

School zoning

Parents Victoria believes that every Victorian child has the right to attend their neighbourhood school while maintaining the right of appeal to change schools if, after discussion and consultation at the current school, the desired educational outcomes cannot be achieved.

Department policy and process must be fair and reasonable for all students and this must be done in co-operation with parents and schools.

Generally, PV supports catchment zones for government schools. However, in special cases some students need to enrol elsewhere due to individual/family circumstances.

The Education Department has a Placement Policy for that reason, to permit those children who are granted approval to attend other than their neighbourhood school.

PV acknowledges that some schools are at capacity.

Benefits and disadvantages of zoning

Zoning can be a benefit by ensuring that all families have a school with viable attendance numbers that is nearby.

The reality is that many families rely on having a school nearby, and cannot send their children to a school outside their local area for multiple reasons. Zoning can make sure local students are guaranteed their spot if the school comes to be regarded as 'popular' or 'more successful.'

Disadvantages include smaller zoned catchment areas where enrolment demand is high and this can exclude families who are still in the local vicinity. There are also circumstances where students have particular learning and wellbeing needs that their local school cannot accommodate due to capacity constraints.

Broader issues

All government schools should be fully funded (100% SRS) to enable all of them to have the same high level of facilities, staff and resources to attract families to enrol their children locally.

In some cases, families do enrol outside their zone due to curriculum offerings, employment and family dynamics. Many rely on school reputation and experiences of others in choosing a school. This can be problematic as every child is different and school leaders, teachers and student cohorts change over time.

Where there is capacity to accept out-of-zone enrolments, schools should be equitable in making those decisions.

Should zoning be abolished?

PV notes that there have been calls for the system of school zoning to be abolished. We do not support this call, unless there was a guarantee that no government school would be at risk of closing or amalgamation.

PV has always advocated that governments have to plan for the future and maintain Victorian government schools to enable choice.

Background

School zones have acted as a mechanism to control demand, due to many factors such as:

- School closures back in the 1990s
- Increased population in metropolitan growth areas
- People relocating to other regions due to the pandemic
- Capital investment for new schools

We all are aware of people purchasing real estate or renting in zones of their preferred choice - but again, not everyone has the ability to do that.