

# Transition: A Positive Start to School

A guide for families, early childhood  
services, outside school hours care  
services and schools

Every  
child,  
every  
opportunity



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# Minister's Message

The transition to school is an experience that starts well before and extends far beyond the first day of school. A positive transition provides a smooth start to lifelong learning and development.

We know the first few years of a child's life are critical in laying the foundation for healthy development.

That's why, over the past decade, the Victorian Government has significantly increased investment in high quality early childhood services to provide Victorian children with the opportunity to learn grow and experience a happy and healthy childhood.

We have also invested in improving links between children's services, kindergartens and primary schools to ensure any learning difficulties, disabilities or developmental delays are identified and addressed.

This investment has resulted in the improved coordination between teachers, community members and key early childhood professionals in ensuring Victorian children get the best possible start to life.

Now in an Australian first, we will introduce transition statements for Victorian children entering the first year of school.

The transition statements will be prepared by each child's kinder teacher for every parent as an individual assessment of their child's abilities, achievements and interests.

These statements will provide a valuable understanding of a child's development before starting school, as well as noting learning difficulties, disabilities or development delays to help schools plan individual support programs.

They will be a significant help to prep teachers and parents who can respond to the information and provide the right support for each child's learning and development both at home and in the classroom.

The Transition: A Positive Start to School initiative will support Victorian children and their families to have a positive experience during this important milestone of learning and development.



*Maxine Morand*

**Maxine Morand**  
Minister for Children and Early  
Childhood Development

# 1. Introduction

Transition to school is not a point-in-time event, but rather an experience that starts well before, and extends far beyond, the first day of school.

Starting school is a major life transition for children and their families. It's a time of change that can be both challenging and exciting, in which children and families adjust to new roles, identities and expectations, new interactions and new relationships.

Children start school with different early childhood experiences and a range of strengths and needs. While most children make effective transitions, we know that some children and their families might need extra support.

The importance of the transition to school is widely acknowledged in national and international research. These findings suggest that children's experiences during the transition-to-school time can have longer-term impacts on their ability to cope with change. We also know that difficulties experienced during the transition to school can persist throughout school life. But, most importantly, we know that a successful start to school is linked to future positive school outcomes, both academically and socially.

The Victorian Government's Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development, released in 2008, sets the scene for Victoria's reforms over the next five years. It takes a life-long approach from birth through to young adulthood to ensure that 'every young Victorian thrives, learns and grows to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life, while contributing to their local and global communities'.

The Transition: A Positive Start to School initiative is an important step towards achieving the Blueprint goal of 'by the time Victorian children start school they will be ready to learn at school and schools will be ready for them'. Effective transition approaches recognise the central role that families and communities play in supporting children's learning and development. The research evidence highlights that transition-to-school experiences are most positive when:

- educators acknowledge children's strengths and abilities, and what they have learnt and experienced before starting school
- families are encouraged to share information about the child including their aspirations
- children are given the opportunity to provide their own views about their learning and what they need to prepare and adapt to their new school.

The initiative also introduces a tool for families and educators to share information about a child's learning and development in the form of a Transition Learning and Development Statement.

This guide provides advice on improving children's experience of starting school and is relevant for:

- all early childhood settings providing services to children in the year prior to school
- Outside School Hours Care settings
- schools in the government, catholic and independent sectors.

Further guidance on the transition to school is provided in the supporting Transition: A Positive Start to School Resource Kit. The Kit will assist in designing successful transition programs for families and children and support the transfer of information to achieve continuity of learning and development for each child.

## 2. Context

### The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and Transition

Transition is recognised as a key element in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (Victorian Framework), which is designed to assist families and early childhood professionals to promote children's learning and development in the critical first eight years of a child's life.

The Victorian Framework describes the key knowledge and skills that children need to acquire during these years and provides guidance for families and others in how to encourage their development.

It builds continuity between a child's learning and development in early childhood and the first years of schooling by linking the learning outcomes and pedagogy from the national Early Years Learning Framework for children aged birth to five with the Victorian school curriculum, the Victorian Essential Learning Standards for children aged five to eight.

### The Victorian Service System for Children's Learning and Development

There is a wide range of services in Victoria that support children's learning and development. These include long day care, family day care, occasional care, kindergarten programs, outside school hours care and schools. Also included is the universally available maternal and child health service which offers support and advice on a broad range of health and development issues.

Targeted and intensive services also provide learning and development support for children and families. These include child and family support services, as well as a range of community, primary and specialist health services. In addition, the early childhood intervention system in Victoria provides a range of services which support inclusion of children in early childhood programs and primary school settings.

These services are provided by staff with a broad range of qualifications and experience. These include teachers, child care workers, family day carers, maternal and child health nurses, allied health professionals including social workers and psychologists as well as integration aides and teachers' aides.

Where relevant for children and their families, it is important to recognise and facilitate the contribution all services can make to ensure a positive start to school for all children in Victoria.

# Art Room



### 3. Who is involved in transition to school?



Many people are involved in the transition to school. Transition to school programs are schedules of activities or experiences designed to support children, families and educators to build supportive relationships and become familiar with changing environments and experiences. These programs most commonly involve three groups: children, families and educators. Successful transitions rely on children, families and educators developing positive, supportive relationships. Children have to feel that school is a place where people care about them and where they are likely to succeed. Similarly, families need to be valued and respected as well as included in school life.

Children are often excited, and sometimes daunted, by the experience of starting school. It is important to recognise that their expectations and experiences can impact on the success of transition-to-school programs. There are many ways that children can, and should be, involved in planning their transition to school – it's important to listen to their perspectives. All children are different – even those of similar ages demonstrate many differences. An effective transition to school process respects these differences.

Families are the most important people in children's lives and play a central role in supporting children's learning and development. They must be involved in the transition process – it's not only children who experience changes on starting school.

Families are keen for their children to succeed and be happy at school. Families who actively support their children during transition, and who build positive relationships with school staff, are likely to continue this positive engagement with school.

They are also eager for school staff to get to know their children as individuals in real and meaningful ways. Transition-to-school programs provide an opportunity to build these relationships.

Educators from different settings have a lot to contribute to children's positive start to school. They develop strong relationships with children and their families and bring professional knowledge and experience about children's learning and development. By sharing this knowledge and experience, and working in partnership with families, educators can recognise a child's strengths and plan appropriate learning and teaching programs.

## 4. Supporting a positive start to school in Victoria



To support a positive start to school for all children, a common Victorian approach has been developed to guide families, early childhood services and schools. This will provide a shared understanding between early childhood services and schools about what is important for children and their families during this exciting time.

Early childhood services and schools will receive a *Transition: A Positive Start to School Resource Kit* which provides information about programs and approaches to transition planning, including specific advice about additional support for those children who may need it.

Collaboration between the child, family, early childhood educator and other people working with the child to complete the Transition Learning and Development Statement will be a central component of sharing valuable information and knowledge.

### Transition and readiness

People often focus on whether a child is ‘ready’ for school when discussing starting school, despite school readiness meaning different things to different people. Traditional concepts of school readiness are often criticised for their undue emphasis on a child’s skills.

Some of the most important elements of helping children to be ‘ready’ for school relate to ensuring that they are healthy and well nourished; are confident that school will be a positive experience for them; and feel supported by positive relationships. When children are happy to be at school, when they are healthy and feel valued, their learning and development will continue.

Children are best able to develop a positive attitude to starting school when they have opportunities to talk about what it will be like and are given realistic information about school experiences and expectations. Participating in transition to school programs is an excellent way to help achieve this.



## 5. Transition: A Positive Start to School approach

A high quality transition-to-school approach should recognise and respond to the broad range of factors shaping this period of a child's life, including the cultural background of the child and their family, participation in early childhood services, the school environment and the social and emotional skills of the child.

This section provides guidance for families, early childhood services and schools on transition planning. It outlines the approach through which local planning can be further developed. It is important to ensure that these arrangements support:

- individual children and their families in the year prior to and following entry to school, not just at point-in-time
- building relationships between and among children, families and professionals.

The following table gives a planning timeline for transition to school and it has been designed to provide for maximum flexibility. Transition planning may commence prior to the dates provided.

**Table 1: Planning timeline for Transition to school**

Key Activity	By*
Options for, and evaluations of, transition program activities and events discussed between local early childhood settings, Outside School Hours Care providers and schools.	Ongoing
School enrolment commences. (Families lodge enrolment form with school).	From May
Transition planning commences - children and their families participate in their local transition program. Note: Activities and events may start from this point.	July onwards
Early childhood educator commences processes to complete Transition Learning and Development Statement, including engaging families and children	October
Early childhood educator collates final information, and obtains consent from parents/guardians to forward information to school. (This process may involve face-to-face meetings, or similar alternative, with families and the Prep teacher.) Final copy of Transition Learning and Development Statement forwarded to family, Prep Teacher and Outside School Hours Care contact (where appropriate) through agreed method (in person, mail, email, etc.).	November
Prep teacher** reviews information in Transition Learning and Development Statement, and uses to inform curriculum planning.* Where appropriate, Prep teacher meets with families and early childhood educator to discuss Transition Learning and Development Statement and identify additional transition program activities that may be required.	November onwards
Additional on-entry Prep assessments of learning commence.	March onwards

Note:\* It is recognised that in many areas transition planning may commence prior to the dates provided, particularly for children with additional needs. The timeline has been designed to provide for local flexibility.

\*\* Where the Prep teacher(s) have not been confirmed for the following year, this activity will be referred to an identified alternative who will pass the information onto the Prep teacher when confirmed.

## 6. Transition-to-school programs

Across Victoria there are many examples of where transition-to-school programs have been developed to ensure the transition to school is a positive experience for all involved. These programs include a range of activities or experiences designed to support children, families and professionals to become familiar with these changing environments and experiences; but, most importantly, to build the relationships that are crucial to a successful start to school. These activities can include:

- visits by children between early childhood settings and schools
- family information sessions
- visits by educators between early childhood settings and schools
- exchanging information about a child's learning and development
- early childhood educators, school teachers and other professionals participating in local transition networks.

An effective transition-to-school program recognises these activities as the starting points for learning and teaching.

As transition-to-school programs are further refined and Transition Learning and Development Statements implemented across Victoria, the approach will be reviewed and additional innovative and promising practice will be identified through an ongoing program of evaluation. Evaluation tools and approaches for local areas will also be developed to support continuous improvement in transition-to-school processes.

To begin to identify and support innovative practices, 30 state-funded pilots trialled a range of transition approaches involving collaborative partnerships between early childhood services, schools, children, families and other agencies. Transition activities, processes, information and resources, relationship-building strategies, professional development programs and the use of transition-to-school statements were all investigated.

A series of regional workshops across Victoria also provided an opportunity for early childhood professionals involved in early childhood education and care services and schools to provide feedback on regional transition practices and contribute to the design and development of the Transition Learning and Development Statement and supporting resources.

These workshops provided valuable insights of how children's transition to school can be successfully supported.



The planet Earth is surrounded by a layer of air called the atmosphere. We live in the bottom of this

### OUR NEW SOLAR SYSTEM



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## 7. Transition Learning and Development Statement



The Transition Learning and Development Statement supports the consistent transfer of information, irrespective of the school a child is going to. It provides an opportunity for children, their families and the professionals working with them to contribute and have their views reflected in it.

The information in a statement:

- summarises the strengths of a child's learning and development as they enter school
- identifies their individual approaches to learning and interests
- indicates how the child can be supported to continue learning.

The Transition Learning and Development Statement reflects the five learning outcomes identified for children in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework:

- children have a strong sense of identity
- children are connected with and contribute to their world
- children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- children are confident and involved learners
- children are effective communicators.

The statement also links to other initiatives that support transitions, such as the Sharing Our Journey process for children with additional needs, to provide a cohesive approach to transition for all children moving into the first year of school.

While it provides valuable information for children and their families, a child's Transition Learning and Development Statement is ultimately for their Prep teacher. It helps teachers in getting to know the children entering their classes. Most importantly, it enables teachers to support children's continuity of learning and development as they transition into school.

The approach taken to support transition to primary school in Victoria is aligned with the Department's policy on privacy and information handling.

The Transition Learning and Development Statement can only be forwarded to a school when parental/guardian consent has been provided. The statement includes a section for parents/guardians to provide their consent inside the front page.

## 8. Additional support for children and families during transition to school



Some children may need extra support during the transition period in varying degrees. These children may:

1. have found it difficult to participate in early learning experiences
2. be from families who speak languages other than English
3. have health concerns, disabilities or developmental delays
4. experience complex family arrangements, for instance; for children being supported in out-of-home care.

All of these factors can impact on the smoothness of the transition process for children, families and educators. For those children who need extra care and support, additional planning before starting school is critical.

Much of what creates positive transitions for children from specific groups, (such as children with disabilities or, from disadvantaged backgrounds) are programs and practices that can assist all children to make a successful start to school. However, those children and families needing a little extra care and support benefit from more detailed forward-planning and organisation before starting school.

The *Transition: A Positive Start to School Resource Kit* identifies a range of strategies and additional resources that can be incorporated into transition planning to support children and families who may require additional support.

## 9. Meeting local needs



There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution that will guarantee a positive start to school for all children. Each local community will have its own needs and views about what will work best for them, and it is important that these are taken into account when designing transition activities or processes.

Promoting continuity of learning and development requires a partnership between families and educators to find ways to link children’s previous experiences with the new challenges presented when a child moves into school. Although there is no ‘one size fits all’ transition program, it is clear that activities working in one location may also work in another location, provided that they are adapted to suit local communities. Reflecting on local needs and working together in partnership is a good way to identify and tailor the transition approach to suit the needs of the local community.

Successful planning for local communities requires a strong knowledge base about what really matters for children and their families during this transition period. An assessment of local area needs can inform transition planning to ensure that the range and capacity of activities offered are available and accessible to all children and families.

## 10. For more information

The best places to start for more information are your local early childhood services and schools.

Updated information will be available from the Transition: A Positive Start to School website [www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/transitionproject/default.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/transitionproject/default.htm)

Queries can be emailed to [psts@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:psts@edumail.vic.gov.au)

Online forums for children, families, early childhood educators and school teachers will be on this website so people can share their experiences.

The DEECD Welcome to School Booklet also provides a range of useful information for families of children beginning school. For more information visit [www.education.vic.gov.au/about/publications/newsinfo/welcomeschool.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/publications/newsinfo/welcomeschool.htm)

For more information about supporting a positive start to school for children enrolled in catholic schools visit [www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au) or for independent schools visit [www.ais.vic.edu.au](http://www.ais.vic.edu.au)

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