders and other family members.

The Western style of education offered by the national, denominational, common and state schools from 1851 in Victoria was very different to traditional Aboriginal knowledge and teachings. Prior to colonisation, Aboriginal children learnt about the history of their communities, wayfinding, spiritual stories, art, sewing garments such as possum skin cloaks, weaving containers, woodworking of tools and weapons, bush medicine, cultural protocols, and how to hunt and gather food.

*“I always tell them the story about our people making cordial out of the banksias. We used to put the banksia tops in a bowl of water and leave it sit there overnight and all the sugar came out of the banksia. They used to feed it to the babies in the heat and it kept water and liquid in them. It’s things like that that make children in awe because like I tell them, we lived with the land. The land was our friend and we were land’s friend. If we look after the land, it’s going to look after us.”* - Gloria Whalan, Aboriginal Life in Gippsland – A Senior’s Perspective(Koorie Heritage Trust & Network Aboriginal Disability and Aged Care Agencies 2016)

Western learning styles also contrasted with Aboriginal learning processes, which were holistic, relied heavily on context, engaged visual-spatial skills, and were often delivered in an informal manner.

*“Learning was largely a matter of observation and imitation of the actions of older people and to a much lesser extent by verbal instruction from those who were older. Much learning was unstructured and took place within concrete contexts. The early education of Aboriginal children was undertaken by those with whom they were intimate and kin. It was only later in life, particularly in the context of initiation or in the learning of religious knowledge and ritual, that verbal instruction was given in a more formal and structured way, and that information was imparted by people who were strangers or relative strangers.”*(Blanchard 1985 as cited in Hughes & More 1997)

Aboriginal education was delivered in language that encompassed their world view, shared and inherited knowledge, and identity. In Victoria there were roughly 38 distinct, separate languages, though there would have been some overlap between them, and most people would have spoken multiple languages.

*“Aboriginal languages are very unique and have very specific linguistic traits that reflect culture. For example, in many Aboriginal languages, the words you use differ significantly depending on who you’re speaking with and how you are connected to that person through kinship systems. This shows how important relationships to kin and Community are in our culture.*

*Language also represents a connection to our ancestors, who have spoken these words and told stories for thousands and thousands of years.”*  *[Languages](https://www.deadlystory.com/page/culture/Life_Lore/Language)* (Deadly Story 2022)

Compulsory education was used by the Australian and Victorian governments to assimilate Aboriginal communities and individuals into Anglo-European culture. They were taught Western laws, morals, values, numeracy, literacy and religious doctrine. They were not allowed to speak in their own languages.

Aboriginal learning opportunities were typically segregated, in that it was rare for Aboriginal and European children to attend the same school or, if they did, at the same time. Merri Creek Aboriginal School was established in 1846 by the Collins Street Baptist Church. The school was attended by both girls and boys, including the children of Wurundjeri tribal leader Billibellary. The teachers were European, and the students learnt a mix of academic, agricultural and domestic skills and even built a public bridge across the Merri Creek. This was typical of the education provided to Aboriginal children, who were only being prepared for a life of unskilled - and sometimes unpaid - labour. One of the complaints against one teacher, Edward Peacock, was that he spent much of the time preaching to students. The school closed in 1851 due to low enrolments.

### Education following Colonisation

Following colonisation, when Europeans arrived in Australia, female convicts were often tasked with overseeing the education of young charges. Children from wealthy families were often more formally educated by a tutor or governess in their own home.

From 1851 onwards, after Victoria separated from the colony of New South Wales, formal education in the colony evolved through several stages.

### The three stages of state education in Victoria

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1851–1862 | National and denominational schools |
| 1862–1872 | Common schools |
| 1873–present | State schools |

### Denominational schools

Denominational schools gained strength during mass immigration to the state of Victoria in the 1850s due to the Gold Rush. These schools were founded by and affiliated with a church body and governed by the Denominational School Board, founded in 1848. The Board was structured into four units, each representing a key denomination: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Wesleyan. Religious education was integrated into the curriculum, ethos, and the general activities of the school community. Many of the early Victorian schools were denominational, as church bodies had the social infrastructure and funds to establish and run them.



Caption: [Old Catholic Church and denominational school in Portland](https://viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE1140282&mode=browse). The school is the small room attached to the back of the church. The school was founded by Reverend Michael Stevens in 1849 and was the second Catholic denominational school to be opened in Victoria.

Source: Laurie Burchell collection of photographs of Victoria schools, State Library Victoria.

### National schools

National schools were run by the National School Board and operated between 1851 and 1863. They were non-sectarian, meaning that religious education was separate to the general teaching. It ran parallel to the denominational school system and was used primarily by families who were not as wealthy as those attending denominational schools.



Caption: [A national school, Dana Street, Ballarat](https://viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE16257589&mode=browse) 1861.

Source: Solomon & Bardwell, Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria.

### Common schools

In 1862, the *Common Schools Act* led to the cessation of national schools and the formation of the Board of Education. Denominational schools continued to be funded along with common schools, but there was a strong movement towards the idea of secular education. Common schools were now the mainstream source of schooling in Victoria and were committed to providing at least four hours of secular education between the hours of 9.00 am and 4.00 pm. Schooling still incurred a fee but orphans or children from destitute families had their fees paid by the Board of Education.

### Private school ventures

Many private and government schools were founded by individuals who had been well educated and were passionate about education. Many of these founders were women who initially ran the schools from their own homes before moving to bigger premises. Their schools often began as a way of offering education to girls and young women. Many schools began as private ventures before being purchased by the state government. [Baringhup School](https://www.vic.gov.au/150-years-baringhup-west-primary-school) is an example of a school that opened as a private school in 1869. It became a common school in 1870 and later a state school in 1970.



Caption: [Miss Clarke’s seminary, Portland](https://viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE7217935&mode=browse) ca. 1859. A private school for girls.

Source: Thomas Hannay, Pictures Collection, State Library Victoria.

### Ragged schools

Ragged schools were founded for children who came from families severely impacted by poverty and who could not afford the fees charged by national, common or denominational schools. It was understood by the teachers that the children attending may be dressed in ragged clothing, have no shoes, be unwashed, suffer from malnutrition and have intermittent attendance.

The first ragged school was founded in 1859 by Hester Hornbrook on Cambridge Street, Collingwood.Soon, more opened, each catering for between thirty-five and fifty students. Although not governed by the Denominational School Board, the teachings of the school were underpinned by religious, evangelical and moral philosophies. The ragged schools system provided opportunities to many children born into poor families, but in the spirit of religious salvation. Poor families were considered responsible for their own destitution through poor decision-making and moral depravity.



Caption: Illustration of [Hornbrook Ragged School](https://viewer.slv.vic.gov.au/?entity=IE601213&mode=browse) off Little Lonsdale Street, 1884. Note that several of the children sitting on the right bench are not wearing shoes.

Source: David Syme and Co. Illustrated Australian news collection, State Library Victoria.

Classrooms were furnished with wooden desks and benches. Equipment usually included a blackboard, writing slates for students, a world globe, a small supply of books, and the requisite portrait of the reigning British king or queen.

**Curriculum and pedagogy**

Prior to the Education Act 1872, National, denominational and common schools taught a range of core subjects including spelling, reading, writing, dictation, composition, grammar, geography, arithmetic, geometry, mensuration (a type of geometry dedicated to the measurement of length, area and volume), algebra, bookkeeping, vocal music (singing) and drawing, plus needlework for the girls.

The Education Act 1872 introduced standardised education, stipulating which subjects would be taught in Victorian schools. Core subjects were Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar and Geography. ‘Extras’ were some form of physical activity, and sewing or needlework for female students. An accurate command of the English language was at the forefront of education during this period. It was tied to ideas of model citizenship, class and social etiquette. Handwriting was also considered an important quality of well-educated children and adults.

The emphasis on different aspects of education changed over time as approaches to pedagogy and learning technologies changed. Many schools shaped their extracurricular activities according to the advice of school inspectors. Organising a school branch of the Gould League of Bird Lovers was generally approved.

With the advent of the twentieth century, new subjects such as social studies were integrated into the state school curriculum.

**Women and education**

Women have been stalwart contributors to the history of education in Victoria, both as members of the teaching workforce and as volunteers through mothers’ clubs, school boards and other voluntary activities.

**Dame schools**

Many of the earliest private schools in the colony of Victoria were founded by women and run out of a private home. Students were taught academic skills alongside social etiquette and female arts such as needlework. These institutions incurred a small fee and were referred to as ‘dame schools’. The earliest dame school in Australia was founded in 1789 by a female convict named Isabella Rosson. In several cases, dame schools became large and significant educational institutions, such as Carlton State School, founded by Grace Pullar in 1858. The school was later renamed as the Faraday Street Common School, then the Carlton (Faraday Street) State School (No. 112). It closed in 1972 and is now the Kathleen Syme Education Centre.

**Female students**

Some of the challenges female students faced in the colony of Victoria related to the expectation that they would only need a basic education, as very few professional careers were offered to women at the time. They were less likely to undertake the more academic subjects. Only girls who attended private schools, were from wealthy families, or had a home tutor or governess were likely to study languages.

*After the* Education Act 1872

Teaching, along with nursing or becoming a governess, was one of the few professional careers available to women in the nineteenth century. Female teachers made up 48 per cent of the teaching profession in Victoria by 1866 and were highly valued for their ability to impart moral values in education. Under the National and Common School Boards, married women were allowed to teach or superintend schools—although, generally, they were paid less than male teachers. This was also evident in the denominational and ragged schools systems.

The Education Act 1872 signalled a new regime in educational administration that initially had a negative impact on female educators. This, in partnership with an unstable economy, meant that female teachers began to lose both rights and responsibilities as educators in the Victorian state school system. The Public Service Act 1889 stripped women of the right to work as teachers when they married, stating that they had to leave the public service. There was a small concession in that the amended 1890 Public Service Act (Article 14) allowed women (on the recommendation of the Governor in Council) to be employed as a sewing mistress.

**Victorian Lady Teachers’ Association**

The Victorian Lady Teachers’ Association (VLTA) was founded in 1885 in response to the marginalisation and unfair treatment of female teachers by the Victorian Education Department. They campaigned against the higher salaries awarded to their male counterparts, the exploitation of female workers, and the lack of superannuation schemes for female teachers in Victoria. They lobbied political figures and were outraged by the exclusion of women from the 1913 Teachers Act.

In addition to campaigning for the rights of women, the VLTA also tried to safeguard the educational opportunities for girls, especially when it was proposed that female students should be removed from academic lessons to train in domestic science two days a week.

**Migrant student experiences**

Some of the first education services for non-British migrant students were made on the goldfields of Victoria as Chinese miners arrived to seek their fortune. Initially, immigrants were single men, but over time men brought their wives and children with them. For those who wished to stay permanently in Australia, education would be a necessary step in planting their roots.

Many of the schools on the goldfields were denominational, although people of any religion could attend. The chief issues for teachers were language barriers, different religious beliefs among their pupils, and the nomadic nature of goldfield families who often moved around. Many church educators were not new to teaching non-English-speaking students due to a culture of overseas missionary work. In Ballarat, Reverend William Young began learning Chinese with locals and offering night classes to migrants and their children.

*Impact of* *the* Education Act 1872

Each decade of Australia’s colonial history has brought new migrants to Victoria—initially British and Chinese, later including Italians, Greeks, Vietnamese, Afghanis, Sudanese, and most recently Ukrainians.

Migrants were one of the key groups to benefit from and appreciate the stipulation that education was ‘free, compulsory and secular’. Many groups arrived in Australia due to economic issues in their homeland or to improve their socio-economic status. Although sometimes they had been professionals in their countries of origin, the language barrier meant that they had to take unskilled jobs and subsequently earn less income. In many cases, they came from countries where education was not free, and some had limited formal education.

The compulsory aspect of the Education Act 1872 was viewed positively by most migrants, as they saw education as an opportunity for their children to gain security and prosperity in their new homeland. Many migrant children were the first in their family to complete secondary schooling or attend university. This ethos often meant that educators were highly appreciated by migrant families.

The large wave of post-war immigration from Europe in the 1950s and 1960s changed the dynamic of public education in Victoria. Teachers were not equipped to teach students from non-English-speaking backgrounds and as a result many children struggled to engage with or understand their lessons. The ideology associated with the assimilation policy meant that students were simply expected to adapt. Many accounts show a clear division between students from English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries during this period. Students often suffered due to racist ideologies or stereotyping.

Because of the secular nature of Victorian public education, children from Jewish, Greek Orthodox, Hindu, Muslim or other faiths were not required to receive Christian religious instruction. However, being removed from the class during the religious education sessions that were delivered in schools by external providers sometimes made these students feel conspicuous and different from their peers.

Many children who immigrated between the 1970s and 2000s had come from countries such as Vietnam, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan and had suffered trauma due to wars in their own countries. Many had arrived without their parents, had grown up in refugee camps, and had never experienced formal education. It wasn’t until Victoria adopted a multiculturalism policy in the late 1970s and 1980s that education underwent a large shift to improve access and experiences for children from migrant families.

**Students with disabilities**

After the passing of the Education Act 1872 (Article 13, Clause 2), one of the key exemptions to the requirement to attend school related to health and disability. The Act was formed with the understanding that universal education would be beneficial to all Victorians, so several institutions were founded to ensure that students who had been born with, or acquired, disabilities could still attend school.

*Victorian Asylum and School for the Blind*

In the nineteenth century, blindness affected many children due to eye disease. To provide a suitable formal education, the Victorian Asylum and School for the Blind was opened in 1866. Children and young adults who attended lived onsite. The use of the term ‘asylum’ is confronting because it linked blindness with a lack of capability and a need to be protected from the world. It was also used in relation to mental health facilities. Students who attended the school learnt academic skills similar those in the mainstream schooling system. Additionally, they learnt a trade that could help them to become more financially independent. These included brush making, basket making, mat making, wool work, commercial or domestic laundry skills, knitting and needlework.

*1970s to the present*

Educational opportunities for students with long-term illnesses and disabilities improved during the second half of the twentieth century. More facilities for students with disabilities were included in mainstream education. These included ramps, modified toilets and hearing loops, although it was well into the twentieth century before all schools complied with accessibility regulations. Programs such as distance learning and the advent of online learning also increased the capacity for students who could not attend mainstream schools.

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