



Victorian Principals Association

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VPA Position Paper

Grounds Allowance and Playground and Tree Safety

Purpose

The Victorian Principals Association (VPA) is concerned that schools are receiving insufficient Grounds Allowance funding to maintain their grounds in fit for purpose condition. This includes covering the cost of the annual upkeep of playground and tree safety.

Background to the VPA Position

The VPA position has been determined in the following context:

- The quantum of funds is insufficient to maintain grounds in even a basic safe and clean condition.
- Time consuming compliance processes requiring a high level of expertise.
- OH&S issues being exacerbated by inadequate grounds maintenance funding, potentially endangering students and staff.
- Poor condition of some grounds forcing students and staff to use of limited areas.
- The ageing state of many schools' play equipment.
- Changes in compliance regulations for school playground equipment.
- The prohibitive cost of employing a qualified playground auditor to examine all aspects of the playground and playground equipment and then to carry out subsequent work.
- In regional areas this is exacerbated by the lack of access to auditors as well as by those currently charging \$1.20 per km for travel costs.
- The poor condition of trees (accelerated by 10 years of drought) in some school playgrounds.
- The extensive cost of employing an arborist to carry out inspections and follow up of recommended pruning and removal of trees.
- A survey of 166 VPA members in May 2015 showed that 70% of respondents stated their annual Grounds Allowance funding did not cover the cost of tree removal. Schools reported having to pay up to 50% of the cost of tree removal from other programs thereby taking money from educational programs.
- Poor external appearance of grounds could be a contributing factor to a decline in government school enrolments.

VPA Position

The VPA advocates for:

- A realistic allocation of grounds allowance in each schools SRP to include:
 - Funding for an annual OHS risk analysis.
 - Sufficient funds to enable the required regular inspections and subsequent maintenance work of playgrounds, including playground equipment and trees to be carried out by appropriately qualified personnel.
 - A new rate of 22.5 cents per square metre to be urgently implemented to each school based on a current market analysis of mowing, drain-cleaning, sweeping/blowing, pruning and weed-control and projected maintenance costs across an average two hectare site.
- DET to supply a list of contractors to carry out inspection and maintenance work at a reasonable, consistent cost.
- Provision of emergency funding to individual schools for tree removal as this is often an urgent safety issue.
- A long term plan to develop a strategy to manage grounds improvement in government schools across the state.