

Transition: A Positive Start to School Resource Kit

Every
child,
every
opportunity



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About this kit

Who is this kit for?

The *Transition: A Positive Start to School Resource Kit* is designed for anyone working in early childhood and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services, schools and those with an interest in the issue of transition. This includes those involved with children and families in long day care, family day care, occasional care, playgroups, OSHC, early childhood intervention services, kindergarten and schools in the government, catholic and independent education systems.

This kit may also be of interest to families; so we have included information that can be shared with them.

What is the kit for?

This kit has been created to help early childhood and OSHC services, and schools improve the quality of transition-to-school planning for children and their families. It will help early childhood professionals develop a better understanding of the positive evidence on the transition to primary school and improve the development and planning of local transition-to-school programs. This includes the implementation of Transition Learning and Development Statements.

It will be more helpful in the long run if, before embarking on improving the quality of transition planning, you take the time to become familiar with the information about effective transition programs and activities, and on implementing the Transition Learning and Development Statement.

What is in this kit?

It has three parts:

- Part 1 provides general information about promising practices and factors contributing to high-quality transition programs for all children. It gives guidance on the new Victorian approach to transition and use of the Transition Learning and Development Statement.
- Part 2 provides more specific information regarding groups of children and families that may require additional transition support, and explains ways that this support can be incorporated into transition programs.
- Part 3 brings together a range of other resources that can be used to further understand transition and program planning at a local community level.

Information in the kit is also available from

www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning

Additional resources

In addition to the information provided in this kit, a program of professional development has been designed to support both early childhood educators, OSHC carers and Prep teachers implement this new statewide approach for children transitioning to school. It can be accessed at www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning

This kit complements and supports *Sharing Our Journey* resources for children who receive a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service (KISS) package. The Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services for children with severe disabilities, which incorporates the Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Program – Non-Government Centre Support, offers supplementary assistance to children's services. A KISS package refers to the individual package of support designed for a child.

For families of children with disabilities or developmental delays, additional resources to support the transition to school are also available through the *Sharing Our Journey* initiative (discussed further in section 7).



1. Introduction



Starting school is a major life transition for children and their families. It is a time of change that can be both challenging and exciting. There is a growing body of research that widely acknowledges the importance of the transition to school.¹ We know that starting school is a significant moment for children and their families and, while a majority of children make this transition successfully, it is sometimes associated with anxiety, uncertainty and confusion.²

The Transition: A Positive Start to School initiative aims to improve experiences of starting school by enhancing the development and delivery of transition programs. It also aims to improve the sharing of information between children, families, early childhood educators, OSHC carers and Prep teachers through a Transition Learning and Development Statement.

What is new about transition to school in Victoria?

The Transition: A Positive Start to School initiative aims to build on the success of existing transition programs supporting children and families starting school. Improvements in the quality of transition to school experiences for all children will be supported through the introduction of:

- this Resource Kit
- a Transition Learning and Development Statement that summarises a child's family background, and describes their abilities, achievements and interests
- professional development resources for early childhood educators, OSHC carers and Prep teachers to improve transition processes and programs.

Together, these support the introduction of a new approach to transition to school in Victoria.

¹ S Peters, 'Teachers' perspectives of transition', in H Fabian & AW Dunlop (eds), *Transition in the early years: Debating continuity and progression for young children in early education*, Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 87–97;

² 'I didn't expect that I would get tons of friends... more each day', *Early Years*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2003, pp. 45–53.

³ K Margetts, 'Children bring more to school than their backpacks: Starting school down under', *Journal of European Early Childhood Education Research Monograph*, vol. 1, 2003, pp.5–14.

Policy context

The initiative has been developed in the context of major changes in Victoria's approach to early childhood, as outlined in the *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*. This includes the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, new Children Services Regulations 2009 and Council of Australian Government (COAG) National Quality Reforms.

Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development

In 2008, the Victorian Government introduced the *Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development*, which sets the scene for Victoria's reforms for the early years over the next five years. Its vision is 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 was established to respond directly to the *Blueprint* goal that 'by the time Victorian children start school they will be ready to learn at school and schools will be ready for them'.

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (the Victorian Framework) is designed to assist families and early childhood professionals to guide children's learning and development in the first eight years of life. It describes the key knowledge and skills that children need to acquire during these years and provides guidance for parents and others in how to encourage their development.

The Victorian Framework builds continuity between a child's learning and development in early childhood and the first years of schooling. It links the learning outcomes from the national Early Years Learning Framework for children aged birth to five with the first stages of the Victorian school curriculum – the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) for children aged five to eight.

Five broad outcomes for children are identified in the Victorian 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.

Transitions in early childhood form a critical component of the Victorian Framework.

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.

New regulations for Children's Services

On 25 May 2009 the amended *Children's Services Act 1996* (Act) and the new Children's Services Regulations 2009 (Regulations) commenced. The Act and Regulations prescribe a number of changes, including requirements for teaching staff members, staff training, child/staff ratios and minimum ages of staff. Transitional provisions relating to changes will enable licensed children's services time to comply with the new requirements.

Key changes to the regulations are:

- regulating OSHC and family day care for the first time to ensure a minimum standard of quality care
- improving the ratio of staff to children under age three from 1:5 to 1:4 in standard children's services; and improving the ratio of diploma qualified staff to children from 1:15 to 1:12
- qualified teachers to be employed at all standard services, including long day care
- increasing the qualifications for all staff and carers to a minimum Certificate III level
- ensuring all staff and carers have current first-aid training (currently, the regulations required one staff member on duty to have first-aid training).

Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Quality Reforms

The proposed COAG National Quality Reforms will affect all long day care, family day care, kindergarten, preschool and OSHC services. A key component of these reforms will be the introduction of the national Early Years Learning Framework. This reform agenda includes:

- a new quality standard in seven areas: educational program and practice; children's wellbeing, health and safety; physical environment; staffing arrangements, including child-to-staff ratios and qualification levels; relationships, collaborative partnerships with families and communities; leadership and service quality
- enhanced regulatory arrangements, which propose a new national system that eliminates duplication with states responsible for regulation and quality
- a quality rating system with five levels: unsatisfactory, meeting operating level requirements, meets national quality standard, high quality and excellent.

2. About transition



Transitions occur at many different times throughout a child's life. Transition usually begins when children are very young, for example when a child moves from the care of a parent to a grandparent, or moves into child care, then as they move between child care services. As children get older they may attend kindergarten, and then go on to school. Children's transitions impact not only on them, but also on their families and their educators.

Change is a key feature throughout each of these transition periods. It is important to ensure that these transitions are successful by building on the commonality between environments and supporting learning and development in ways that connect with a child and their family. Creating this continuity involves building on children's prior and current experiences to help them to feel secure, confident and connected to people, places, events, routines and understandings.

To some, transition can mark a period of time between experiences; while to others it is an active process or set of activities. In essence, transition is something that is experienced, rather than something that happens to a child and their family, and it is a deep-rooted part of natural learning and development.

Transition to school should be understood as a process, not a point in time. It is an individual experience for everyone involved. While there are common elements to most children's transition, there are important considerations that need to be thought about and planned to ensure that each child has a successful start to school.

What is transition to school?

Starting school is a major life transition for children and their families. It is a period of change that can be both challenging and exciting. Starting school is a process whereby children and families adjust to new roles, identities and expectations, new interactions and new relationships.³ It is not a point-in-time event, but rather an experience that starts well before, and extends far beyond, the first day of school.

Many children will start school after having attended kindergarten; others will have attended child care; while a proportion may not have attended any formal prior-to-school service. However, all will have developed a range of skills and abilities that form the basis of positive school experiences. Effective transition-to-school approaches recognise these skills and abilities as the starting points for learning and teaching.

All children are different – even those of similar ages demonstrate many differences. Effective transition-to-school programs recognise and respect these differences.

When children start school, they experience environments that can be quite different from home, child care or kindergarten. Not only can the physical environment be different, but the social nature of school and academic expectations can differ. Children may participate in larger groups, with smaller numbers of adults. The ‘rules’ about how they interact with these adults may also change.⁴ The approach to learning and teaching may also be different between early childhood services and schools. This is most noticeable when comparing the play-based programs of early childhood services with more formal school programs and curricula.⁵

To help bridge the gap, and support children to manage this change well, both early childhood services and schools offer transition-to-school programs. There are many examples of transition-to-school programs across Victoria that have been developed to ensure the transition to school is a positive experience for all involved.

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)

While the main focus of transition to school is supporting children as they move into school, it is also important to remember that there are services outside school hours into which children will also be transitioning. Many children will spend a significant amount of time in these services during the transition period, and will continue to engage with these services throughout a child’s time at school. Therefore, it is important that transition processes and programs incorporate these services.

OSHC programs are offered by many schools for children outside school hours, including before and after school, during the holidays and on student-free days. OSHC programs are usually located close to primary schools, but may also be offered in other locations, such as community centres, halls, neighbourhood houses or recreation centres.

³ S Dockett & B Perry, *Starting School – A Handbook for Early Childhood Educators*, Pademelon Press, NSW, 2007. ⁴ ...

⁵ K Margetts, ‘Transition to school – Complexity and diversity’, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, vol.10, no.2, 2002, pp.103–14.

What is a transition-to-school program?

Across Victoria, transition-to-school programs have been developed to help make starting school a positive experience for all involved. These programs include a range of activities or experiences designed to support children, families and early childhood professionals to become familiar with these changing environments and experiences.⁶ Although there is no 'one-size-fits-all' transition program, it is clear that activities that have worked in one location may also work in another location, provided they are adapted to suit local conditions. Reflecting on local needs and working together in partnership is a good way to identify and tailor promising practices to suit community needs.

Why is a positive transition to school important?

While most children make effective transitions, we know that some children and their families may experience anxiety, fear and confusion.

Research suggests that experiences during the transition-to-school time can have longer-term impacts on children's resilience (that is, their ability to cope with change) and an image of themselves as a learner.⁷ A successful start to school is linked to future positive school outcomes, both academically and socially.⁸ We also know that when difficulties are experienced during the transition to school they can persist throughout school life.⁹

Most significantly, we know that ensuring effective and positive transitions can also help to support the continuity of a child's learning and development. Placing greater emphasis on the continuity of learning recognises that building on children's prior and current experiences helps them to feel secure, confident and connected to people, places, events, routines and understandings.

Different places and spaces have their own purposes, expectations and ways of doing things. Transitions between early childhood settings can have a range of impacts, which can play a critical role in either promoting or disrupting continuity in a child's learning and development. Promoting continuity of learning and development requires a partnership approach between families and educators to find ways to link children's previous experiences with the new challenges presented when a child moves into school.

Successful transitions rely on children, families and educators developing positive, supportive relationships. Within these relationships, children should feel that school is a worthwhile place to be, where people care about them and where they are likely to succeed.¹⁰ Families should feel valued and respected as well as included in school life. Educators should also feel valued and respected but also supported by their colleagues, families and communities.

⁶ RC Pianta, & ME Kraft-Sayre, *Successful Kindergarten Transition*, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co, Baltimore, 2003

⁷ PA Hadley, KA Wilcox & ML Rice, 'Talking at school: Teacher expectations in preschool and kindergarten', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, vol. 9, 1994, pp. 111–29; Ramey, cited in D Viadero, 'Make or break', *Education Week*, vol. 18, no.34, 1999, pp. 158–72, New York: Teachers College.

⁸ D Entwisle, KL Alexander & LS Olson, 'Early Schooling: The Handicap of Being Poor and Male', *Sociology of Education*, vol. 80, no. 2, 2007, pp.114–38; D Smart, A Sanson, J Baxter, B Edwards & A Hayes, *Home-to-school Transitions for Financially Disadvantaged Children: Final Report*, The Smith Family, Sydney, 2009.

⁹ SH Birch & GW Ladd, 'The teacher-child relationship and children's early school adjustment', *Journal of School Psychology*, vol. 35, 1997, pp. 61–79.

¹⁰ Dockett, & Perry, *Our Family is Starting School – A Handbook for Parents and Carers*, Pademelon Press, NSW, 2006.

While acknowledging the importance of a positive start to school, it is also important to note that a less-than-positive start to school does not mean those children, or their families and educators, will have a negative school experience overall. However, as the evidence highlights, a less-than-positive start to school can impact on the longer-term experiences and achievements of a child and their family.

Providing a 'seamless' transition should not be seen as the primary aim of transition programs, because in reality the change for children is significant. Rather, the focus should be on facilitating and supporting children's adjustment to the inevitable changes they will experience, recognising and building off what they have experienced before arriving at school.¹¹

Who is involved in transition to primary school?

Transition-to-school programs most commonly involve three groups of participants: children, families and educators.¹²

Children are often excited, and a bit 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 in which children can be, and should be, involved in planning transition-to-school programs – it's important to listen to their perspectives.

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 be supported to plan appropriate learning and teaching programs.

Transition to school and readiness

One notable feature of any group of children starting school is their diversity. Not only will children have diverse social and cultural backgrounds, diverse abilities and interests, but they will also be quite different in terms of development and learning. When children have the support and encouragement of people they know and trust – their families and educators – they have the potential to achieve a great deal at school.

¹¹ ...

¹² S Dockett & B Perry, 2007.



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.¹³

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, much learning will occur.

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 positive way to help achieve this.

Any 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.

Ready schools

Positive approaches to transition to school acknowledges how important it is for schools and communities to be ready to respond positively to all children and families; provide a supportive as well as a challenging environment; and hold high, yet realistic, expectations for all children.¹⁴

As discussed, readiness must be viewed as a multidimensional concept, and the importance of a ‘ready school’ cannot be underestimated. The research¹⁵ highlights some common characteristics of ready schools, including:

- having identified staff member(s) responsible for developing, evaluating and modifying a range of transition-to-school processes and programs
- promoting professional development for educators and teachers on how to build relationships with families during their children’s transition to school that acknowledge there can be a diversity of views on transition
- planning for each child’s transition to school in the year before it happens
- inviting all those involved to participate in ways that are relevant and appropriate to their needs.

In short, ‘ready schools’ provide environments that:

- are flexible and adaptable
- are responsive to the children attending

¹³ S Ramey & C Ramey, ‘The transition to school for “at-risk” children’, in RC. Pianta & MJ Cox (eds), *The Transition to Kindergarten*, pp. 217–51, Paul. H. Brooks Publishing Co, Baltimore, 1999.

¹⁴ Dockett, & Perry, ‘Readiness for School: A Relational Construct’, *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, vol 34, no.1, 2009, pp. 20–6.

¹⁵ National Education Goals Panel, The Education National Goals Report. Washington, DC, 1991, *Getting a Good Start in School*, 1997a; *School Readiness: Helping Communities Get Children Ready for School and Schools Ready for Children: Child Trends*, 1997b; *Ready Schools*, 1998.

- facilitate family engagement
- are guided by strong leadership
- connect positively with local early childhood settings and the broader community.

Many children will be eager to experience 'school' activities, such as reading, writing, and working with numbers and mathematics ideas. They may have already experienced these at home and at early childhood settings.

Second year of funded four-year-old kindergarten

Most children start school by the age of five. It is important that children start school when they are ready to learn in a more formal environment. Therefore, it is important for families to consider when is the best time for their child to start school, as this will determine the best time to attend kindergarten.

However, a small number of children may attend a second year of kindergarten if their early childhood educator assesses them as having delays in at least two areas of development and that he or she will benefit from a second year of kindergarten. The areas assessed include self-care, the ability to speak and/or understand language, cognitive (intellectual) development, social development, and emotional development. Other factors may also be considered.

At the time of enrolment, or at the start of the year, early childhood service providers are required to provide families with relevant information about the criteria for eligibility to attend a second year of funded four-year-old kindergarten. This will enable families, in consultation with the early childhood educator, to make informed decisions about the best age to start kindergarten and school for each child.

If continued attendance in the kindergarten program is sought for a child, the 'Declaration of eligibility for a second year of funded kindergarten' form is completed by the early childhood teacher in consultation with the child's parent/legal guardian. Families will be required to keep a copy of the declaration as they may be requested to present the declaration when re-enrolling for the following year.

In some cases, the child will turn six years of age (compulsory school age) while attending the second year of funded kindergarten. If so, the child must be exempted from attending school by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The parents/guardians are responsible for seeking this exemption.

Parents/guardians should fill in the DEECD *Exemption from school due to attendance in kindergarten program* form and attach a copy of the completed Declaration of Eligibility for a second year of funded kindergarten form. The declaration form will be provided to the parent/guardian by the early childhood service teacher.

For more information on children of school age attending a kindergarten program and the school exemption process can be found at

www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/preschool-schoolage.htm

3. Key components of quality transition

The key components to consider when designing and supporting effective transitions are the principles underpinning a positive start to school; ways to meaningfully involve children, families and educators in the transition process; and the importance of community engagement.

Research highlights that when families, schools and communities work together in positive and collaborative ways, a child's capacity to achieve their learning potential is significantly enhanced – and so are their general health, wellbeing, positive outlook and sense of purpose in life'.¹⁶ When planning transition-to-school programs it is important to consider the significance of:

- pre-existing relationships when fostering new relationships
- local knowledge about the needs of local children and their families (e.g. common languages spoken other than English)
- ensuring, rather than assuming, that all the relevant information is provided to families and understood by them
- the need to be flexible to meet the individual needs of children and families
- allowing programs to evolve in line with the needs of families, individual children and school staff, as well as in terms of logistics, dates, etc.
- being mindful of making the program a part of, rather than additional to, the things already being done.

Principles of learning and development

The Victorian Framework identifies six practice principles for learning and development. They reflect Victoria's commitment to develop a holistic approach to children's health, learning and development from birth to age eight.

These principles form the foundations of professional practice for early childhood professionals working with children from birth to eight years in Victoria. They are based on the understanding that when professionals establish respectful and caring relationships with children and families they are able to work together to construct effective health, learning and development experiences relevant to children in their local contexts. These experiences gradually expand children's knowledge and understanding of the world as well as promoting their health and wellbeing.

¹⁶ Family-School and Community Partnership Bureau, see www.familyschool.org.au/

The six principles reflect three major areas of the early childhood professional's work:

- Collaboration:
 - family centred
 - partnerships
 - equity and diversity
- High-quality teaching and learning:
 - responsive engagement
 - a holistic approach
- Continuous professional improvement:
 - reflective practice.

For information about the Victorian Framework practice principles, visit www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/earlyyears

Involving children

Involving and listening to young children is a central part of understanding what they are feeling and what it is they need from their early childhood experience. If young children feel their views are respected and valued by adults this will have a positive effect on their self-confidence. This can really help those children who find it hard to share their opinions, or who have had limited experience of adults who listen to them.

We need to involve and listen to children because:

- it acknowledges their right to be listened to and for their views and experiences to be taken seriously
- it can make a difference to our understanding of children's priorities, interests and concerns
- it can make a difference to our understanding of how children feel about themselves
- listening is a vital part of establishing respectful relationships with the children we work with and is central to the learning process
- involving children in transition planning can trigger early childhood educators and Prep teachers to think about how routines and activities can be improved.

It is important to value children's views equally, as they can be very clear about what is important to them. They may have thought about things that adults have not. It is useful if adults do not assume they know everything a child is thinking about, as this shows children we respect them for who they are and what they believe.

Children's perspectives on transition to school

Research¹⁷ has highlighted common issues children raise:

- they can find it hard to learn and follow school rules
- they find that making and keeping friends can ease their transition to school



¹⁷ Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood 2009, Transition: A Positive Start to School Literature Review, The University of Melbourne, available from www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitiontoschool/default.htm

- their sense of wellbeing and their positive engagement in learning depends on positive relationships with their educators
- they find it hard to deal with the longer days and the new responsibility for their own care associated with starting school
- they often prefer free-play programs to more formal learning and associate more formal learning with being at school
- they realise that going to school requires a morning routine.

To encourage the sharing of information between families, early childhood services and schools, an inner-Melbourne pilot developed a concise ‘transition package’ about the child that captured:

- *the perspectives of the child by giving them a ‘voice’, through recording their words along with their drawings*
- *a description of the child’s strengths and learning at the end of the final year of kindergarten written by the early childhood educator*
- *valuable knowledge and information from the family about their child.*

How can children be involved?

There is a range of ways to listen to young children and more than one approach can be used at the same time.¹⁸ Choosing the approach or approaches to use will depend on the adult’s skills, the child, and the time, space and resources available. It is important to remember that listening in imaginative ways can support children as they adjust to change, such as starting school. Suggested approaches include:

- asking children to draw or paint what they think school might be like
- asking children to add their explanations to these paintings or drawings and then discussing what has been included and why
- reading stories about starting school and discussing the various elements and expectations raised in these
- using modelling materials (dough, clay, box construction, sand, etc.) to create what children expect their school to be like
- providing a range of materials in play areas to stimulate discussion about school
- promoting role plays or scenarios that relate to school.

With all of these approaches, allowing time for children to talk about school is really important. They may want to talk about their experiences of transition programs or visits; the things their older siblings tell them; their expectations of what school will be like; and how school will be the same or different from their current early childhood service. Making time for children to think about what information they want to share with their Prep teacher at school and how they prefer to do this is also important.

Involving families

What is a family?

In this kit, the term ‘family’ incorporates the widest definition of family, recognising the broad range of family structures and members that exist in Victorian society. It is important to respect that there may be different interpretations of what a family is. Children may also perceive their family in many ways, even to the point of including much-loved pets or toys.

Children may have a range of carers, from parents, siblings, grandparents, to extended family members and family friends who look after them and support their learning and

¹⁸ National Children’s Bureau (UK), *Listening and a way of life leaflet series*, at www.partner.ncb.org.uk/Page.asp?originx6668cx_211360867683c3p6773783809



development. For children in out of home care, their legal guardian may still be their parent, but their sense of belonging to a ‘family’ may revolve around who cares for and supports them on a day-to-day basis, for example foster families.

Why do families need to be involved?

Families know their children very well. Sharing some of the knowledge they have about their child with early childhood services and schools can help the transition to school.

Families who actively support their children during transition to school, and who build positive relationships with staff, are likely to continue their positive engagement with school. This, in turn, supports children’s longer-term positive engagement with school.

The research¹⁹ consistently demonstrates that families have a major influence on all aspects of learning and a wide range of educational outcomes. When families and schools work together to support their child’s learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.²⁰

In the northern suburbs of Melbourne early childhood services have been working with families of children making the transition to school to complete statements. A greater feeling of empowerment among families in the transition process has been achieved through providing the opportunity for families to work with their child’s early childhood educator to share information about their child with their new school.

School staff were trained to deliver a parenting program, AusParenting in Schools Transition to Primary School Parent Program, in a statewide pilot. The program consisted of four sessions, designed to help parents with their child’s learning and development and practical issues encountered during their child’s transition. The school participants were provided with a program manual and resources required to deliver the program to parents.

Family perspectives on transition to school

Research²¹ into families’ experiences of, and perspectives on, transitions to school highlights that:

- families have diverse views about what matters when young children make the transition to school
- many families are concerned about how their child will adjust to school, asking, ‘Can my child fit in, be respected, be happy and safe?’
- families living in rural and remote areas of Australia share the concerns of other parents, but many have additional concerns
- families of children with disabilities or developmental delays share the concerns of other parents, but may have additional concerns
- many families want contact with the school prior to their child’s attendance and to understand how their child’s school works
- some families, but not all, want their children to receive formal academic instruction in their first year of school
- families’ level of confidence in managing the transition to school affects their child’s subsequent engagement with school.

Families’ own experiences of school may influence the messages and levels of encouragement and support that they provide children. If a parent, for example, had a negative school experience, they may find it difficult to provide support and

¹⁹ Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood.

²⁰ A Henderson & K Mapp , *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*, National Centre of Family & Community Connections with Schools: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, TX, 2002.

²¹ Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood.

encouragement to their children about going to school. Similarly, it may be many years since a family member has stepped into a Prep class when their first child starts school. This may lead to misconceptions prior to starting school.

It is important for families to have an accurate view of how early childhood learning and development is supported in schools today, as many things will have changed for the better since adults attended school. Families with older children may be more comfortable about the transition process and can provide a good support network to other families experiencing it for the first time.

Providing opportunities for families to meet and get to know each other informally, particularly with families of older children who have already experienced the transition to school, is a good way to support 'first-time' families. For example, schools and early childhood services might like to organise picnics, BBQs, family fun days, children's cultural festivals or library events.

Involving educators and teachers

Families are children's first and most enduring educators; however, early childhood educators can provide professional insight into a child's learning and development.

They observe children's learning and development, and actively supported each child to develop skills, knowledge and learning dispositions. This means they have specialised knowledge and insights about how a child's learning and development has progressed prior to starting school. Importantly, they also understand what sorts of teaching strategies work best for individual children. This information is important to share with those who will help children settle into school, and who are responsible for building on the learning and development that has occurred before children start school.

Educators' perspectives on children's transition to school

There is a diverse range of perspectives on children's transition to school among early childhood educators, school teachers and OSHC carers.

The research²² indicates some common perspectives from these educators:

- many children have no difficulty making the transition to school
- socio-emotional and interpersonal development assist a child's transition to school
- family participation assists a child's transition to school
- children who have attended an early childhood service make the transition to school more easily than those who haven't
- children who require additional support (such as those with disabilities and delays), or those that face cultural or linguistic barriers, can face additional challenges in their transition to school that may require additional planning.

Additionally:

- some school teachers have concerns about whether children have appropriate academic skills prior to entering school
- the ways in which early childhood educators support young children's transition to school varies.

One pilot helped early childhood educators and school staff to better understand transition issues through professional development forums where keynote speakers highlighted the importance of early learning and development and explained local transition programs and approaches. These collaborative forums generated lively cross-sector discussions about supporting children and families in their transition to school.

²² ...

In many of the transition pilots, early childhood educators and Prep teachers found that getting to know more about the each other's practice and learning environments was invaluable. This information was often gained through reciprocal visits across a period of time, so that each professional developed a better insight into individual children's strengths, as well as a deeper appreciation and knowledge of the pedagogical differences and similarities between those used in early childhood services and schools.

Facilitating involvement through transition networks

A transition network is a professional group of people with an interest in improving transition experiences and outcomes for children and their families in a certain geographical area. Transition networks exist in many places across Victoria, informal or formal, with or without designated resources. Those who participate in transition-to-school networks are usually from early childhood services (such as child care centres, long day care, family day care or kindergartens), early childhood intervention services, maternal and child health services, private practitioners, municipal officers with a focus on early childhood, OSHC carers, and school staff.

Networks foster the development of mutual understandings about the needs of local children and families. They cultivate a richer understanding of the contribution everyone involved in educating and supporting children and families can make to children's long-term outcomes. In developing common approaches to transition, networks support early childhood educators, Prep teachers and other professionals to share ideas, issues and promising practices.

Why are networks important?

Networks have a range of important functions, and provide opportunities for:

- strengthening community partnerships at both a formal and informal level
- deepening knowledge about practice
- practical support and problem-solving
- developing local agreements and resources, thereby reducing workloads on individual services
- communicating about individual child and family needs
- developing leadership skills and fostering change champions
- critical reflection and review of practice and service delivery.

How do transition networks function?

There is no one formula for successful transition networks, but positively maintaining regular communication, often through face-to-face meetings about key issues, is critical. An evaluation of the transitions practices in Victoria²³ has highlighted how these networks can function successfully.

When establishing or reviewing a network, it is useful to:

- identify a key person who has organisational or leadership responsibilities in relation to developing, maintaining and enhancing transition networks
- uncover assumed understandings and beliefs between early childhood professionals and school staff about programs in early childhood services and in schools; as well as identify perceptions about transition to school in order to air any difference in views, and develop common understandings
- allocate time to develop partnerships and build trust – regular meetings and contact with educators from all services facilitate the establishment of common ideals about roles in transition
- establish common approaches, philosophies, processes and programs for transition planning based on locally identified and understood needs in the community
- plan a professional development calendar that includes all educators and other professionals
- develop a process where families are encouraged to enrol their child into their chosen school during particular periods to assist in school planning.

Transition networks are an important way of establishing and enhancing communication, providing opportunities to identify positive and constructive solutions to any issues, as well as developing new approaches to working together.

An effective transition will improve children's experience of starting school by:

- empowering families to work in partnership with professionals and provide them with information about their child's learning and development
- enhancing the development and delivery of transition programs
- improving collaboration between early childhood services, schools and other services (such as early intervention and OSHC) to support the continuity of learning and development for a child
- developing a more consistent approach to the sharing of information between the early childhood and school sectors.



²³ ...

4. Supporting effective transitions in Victoria

Outline of the Victorian transition-to-school approach

The approach outlined in table 4.1 *Outline of the Victorian Transition Approach*, provides guidance for families, early childhood services, OSHC providers and schools on transition planning, through which local arrangements can be further developed. It is important to ensure that these arrangements support:

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

Where a child or family is not engaged with an early childhood service in the year prior to school, this approach will need to be adapted. Further information on this is provided in Part 2: Providing additional support. For children in receipt of a Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service (KISS) package, reference should also be made to the *Sharing Our Journey* resources (see section 7).



Table 4.1 gives a planning timeline for transition to school and it has been designed to provide for maximum flexibility. It is recognised that transition activities may commence prior to the dates provided.

Table 4.1: Outline of the Victorian Transition Approach

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.

Dockett and Perry have developed some useful guidelines to support the design and development of locally driven transition-to-school process and programs.²⁴ They suggest that successful programs:

1. establish positive relationships between children, families and educators
2. facilitate each child's development as a capable learner
3. differentiate between 'orientation to school' and 'transition-to-school' programs

4. draw upon dedicated funding and resources
5. involve a range of stakeholders
6. are well planned and effectively evaluated
7. are flexible and responsive
8. are based on mutual trust and respect
9. rely on reciprocal communication among participants
10. take into account contextual aspects of community, and of individual families and children within that community.

These guidelines may help early childhood services, OSHC providers and schools when planning transition programs.

Identified promising practices for transition planning in Victoria

In many communities across Victoria there is already much good work being undertaken to ensure that starting school is a positive experience for all involved.

Although there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach, it is clear that approaches which have worked in one location may also work in another provided they are adapted to suit local conditions. Establishing a transition network and working together in local partnerships is a good way to tailor promising practices to suit local needs.

Promising practices are defined as strategies, programs, approaches or techniques designed to support positive transitions for children, families and educators that are typically based on educator-focused wisdom and research but are often not yet empirically 'validated' through systematic research and evaluation:

The identification of promising practices (as distinct from 'best' or 'evidence-based' practices) is part of a growing trend in social work, community development, family studies and early childhood development.²⁵

To inform government policy in this area, and expand the local evidence base on what works in supporting children's transition to school, 30 pilots were funded through the Transition: A Positive Start to School initiative. The pilots, which ran from October 2008 to May 2009, trialled or extended a range of transition approaches in a diverse range of Victorian communities. They provided valuable insights of how children's transition to school can be successfully supported. An evaluation of the pilot findings²⁶ has highlighted the following promising practices reported in table 4.2.

These promising practices emerged from a small-scale evaluation of the pilots. As such, they should be seen as 'good ideas' rather than 'proven' practices that may be included in transition-to-school programs if considered to 'fit' local community conditions. A description of each practice is provided, along with information about how the practices might be usefully combined and implemented in different services.

One pilot developed and distributed a comprehensive locally relevant Transition Resource Kit to promote sound transition program practice among early childhood educators. The kit comprised information about the nature of transition, how to involve families, ways to enhance transition programs, and an extensive list of transition ideas and activities.

²⁴ Dockett & Perry 2001.

²⁵ M Gray & C McDonald, 'Pursuing good practice? The limits of evidence-based practice', *Journal of Social Work*, vol. 6, no.1, 2006, pp. 7–20.

²⁶ Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood.

Table 4.2: Summary of commonly used promising transition-to-school practice

Practice idea	How it works	Why it works
Reciprocal visits – for children	Children attending early childhood services visit the primary school before school starts (e.g. in Term 4). Prep students may also go back to visit early childhood services. Visits may occur on multiple occasions and involve different types of activities.	Children who are familiar with the school environment, expectations, rules, people, etc. prior to commencing school are less likely to be anxious and will adjust more quickly to it. Prep students may gain a sense of self-confidence from attending early childhood services.
Reciprocal visits – for educators	Early childhood educators and Prep teachers visit each other’s environment to participate in meetings, joint teaching, transition planning, etc.	Ongoing communication between educators improves professional relationships and contributes to curriculum/pedagogical refinements, better supporting continuity of learning and transition. Teachers also get to know each child before they start school.
Transition statements and meetings	Written information about a child’s learning and development is jointly prepared by early childhood educators, families and the child and is passed on to the Prep teacher.	Provides an opportunity for educators, families and children to talk and engage in meaningful conversations about transition needs/expectations. Helps Prep teachers plan appropriate support incorporating the child’s and families’ perspectives.
Joint professional development	Training/information sessions or more formalised professional development between early childhood services and schools.	Helps to build trust, understanding and mutual respect between early childhood services and schools, as well as an opportunity to learn more about successful transition and education practices.
Local transition networks	A diverse collection of individuals and agencies who share a common interest in improving school transition and outcomes for children and families generally.	Builds the capacity of local communities to design and deliver locally responsive transition-to-school programs. Enhances linkages between sectors and agencies and promotes service collaboration for the benefit of children and families.

Practice idea	How it works	Why it works
Buddy programs	The use of peer-to-peer support strategies for children (and sometimes families) to assist transition to school.	Children worry about losing their friendship groups when the move to school. Having a buddy may improve adjustment to school and educational engagement. Views were mixed as to whether the ‘buddy’ should be similar in age (e.g. Prep/grade 1) or older (e.g. grade 5/6 student).
Family involvement	Broad-based, tailored strategies designed to encourage families to become more actively involved in the early childhood services and/or school community (e.g. information sessions, open days, reading programs, social events, etc.).	Increased involvement of families in services is linked to longer-term improvements in the social, emotional, physical and academic development of children.
Learning programs responsive to children	Often referred to as ‘play-based learning’, it is widely used in early childhood services and increasingly in schools.	Enhances continuity of learning experience between early childhood services and schools, which helps to smooth the transition for children.
Social story-boards	Social story-boards are documents that visually depict the nature and processes involved in transitioning to school in a way that is meaningful to the individual (e.g. photos of their Prep teacher, school environment, how to get ready in the morning, etc.).	Helps to prepare children for school and relieves their anxiety. Often used for children with autistic spectrum disorders, or children who have not been to kindergarten, etc. who may be more likely to experience difficulties with the change from home to school environment.
Community-level transition timetable	An integrated plan describing common sequences of activities (often organised by school terms) designed to support transition, including common orientation weeks, community events, etc.	Promotes awareness in the community of the importance of early learning and development, and school transition. Assists local agencies to coordinate and align services for the benefit of children and families.



Meeting local needs

Throughout Victoria, no two communities are ever exactly the same. Communities are formed for a variety of reasons, but in most cases it is because people have something in common. It may be where they live, the language they speak, or their cultural background or geography that distinguishes them from other communities.

Each 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. Some families may not feel connected to any one particular community. This may also be true for those families who move from one location to another. Processes and programs developed to meet local needs may need to be different for these families.

Planning for local communities must be based on a strong knowledge base about what really matters for children and their families during the transition period, including their beliefs and values. An assessment of local area needs can inform transition planning to ensure that the range and capacity of activities offered are appropriate and accessible for all children and families.

Ultimately, any assessment of need should focus on the needs of the children and families making the transition to school. There are many resources available to develop a better understanding of local areas. Resources such as Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) profiles of local government areas can help early childhood services and schools understand how services can be changed to improve the experiences for children.

One community established a shared 'story-time' at a local school where books were read aloud by the Prep teacher. This 'story-time' was open to any child who would be starting school the following year and current Prep children, one day a week from Term 3. This gave children time to familiarise themselves with the school environment and helped them socialise with peers.

Community engagement and development

Communities play a valuable role in transition to school because they provide support to families who, in turn, support children. Engaging communities in the importance of transition to school can:

- facilitate children and families locating and accessing services and support in a timely way
- strengthen and highlight the profile of children's issues in a local context
- assist the communication of key messages across all sections of the community

Access to early years services in rural areas was identified as a challenge in one pilot, particularly when only a small number of families in one area required them. The solution found to service and support these families, and overcome geographical distance, was to use a mobile kindergarten to give families a resource package as a tool to discuss their child's learning and development with the early childhood educator and school.

- assist the provision of resources to support transition activities that address the needs of children and their families
- encourage families from a range of backgrounds to feel welcome and able to participate in their children's learning and development.

How to involve communities

Community engagement relies on practices that encourage openness, welcome new ideas and encourage fresh perspectives. The process of developing and maintaining an inclusive and collaborative approach to transition to school should be regarded as an ongoing one. The profile of families, schools and the community changes from year to year, as do the needs within each community. Therefore, it is important to continually understand and reflect on the demographics of each community over time.

The following strategies may be useful to support transition-to-school planning, and in building supportive community relationships and effective collaborations between early childhood services, families, schools and communities:

- identify a shared vision to work towards
- build an atmosphere of working together to achieve the vision
- identify leaders or change champions who can support and develop cohesion within the community
- recognise, use and share the skills, input, knowledge and expertise of all participating community members
- create a locally relevant and evidence-based shared action plan that identifies how community members will work towards achieving their vision
- find ways to communicate the key messages and action plan to the broad community so that everyone knows what is happening and how to get involved
- recognise the special effort of individuals who make a positive contribution to the community's transition-to-school experiences
- celebrate achievements together.

Practical ways to involve communities include:

- being welcoming and inclusive to all, celebrating diversity and developing culturally appropriate practices
- promoting successful transition experiences
- offering support with venues for network meetings, family support groups, etc.
- having family fun days that bring the community together where informal links can be encouraged and built upon

A regional local government area created a series of birthday postcards for every child in the municipality (for their first to eighth birthdays). The postcards depict cheerful images and have messages for children and families on the back that support children's health, learning and development and transition to school.

For example:

Being 5 is fantastic fun. There are so many things I am learning to do. Take turns. Follow instructions. Play with friends. Dance. Sing. Draw. Count. Mum and Dad can talk to your school and kinder teacher about moving from kinder to prep. If you are in prep the school nurse will visit school to test your eyes and ears and talk to you.



- listening to children and families about what aspects of the community can be improved to support children’s learning and development
- recognising and involving existing children’s champions within a community.

Planning transition programs

Building off work undertaken by Dockett and Perry²⁷ on the cycle of transition planning, it is recommended that the following points are considered when planning a local transition program:

- establish a local network, or revise an existing local one
- identify a key person with responsibility for leading transition planning within each early childhood service and school
- set up a communication system within the network (this might include regular meetings, emails, etc.)
- assess local needs for transition to school
- agree goals for the transition program
- generate program ideas by working out what activities will meet local needs of children, families and early childhood professionals
- identify timelines
- pinpoint local issues and jointly find solutions
- adapt timelines where necessary
- implement the program
- monitor program activities and timelines and engagement of children, families and early childhood educators
- evaluate and revise the program.

Using playgroup sessions at a school in the year before school helped develop children’s understanding of stories and expanded their play skills. These sessions supported positive family relationships and helped children get used to new routines. The children were introduced to stories with a range of multicultural themes appropriate to the group, which blended Aboriginal Dreamtime stories and characters with those from European culture. The program enabled early childhood educators to identify children who might benefit from additional support at school at an early stage.

²⁷ Dockett & Perry 2006.

One transition network in regional Victoria developed a yearly planning timetable, which plotted:

- network meeting dates and topics
- school transition dates (for example, open days)
- network survey dates (particular to their jointly agreed program)
- visits by Prep teachers to early childhood settings
- school buddy visits to early childhood settings
- joint early childhood educator and Prep teacher professional development opportunities.

Evaluating transition programs

Early childhood educators, OSHC carers and Prep teachers in networks should develop strategies to engage in ongoing reflection, review and improvement of their transition programs. Even in the early stages of designing a transition program, it is a great idea to think about how the program might be evaluated. Some possible ideas are outlined in table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Evaluation ideas

Design questions	Suggestions
What is the main question?	A 'how?', 'who?', 'what?', 'where?' or 'when?' type question
What is the purpose of the evaluation?	This will link to the main question, but may be influenced by local needs and audiences
Who is the evaluation for?	Is it for the transition network, or an individual service, or funding body?
Who could be involved?	For example children, families, early childhood educators, school staff or early childhood professionals
What kind of evaluation will be helpful?	Will it provide feedback on a proposed program, one that is underway, or a completed program cycle?
What will the evaluation measure?	For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effectiveness of program components • impact of the program on participants or stakeholders
How will information/data be collected?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • questionnaires • focus groups • telephone surveys • interviews, etc.

Various evaluation techniques may be used to evaluate transition programs, including quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative research methods capture data that have been categorised or ordered (such as questionnaires that rank responses from helpful to not helpful and numbers of participating children and families in program activities over time). Qualitative research methods are commonly descriptive accounts of participants' experiences when engaging in a program or reflecting on how programs could be improved.

How to involve children in evaluating transition-to-school programs

The information collected from listening to children can prompt early childhood educators OSHC carers and Prep teachers to think about how transition-to-school programs, routines and activities can be improved.

Where information is collected from a child, there needs to be a clear process of consent/ assent so that children understand that they have a choice in whether or not they participate in the evaluation. Formal evaluations will require parental/guardian consent.

Where a child's views are to be incorporated into the evaluation, their exact words, or as close as possible, should be used. Children see things in different ways to adults. It is important to value their views equally, as they can be clear about what is important to them. They may have thought about things that adults have not. It is useful if adults do not assume they know everything a child is thinking about – this shows children they are respected for who they are and what they believe.

Suggested ways for seeking children's views were outlined in Section 3: Involving children.

Keeping transition programs going

What is sustainability?

In simple terms, sustainability refers to the capacity of a transition program to continue to deliver its desired outcomes to children, families and early childhood educators and professionals.

Although sustainability is a common concern among transition networks and partnerships, many innovations, even effective ones, finish shortly after the initial funding runs out. This is often because those involved in the planning at the start have not actively planned for how to keep the program running.

How to develop a sustainable transition program

The lessons learnt from the evaluation of 30 transition pilots provide some insights into various ways of enhancing the sustainability of transition programs. Some of the key factors include:

- building community support for the local approach/program, often achieved by developing and maintaining a diverse and effective range of networks and partnerships
- developing a clear concept or model detailing what the project is doing, why and to what effect
- identifying strong champions of the project and effective leadership
- building on existing initiatives and identifying organisations that could support project activities into the future
- diversifying the funding base (that is, not relying on a single source of funding)
- providing training and professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals
- regularly monitoring and evaluating the program
- sharing and promoting the knowledge gained.

One pilot focused on creating effective, local partnerships between people working with children to help them better understand each other's practices and to support them in their work during the transition to school process. They did this by finding ways of making their relationships with partner organisations sustainable across the transition process. They found that by identifying a local champion working in childcare, and supporting that person to work with local services, they were able to encourage wide participation in the local transition program.

5. The Transition Learning and Development Statement



A primary school, with a kindergarten on site, was the setting for one pilot in metropolitan Melbourne that trialed a version of the transition to school statement. Involving families with multicultural backgrounds in the pilot was assisted by the use of interpreters (for verbal communication). The pilot found that keeping a simple document format proved effective.

What is the Transition Learning and Development Statement?

A child's Transition Learning and Development Statement summarises their strengths as they start school, identifies their individual approaches to learning alongside their interests and indicates how they can be supported to continue on their learning journey.

The information in the Statement helps prep teachers get to know the children entering their classes, plan appropriate learning and teaching programs and provides an opportunity for children, their families and all the professionals who work with them to support to a child's transition to school.

Transition to school should be understood as a process, not a point in time. It is an individual experience for everyone involved. Sharing information between the child, the family, the early childhood service(s) and the school is only part of this process.

How has the Transition Learning and Development Statement been developed?

The Transition Learning and Development Statement has been developed following wide consultation with early childhood educators, primary school teachers and other early childhood professionals and by obtaining evidence from the literature review and the evaluation of transition pilots across Victoria. Examples of statements or similar documents used across Victoria and in other states around Australia have also been considered and their key ideas incorporated where appropriate.

The Transition Learning and Development Statement provides a tool for the consistent transfer of information irrespective of the setting to, or from, which the child is transitioning. It reflects the learning outcomes identified for children in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. It has also been linked to other initiatives that support transitions – such as the *Sharing Our Journey* process initiated for children with a severe disability – to form a cohesive and inclusive approach to transition for all children moving into the first year of school.

The Transition Learning and Development Statement has two parts: one for the family (Part 1) and one for the early childhood educator (Part 2).

Part 1, Section C is for families of children with additional learning and development needs, a disability or developmental delay to record information on the additional services the child and family have accessed prior to school or any other important information the school should know (if this has not already been recorded).

The Transition Learning and Development Statement has been designed to align with the requirements of privacy legislation and therefore cannot be locally adapted.

Who owns the Transition Learning and Development Statement?

The Transition Learning and Development Statement is jointly owned and developed by the family and educator on behalf of the child. However, the decision about whether the information can be forwarded to the school and outside school hours care service remains with families through the parent or legal guardian.

It is important to maintain ongoing communication with families throughout the year about their child's learning and development to assist them in developing a clear understanding of the information contained in the Transition Learning and Development Statement. Where families have concerns about the information contained in the Statement, early childhood educators should work collaboratively with them to ensure they understand the information and can make an informed decision about this information being forwarded to other services. As part of this process, it is critical that families understand not only what is written, but also how the information will be used to support their child's learning and development at school.

Who is the Transition Learning and Development Statement for?

While it provides valuable information for children and their families, a child's Transition Learning and Development Statement is ultimately for their prep teacher. The information assists educators in getting to know the children entering their classes and helps them support continuity of learning and development across learning environments. The Statement will also be used by those responsible for planning outside school hours care programs if a child is attending a service and the parent/guardian consents to the use of the information by the outside school hours care service.

Who completes the Transition Learning and Development Statement?

There may be a number of people contributing to the information included in the Transition Learning and Development Statement. Early childhood educators are best placed to coordinate the Statement as they are the main point of contact and support for the child and the family during the period when the Transition Learning and Development Statement is prepared. If a child is enrolled in multiple schools, the family becomes responsible for forwarding the Statement to the school and outside school hours care service (where applicable) the child attends.

Guidelines for families and educators have also been developed that explain the process for completing the Transition Learning and Development Statement.

- **Guidelines for families**

Information sheet for families can be found in this section of the resource kit and at www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/transitionstatement.htm#1



Guidelines to help families complete the Transition Learning and Development Statement – Part 1: the family can be found in this section of the resource kit and at www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/transitionstatement.htm#4

- **Guidelines for educators**

Professional Development Booklet: How to write and interpret the Transition Learning and Development Statement and other Resources for Professionals is available at www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/profresources/default.htm

A good understanding of the Victorian Framework is required by both early childhood educators and prep teachers in order to write and interpret the information in the Statement. This is because *Part 2: the early childhood educator* is written to reflect the five learning outcomes in the Victorian Framework.

Refer to Part 3: Useful Resources for web links to the Victorian Framework, the Early Years Learning Framework and other resources.

The Transition Learning and Development Statement is available both electronically and in hard copy. To aid in the transfer and storage of the Transition Learning and Development Statement, it is recommended that the statement be completed and stored electronically. Where possible, any handwritten forms should be scanned and stored electronically.

For more information about privacy when storing and transferring the Transition Learning and Development Statement electronically, see *A guide to upholding privacy principles* in this section of the resource kit.

To order hard copies of the Transition Learning and Development Statement please contact psts@edumail.vic.gov.au

How will the Transition Learning and Development Statement be used?

The Transition Learning and Development Statement is one part of the process of transition. It is a vehicle for sharing information and facilitating communication between early childhood educators, schools, families and the children themselves.

The Statements will help prep teachers get a better understanding of the children coming into their classes. Prep teachers will use this information to plan transition and class activities, keeping in mind individual requirements and ensure continuity of learning and development for each child is achieved.

The Transition Learning and Development Statement is also a valuable tool that schools can use to nurture a partnership with each Koorie child, their parent/guardian and, where necessary, a regional Koorie Engagement Support Officer (KESO). Information in the Statement should be used to inform the development of each Koorie child's Individual Education Plan (IEP). All government schools are required to have an IEP in place as soon as Koorie children begin prep. Linking the Statement to the IEP supports the child as they continue on their learning journey.

For more information on the Victorian Government's education strategy for Koorie students *Wannik, Learning Together, Journey to Our Future* and the *Guidelines for Wannik Individual Education Plans for Koorie Students* please visit www.education.vic.gov.au/wannik

Other important sources of information

It is important to recognise that, while the Transition Learning and Development Statement will contain a significant amount of information about a child, there are a number of services that collect information about a child's learning and development throughout their first eight years. These services include, but are not limited to, maternal child and health services and early childhood intervention services. A summary of the tools currently available for the assessment of children in the birth to eight period is provided in Figure 5.1. These tools are also described in more detail below.

Prior to school assessments

Maternal and child health checks are encouraged for children at two, four and eight weeks, four, eight, 12 and 18 months and two and three years. These checks also include a home visit in the first week. They evaluate children's health and development, including growth, physical movements, behaviour, play, and interactions with family members and their peers. There may also be additional checks as required, such as a physical exam, hearing or eye screenings or play observation. For more information, visit www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/mch/childhealthrecord/

The **Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS)** assessment is becoming more widely used in Victoria. It is a methodology for detecting developmental and behavioural problems in children from birth to eight years of age and involves families answering



a ten-item questionnaire. The PEDS can be used in a number of different ways. Some professionals may use the PEDS on a regular basis (e.g. on a child's birthday or at a scheduled visit with the maternal and child health nurse), while others may administer the PEDS when the child is first enrolled in a particular community setting (e.g. kindergarten or school) or at regular family interview times. PEDS can be used as a formal developmental screening test and as an informal assessment to elicit and respond to family concerns. The flexibility of the PEDS means that it can be used in a variety of ways, enabling developmental concerns and progress to be monitored over time.

The **Brigance screening test** is used by a range of early childhood professionals (health and education) to identify developmental delay in children from birth to eight if the child is considered at 'high risk' or 'medium risk' via a PEDS assessment. The screen consists of a series of measures with one form completed per year of age.

No common **specialist intervention assessments** are used in early childhood intervention services. Rather, the appropriate early childhood educators will use one, or a suite, of tools they believe appropriate to assess the needs of the child involved. As a general rule, assessments will identify family concerns as well as child development and functioning. These assessments recognise that families are key decision makers and must be given the information they need to make well-informed decisions. The planning process is directed by the family identifying their priority needs for services. Over time, as the child's and family's needs change, the level and type of involvement and participation should respond accordingly.

Healthy Kids Check is a Commonwealth Government initiative to assess four-year-olds' health prior to starting school. It promotes early detection of lifestyle risk factors, delayed development and illness, and provides guidance for healthy lifestyles and early intervention strategies. For more information about the Healthy Kids Check, visit www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/Healthy_Kids_Check

'On Entry' to school assessments

A number of assessments take place when children enter school. Some are completed by their families, some by their teachers. These assessments provide the opportunity for teachers to find out more about each child, their abilities and interests. These assessments play a role in assisting the school and prep teachers to understand the learning and development needs of each child.

The **School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ)** is a family reporting instrument that records a family's concerns and observations about their child's health and wellbeing. It is also a tool for clinical practice and a point of engagement with families and educators. The questionnaire is sent out to the families of all prep students following the start of school.

The **English Online Interview** and the **Mathematics Online Interview** are assessments used to determine the level of understanding of English and Mathematics that children have at the point at which they enter formal schooling. They provide the prep teacher with

comprehensive information about the child's understanding of literacy and numeracy and informs the curriculum planning undertaken for each child. Both interviews facilitate the monitoring of children's progress throughout the first three years of school.

The English Online Interview is generally completed in late February/early March. The interview is carried out on a one-to-one basis at a pace that suits the child, for approximately half an hour. It provides information that contributes to building a holistic picture of the child's English language development and specifically enables evaluation of a child's learning growth in speaking and listening, reading and writing.

The Mathematics Online Interview gathers information on the strategies that children use in their mathematical thinking. Data from the Mathematics Online Interview enables teachers to develop a detailed understanding of individual and group/class skill levels in the stages of mathematical development.



Other assessments that may assist with transition planning

There are also a range of population level assessments that can help services identify the needs of local children and their families.

The **Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)** is completed by prep teachers based on their knowledge of the children in their class between May and July. Questions are answered about children's physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and communication skills, cognitive skills and general knowledge. The AEDI is a population measure rather than an individual assessment. The AEDI helps communities understand the needs of their local children and enables comparison with children nationally and in other communities. This comparison helps ensure appropriate services and resources are available and accessible to support children and families. The AEDI pinpoints the strengths of.

Figure 5.1: Summary of tools currently available for monitoring and assessment of children birth to eight



Privacy and consent when sharing information

Early childhood services and schools must be reasonable and fair in their treatment of personal and health information, not only for the benefit of staff and children but also to maintain the service's reputation.

Privacy laws provide a guide to information handling. The application of information privacy principles enables early childhood services and schools to bring their practices into line with community expectations and legal requirements. These principles will be particularly relevant to services when implementing the Transition Learning and Development Statement.

Privacy

Victorian privacy legislation includes the *Information Privacy Act 2000*, the *Health Records Act 2001* and the *Public Records Act 2002*. The *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988* may also apply to early childhood services.

These laws regulate the way early childhood services, schools and outside school hours care services can collect, use, retain, secure and dispose of personal and health information. This includes information or opinion about an individual whose identity is apparent or can reasonably be ascertained from the information.

Personal information means recorded information or opinion, whether true or not, about an identifiable individual. Personal information can be almost any information linked to an individual, including name, address, sex, age, financial details, marital status, education, health information, criminal record or employment history.

Privacy legislation requires, among other things, that organisations advise individuals from whom they collect personal information:

- the purpose of collecting the information
- to whom the information would normally be disclosed
- how individuals access information the organisation holds about them
- any consequences for not providing some or all of the information requested.

This obligation is complied with by the inclusion of the privacy and consent notice on page two of the Transition Learning and Development Statement to be signed by the parent/guardian.

When considering privacy issues, it is important for early childhood services and schools to consider the following requirements:

- **Collect:** Collect only the information that is needed and be clear about the purpose for which it is being collected.
- **Inform:** Tell the person why the information is needed and how it will be handled.
- **Disclose:** Disclose the information only as necessary for the primary purpose of collection.

- *Access:* Provide the person with access to their information on request, unless there are concerns that information contained in the files may cause harm to the individual or others.
- *Security:* Keep personal information secure and safe from unauthorised access.

With limited exceptions, all public organisations must comply with the ten information privacy principles contained within the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and/or have an approved code of practice/policy identifying how staff will manage personal and health information. **This approved code of practice/policy must be made available to anyone who asks for it.**

For more information see *Simple steps to upholding privacy principles* found in this section of the resource kit and at www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/transitionprivacy.htm

Further information on the ten information privacy principles in the *Information Privacy Act 2000* is at www.privacy.gov.au/publications/npps01.html

Consent

The Transition Learning and Development Statement can only be forwarded to a school and/or outside school hours care service when parent/guardian consent has been given. The Statement includes a notice on page two for the parent/guardian to give their consent.

It is important that early childhood educators work with families to develop a clear understanding of the importance of sharing information with schools and outside school hours care services (about their child's learning and development) and how sharing information will improve the support for their child.

By working in partnership with families, early childhood educators can:

- stay informed about family perspectives
- help resolve any issues or concerns, and
- improve families' understanding of the information being shared to ensure they are able to make an informed decision about this information being forwarded to their child's school and outside school hours care service.

As part of the Transition Learning and Development Statement process, it is critical that families understand not only what is written but also how the information will be used to support their child's learning and development at school.

Families need to understand that they have a choice whether or not to complete *Part 1: the family* in the Transition Learning and Development Statement and that **part or all of the information in the Statement cannot be passed on without their consent.**

If a family chooses not to complete Part 1 of the Statement, the early childhood educator should still complete Part 2 of the Statement and give it to the family. No part of the Statement can be forwarded to the child's school or outside school hours care service without parent/guardian consent (i.e. parent/guardian has signed the consent section on page two of the Statement).

A guide to upholding privacy principles

Privacy is a serious matter, but by following these simple steps, it is easy to do the right thing.

This information will guide you in upholding the privacy principles and protecting the information in a child's Transition Learning and Development Statement. The Statement has been developed to meet privacy requirements.

Collecting the information

Inform the child's parent or legal guardian about the Transition Learning and Development Statement process. Tell them that the Transition Learning and Development Statement supports the continuity of their child's learning and development as they transition to school. The Statement will provide valuable information for families and will assist school staff (particularly prep teachers) to get to know and more effectively support the children entering their classes.

Provide families with a copy of *Part 1: the family* of the Statement and the *Guidelines to help families complete the Transition Learning and Development Statement – Part 1: the family*. This explains what the Transition Learning and Development Statement is, how to fill in their part and what happens to the Statement once it is completed.

For families where literacy is an issue, it is important to discuss the details of what is in the Guidelines. The Guidelines have been translated into 21 community languages which are available at www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/profresources/caldresources/htm

Provide families with information about how you will handle the information collected in the Statement i.e. it will be kept private, secure and safe from unauthorised access. It is also important to explain what information you will include in the Statement. Let them know that you will not forward any information to the school or outside school hours care service without their consent (see 'Disclosing the Information').

Families that speak a language other than English may benefit from the use of an interpreter to assist in gaining the parent/guardian's informed consent for the final Statement. The Department provides funding for early childhood services to access on-site interpreting (both spoken and sign language) and telephone interpreting through All Graduates Interpreting and Translating Services. For more information about the Interpreting Service or to book an Interpreter, call All Graduates on **9605 3000** or visit www.allgraduates.com.au

If the child has not attended an early childhood service, schools may find it helpful to assist families to complete *Part 1: the family* of the Transition Learning and Development Statement as part of their enrolment process (Part 2 will not be applicable in these situations).

There are a few simple ways that you can meet your privacy obligations:

- **Collect** only the information that is needed and be **clear** about the purpose and **inform** the person why it's needed and how it will be handled.
- **Disclose** information only as necessary for the purpose.
- Provide the person with **access** to their own information on request.
- **Store** information securely and safely.
- **Dispose** of information at the required point in time.

Disclosing the information

When Parts 1 and 2 of the Transition Learning and Development Statement are finished, the early childhood educator must provide a copy of the completed Statement to the family and ask the child's parent or legal guardian to review the content and give consent to the early childhood educator to share and/or discuss the information in the Statement with the child's prep teacher and outside school hours care service (if applicable). There is a privacy and consent statement for them to read and sign on page two of the Statement.

It is important to consider whether the family will require support to understand the content of what is written. This may require the early childhood educator to discuss the information in the Statement with families where literacy issues exist and/or use an interpreter.

Those families that speak a language other than English may benefit from the use of an interpreter. The Department provides funding for early childhood services to access on-site interpreting (both spoken and sign language) and telephone interpreting through All Graduates Interpreting and Translating Services. For more information about the Interpreting Service or to book an Interpreter, call All Graduates on **9605 3000** or visit **www.allgraduates.com.au**

Electronic Statements

If you are completing the Statement electronically and gaining consent from the family electronically (via email) include the following text when you email the copy of the completed Statement:

We have attached <insert child's name here> the completed Transition Learning and Development Statement. This information about your child and family has been collected to support the continuity of your child's learning and development as they transition to school.

Please advise by return email that you consent to share this information with the school and outside school hours care service (if applicable).

Should you choose not to consent to the disclosure of part or all of the information in the Statement, please contact me to discuss this further.

Families must then provide confirmation that they consent to share the information in their return email. This email must be kept on record.

If families do not consent to this information being provided to the school or outside school hours care services **then it must not be forwarded on**. In these instances, the family should be provided with a copy for their records and the early childhood service should keep a copy (see 'Storing information securely and safely').

Password-protecting electronic Statements

When sending electronic versions of the Statement via email, you need to take the following basic security steps:

- Password-protect the Statement document. To do this, open the word document (electronic version of the Statement).
- From Tools, select Options, then Security.
- Type your password in the 'Password to open' box (use a mixture of upper and lowercase letters and numbers), then press 'OK'. Retype the password in the 're-enter password to open' box and press 'OK'.
- Send this password to the recipient in an email for this purpose.
- Attach the electronic Statement to another email.
- Send the electronic Statement to the recipient - do not include the password in this email.

It is a good idea to request read receipts for these emails. It is important for early childhood services to develop processes to ensure recipients details are checked before sending the email.

Any information to be included or attached to the Statement must be seen by the family and consent given to share this with the school and outside school hours care service (if applicable) before it can be forwarded.

Three or four copies (paper-based or electronic) of the completed and signed Statement are required:

- one for the family to keep
- one for the school the child is enrolled in
- one for the outside school hours care service where applicable
- one for the early childhood setting.

Paper-based copies must be posted to a named person (e.g. the prep teacher, Transition Coordinator, Principal or Manager of the outside school hours care service). This helps make sure that the information can only be seen by an appropriate person. If you do not have a named person, you should contact the school to find out who you should send the Statement to.

While registered mail is the preferred delivery method as it provides more security and a delivery confirmation notice for early childhood services, posting personal information via regular mail is acceptable. Early childhood services will need to decide which delivery method to use depending on the resources available to them.

If a child's school enrolment has not been confirmed, then the family should deliver the Statement to the school and outside school hours care service (where applicable) when they enrol their child.

As previously stated, when sending electronic versions of the Statement via email to the school or outside school hours care service, you need to take basic security steps (see 'Password-protecting electronic Statements').

Accessing information

You must allow the child's parent or guardian to see a copy of their child's information if they request it within two years of forwarding the Statement to the school (these requests are likely to be minimal, as the family will have its own copy).

You must allow access to view a child's Statement by staff within your organisation if their need to view the information is in line with the purpose of the Statement (i.e. to support the child's learning and development as they transition into school).

Your service or school should regularly review and monitor access to information as part of the service's standard organisational procedures and processes.

Storing information securely and safely

Secure and safe storage implies that paper-based Statements are kept in named files and in locked filing cabinets only accessible to appropriate staff. Electronic Statements should be kept in password-protected computers, with up-to-date antivirus software. Authorisation to access these documents should be clearly understood by all staff.

Safely store paper-based and electronic copies of Transition Learning and Development Statements according to your organisation's policy:

- Early childhood services (including outside school hours care services) – will have their own privacy policies to comply with the *Children's Services Act 2004* and the *Children's Services Regulations 2009*
- Government schools – see instructions in the Victorian Schools Reference Guide
- Non-government schools – will have their own policies or may follow similar guidelines to government schools.

Disposing of information

Services are required to keep a copy of any Statements for a minimum of two years as a temporary record. This advice applies to paper-based and electronic Statements prepared by all early childhood services, outside school hours care services and schools with the exception of childcare and early education services within municipal jurisdictions that must keep them for seven years after last attendance of the child.

These time frames are in line with Retention and Disposal Authorities (RDAs) issued by the Public Records Office Victoria.

After two years (or seven years for services in municipal jurisdictions), paper-based and electronic Statements should be disposed of securely and safely in line with your organisation's procedures and processes. Paper-based Statements should be shredded. Electronic Statements should be permanently deleted (seek technical advice when necessary to ensure the deletion is permanent).

This is particularly relevant if the organisation is considered a Public Office (for example government schools or services with a funded kindergarten program or child care centres run by Local Government Authorities) where disposal schedules must be followed and destruction of documents should be recorded. Enquires can be made through www.prov.vic.gov.au

Part 2: Providing additional support

Some children and families need extra support for a variety of reasons.

A range of factors can impact on the smoothness of the transition process for children, families and educators. For example, children with concentration difficulties may find it more difficult to settle into new routines, with new people, or environments. Families may not feel confident speaking with early childhood educators and Prep teachers if they perceive that they are not welcome, or if they find conversations challenging.

The level and type of support required can vary enormously from child to child and family to family. It may include (but is not limited to):

- providing information in languages other than English
- building a child's confidence to try new things and become more independent in self-care skills
- referrals to early childhood services for further assessment and advice (e.g. paediatrician, occupational therapist, speech pathologist)
- consideration for funding where significant needs exist (such as the Program for Students with Disabilities for children attending government schools)
- developing appropriate learning and development plans
- linking families to community support agencies
- providing aids and equipment (such as communication devices or for mobility)
- adapting school environments to make them more welcoming and accessible to children and families.

Much of what creates positive transitions for children from specific groups, such as children with disabilities or, from disadvantaged backgrounds, highlights the need for policies and practices that can assist all children to make a successful start to school. Careful planning and inclusive practices support children and families who need targeted support to enable a positive transition to school.



6. Supporting diversity



We acknowledge and pay respect to all the traditional owners of the land we now call Victoria. There were approximately 40 language groups before colonisation that made up the state of Victoria.

Victoria is a multicultural society comprising people from more than 200 nations, speaking more than 200 languages and dialects and following more than 120 faiths.

‘While respecting our differences is necessary in an open, inclusive and vibrant society, it is also vital to acknowledge that we have much in common. We have much to gain, individually and collectively, by working together to build a positive and progressive future that enhances our state as a great place in which to live, work, invest and raise a family.’

All of Us Multicultural Policy for Victoria 2009, Hon John Brumby and James Merlino, MP, p 2

Transition programs that support and celebrate diversity and early childhood professionals who are culturally aware and competent help to support a positive start to school for all children and families. Respecting diversity, helping to foster supportive relationships and encouraging a strong, positive sense of identity are all key practices that will help early childhood services and schools achieve this.

Cultural competency

Educators who are culturally competent respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences. This is evident in everyday practice when educators demonstrate an ongoing commitment to developing their own cultural competence in a two-way process with families and communities.

Educators view culture and the context of family as central to children’s sense of being and belonging and to success in lifelong learning. Educators also seek to promote children’s cultural competence. Cultural competence is much more than awareness of cultural

A community-centred approach to transition was taken in one multicultural metropolitan area to attract and engage families in which transition programs were promoted through local community and health services, language classes and playgroups.

differences. It is the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural competence encompasses:

- being aware of one's own world view
- developing a positive attitude towards cultural differences
- gaining knowledge of different cultural practices and world views
- developing skills for communication and interaction across cultures.

There are a range of documents that contain advice and information for educators about developing cultural competence amongst children, these include:

- Teaching about cultural diversity - provides advice for teaching about cultural diversity.
- The Keynotes Project - provides information to teachers with the history, principles and perspectives of nine world religions appropriate as background material in classroom programs and discussions.

These resources can be accessed from www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchlearnteach.htm. For additional information about teaching controversial issues see www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchcontroversial.htm

Transition for Aboriginal Children

The information in this section is sourced from the Australian Government Indigenous Portal²⁸, Share Our Pride²⁹, and the Indigenous Australia website³⁰.

Aboriginal cultures are complex and diverse. Aboriginal children, people and communities have a unique contribution to make to Australian society and to their local community. For the purposes of this Resource Kit, the term Aboriginal will be used to represent people from all Indigenous Australian groups.

Land is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. The land is not just soil or rocks or minerals, but a holistic environment that sustains and is sustained by people and culture. It is the core of all spirituality and this relationship and the spirit of 'country' is central to the issues that are important to Aboriginal people today. They identify themselves through their land areas, their relationship to others and their language and stories – which may be expressed through ceremony, the arts, family, religion and sports.

Maintaining a connection to family and community is also especially important to Aboriginal people. It is this connection that helps maintain the links to their cultural identity. Reconnecting and remaining a part of a family or kinship group are important issues. Learning the intricate pattern of kinship is part of every Aboriginal child's education.

*One Aboriginal early childhood setting used weekly cultural education sessions to strengthen children's sense of identity and improve their gross motor skills. The children learnt traditional dances and performed in traditional costumes and face painting. Music was provided by a professional didgeridoo player for dances such as 'Walk on', 'Birds and Animals', 'Yam', 'Fishing', 'Boomerang', 'Mother Earth', 'Basket Weaving' and 'Munji Maa'. The children practised and then performed at a number of events, including Elders Christmas Luncheon and the launch of **Dardee Boorai: The Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young**. The children's traditional dance performance was reported as the highlight of the kindergarten's graduation ceremony.*

²⁸ www.indigenous.gov.au

²⁹ www.shareourpride.org.au

³⁰ www.indigenoustralia.info Indigenous Australia's website is written by Aboriginal people of Australia

In a regional pilot focused on addressing the needs of Aboriginal children and families, transition coordinators and two community members were engaged to support children in the early childhood setting and to move with them to school. The presence of a familiar face from the Aboriginal community at kindergarten, and later at school, was reported to help children and families feel more comfortable and adapt to the new school environment and routines.



Supporting Aboriginal children as they transition to school

Many Aboriginal children make a positive transition to school. Aboriginal children and families will have high expectations of their child's learning and development experiences and it is important to recognise that many of the strategies previously identified in this Kit will be relevant to planning effective support for Aboriginal children as they transition into school.

Early childhood services and schools can do additional things to help further support the transition to school for Aboriginal children:

- acknowledge and support engagement with Aboriginal children's families, recognising that this may include a wider group of people than non-Aboriginal cultures may associate with a child
- ask family members to come and stay in the classroom for a little longer at the start of the day
- recognise oral communication is greatly valued and used widely within Aboriginal communities when engaging with Aboriginal children and their families
- plan and organise transition programs for Aboriginal children in partnership with local Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs)
- incorporate resources reflecting Aboriginal culture into local programs and curriculum such as books, music and movement activities or Aboriginal art and flying the Aboriginal flag together with the Australian flag. These make places more welcoming for Aboriginal children and their families and give consistent, inclusive messages straight away to those visiting and attending early childhood services and schools
- get to know local Aboriginal communities, seeking their guidance on how best to support and respond to the needs of their children as they transition to school
- undertake professional development to find out more about Aboriginal culture (see Share Our Pride at www.shareourpride.org.au).

Victoria has specific Koorie support workers in each region who may be useful to link with for Aboriginal communities when planning transition programs:

- Koorie pre-school assistants
- Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs)³¹
- Koorie Education Coordinators.

There are also 32 voluntary Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups across Victoria that can support partnerships between Aboriginal families and educational services. Their role includes:

- providing advice on all education and training matters affecting Koorie students
- monitoring the current trends in education that impact on all Koorie students
- providing an advocate role for Koorie students and their families in respect of education matters
- providing representation to local and regional committees and forums in relation to education and training
- providing representation to all Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. forums.³²

³¹ This title incorporates posts previously know as Koorie educator, Koorie education development officer, and Koorie home school liaison officer.

³² Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. *Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs)*. Available from www.vaeai.org.au/who/laecg.html

Wannik (Learning Together – Journey to Our Future): Education Strategy for Koorie Students in Victoria

Wannik, from the Gunai/Kurnai language meaning ‘learning together – journey to our future’ is the DEECD’s new education strategy for Koorie students in Victoria.

Fundamental to *Wannik* is the fostering of a new culture of high expectations for Aboriginal children and systemic reform across government schools to deliver the best possible education to meet these expectations. It emphasises working in partnership with Aboriginal families and the community to respect, recognise and celebrate Aboriginal cultural identity.

Wannik identifies a number of key strategies for improvement. Those relevant to transition-to-school planning include:

- developing ready-for-school or pre-school Aboriginal programs in collaboration with KESOs in all areas where there are high numbers of Aboriginal families
- requiring all government schools to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each Aboriginal child in a partnership between educators, children, their families and Aboriginal support workers, covering key transition points from early childhood settings to school.
- Encouraging schools to use the Transition Learning and Development Statement to inform the development of IEPs for Aboriginal children entering prep.

For more information about *Wannik* visit www.education.vic.gov.au/wannik

For more information about supporting children from Aboriginal backgrounds who attend catholic schools visit www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au or for independent schools visit www.ais.vic.edu.au

Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

As previously stated, Victoria is a multicultural society comprising people from more than 200 nations, speaking more than 200 languages and dialects and following more than 120 faiths. The diversity and richness this brings communities cannot be underestimated and should not be overlooked. Families from different backgrounds contribute in many meaningful ways to all children’s understanding of the world and they offer new insights on supporting all children to successfully transition to school, as well as their own.

In the Australian context, individuals from a [culturally and linguistically diverse] background are those who identify as having a specific cultural or linguistic affiliation by virtue of their place of birth, ancestry, ethnic origin, religion, preferred language, language(s) spoken at home, or because of their parents’ identification on a similar basis.³³

Finding ways to develop strong, effective partnerships with families with diverse cultural backgrounds or who speak languages other than English is a very enriching experience.

In a metropolitan area, group gatherings in familiar venues (such as community houses or church halls) were arranged to engage children and families from non-English speaking backgrounds. Interpreters were available at these sessions along with translated materials. Transport, childcare and culturally appropriate food was provided for families to support their participation and to make them feel more welcome.

³³ Department of Human Services Multicultural Strategy Unit 2002, cited in Department of Human Services 2004, Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Strategy: Planning and Delivering Culturally Appropriate Supports for People with a Disability, Their Families and Carers, Melbourne.



Engaging with these families provides opportunities for early childhood services and schools to better understand, appreciate and celebrate the experiences of families and their cultures. Understanding the experiences of their families and cultures can help educators link with a child's experiences to better support continuity of learning and development.

Children and families with diverse cultural backgrounds speaking languages other than English may require support to participate in transition-to-school processes. Educators need to be aware of and be responsive to:

- varying levels of English language fluency
- experiences of trauma or war
- disrupted education for some children
- the pressures of resettlement
- racism and discrimination.

Improving the way children and their families are included in the transition planning processes and ensuring that programs respond to their needs are critical to ensure the start to school is a positive experience.

Given the diversity within and across cultures in Australia, it is important not to make assumptions about families' backgrounds, cultures or practices, as these can be very different from family to family. Taking time to talk with families directly about their lives and culture is the best way to find out more about families histories and cultural practices.

Children and families from Arabic backgrounds were supported in the transition-to-school process in a Melbourne-based pilot that held a number of bilingual workshops for them in English and Arabic. The workshops gave families information and guidance on supporting their child's literacy development and explained the benefits of playing, how to engage their child in literacy and play activities and what is involved in the transition process.

Supporting children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Some key strategies that early childhood services and schools might like to consider when communicating and planning support for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as they transition into school are:

- be open to different notions of 'family'
- acknowledge that, while some families may share cultural practices, values and beliefs, they all have individual features and characteristics
- work in partnership with other agencies who are involved with the family

- review the environment and resources used in programs regularly and be aware of the messages they convey to families
- talk to families about how they would like to participate and how they view their role as their child transitions to school
- link families with one another and encourage them to support each other and discuss mutual concerns
- make sure transition programs are flexible and encourage children and their families to participate
- provide opportunities for children and their families to give feedback on transition programs and participate in any evaluation exercises to ensure transition programs are relevant and meet their needs.

Communication is one of the most obvious challenges for children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Again, there are a number of things early childhood settings and schools can do to break down communication barriers to better support children and their families. These include:

- using the assistance of interpreters, bilingual staff, aides and translated materials to help families understand and feel comfortable
- displaying information in community languages
- becoming familiar with local agencies that provide language services in the relevant languages
- speaking clearly and repeating information to families who are not fluent in English
- using pictures and photographs to help communicate with families.

A range of services is provided to government schools to support students from language backgrounds other than English. This includes funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

Some children who speak a language other than English as their main language at home will require additional support in learning English as a second or additional language. If they are enrolled in a government school they are eligible for ESL programs.

Funding is provided to schools with significant numbers of ESL students through the Student Resource Package (SRP). ESL funding is given to schools to staff ESL programs. A targeted specialist ESL program is informed by a good understanding of each child and their learning background including their stage of English language development. Further ESL program information is available on the DEECD - ESL website on the following page: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/eslschools.htm>

Funding may also be provided for Multicultural Education Aides (MEAs). MEAs in schools support ESL programs in several ways:

- facilitate communication between the school and families from language background other than English

- provide insights into students cultural backgrounds and experiences
- assist individual or small groups of students in the classroom
- assist the teacher with the development of materials.

Schools also have access to Regional ESL Program Officers in each of the nine DEECD regional offices. Regional ESL program officers provide ESL program support and advice to schools and professional learning opportunities for teachers in government schools in the region. For more information phone the DEECD Information and Referral Service for your DEECD Regional Office on **1800 809 834**.

To improve support for refugee children, DEECD has developed Strengthening Outcomes - Refugee Students in Government Schools, which contains information for schools and other service providers about the range of resources available to support students from refugee backgrounds in Victorian schools. This document can be downloaded from **www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/refugees/default.htm**

Children who have recently arrived in Australia may also be eligible for additional support, if they are enrolled in a government school, through the New Arrivals Program. Further information about the New Arrivals Program is available on the DEECD-ESL website on the following page **www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/newstudents.htm**

The Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Schools provide an overview of Government policies and DEECD initiatives in relation to the prevention of discrimination and harassment. These guidelines also include a range of learning materials. More information can be found at **www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/schoolleaders.htm**

Interpreting and translating services are also available free (within guidelines) to government schools. The services ensure that parents and guardians who require an interpreter have access to school information and are better able to communicate with schools. More information on the interpreting and translation services for schools can be found at **www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/interpret/default.htm**

For more information about supporting children with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who attend catholic schools visit **www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au** and for those who attend independent schools visit **www.ais.vic.edu.au**

It may be necessary to involve an interpreter to work with the family, advocate and/or early childhood professionals. When working with an interpreter, speak slowly and clearly. Try not to say too much in one go so that the interpreter can remember what was said. Focus on engaging with the family, not the interpreter, in face-to-face meeting situations. Ask the family questions to see if they have understood what was meant. Provide opportunities to listen to what families have to say and provide them with the information they may need/want.

7. Children with disabilities and developmental delay



To support children with additional needs and their families make a positive transition to school, an early intervention service trialled three new ways to encourage collaboration and a family-centred approach:

- the development of a practical resource folder, personalised for each child, with information such as how to incorporate visual aides for each child/grade, helpful teaching tips, and ideas from early childhood intervention practitioners*
- a program of shared professional development and training for early intervention workers, early childhood educators and school staff visits by early childhood intervention professionals to schools in Term 1 to provide expert advice and guidance on how the individual child and family can be best supported during the transition period.*

Transition for children with a disability or developmental delay may be like that of any child, in that they are a child first and foremost, and starting school is an important transition in their life. However, transition may differ for these children as a result of the involvement of a range of other early childhood services and professionals; and the degree of information about the child that may need to be gathered, synthesised and made available to the school (for example, detailed reports and advice from allied health professionals).

It is important that early childhood educators engage with the family and other professionals who know the child when planning transition programs and completing the Transition Learning and Development Statement. Understanding the holistic impact of a child's disability or developmental delay on their learning and development helps to plan ahead for any resources or adjustments that may be required. Many early childhood educators already do this by arranging collaborative meetings early in the year. Specific guidance is included in the *Sharing Our Journey* protocol about the roles of everyone involved in supporting the child's transition to school.

The following issues should be considered when designing and developing transition programs for children with disabilities:

- the importance of early childhood experience for positive transition experiences for children
- the importance of long-term cross-sector collaborative planning and continuity of programs around transitions
- transition to school can be a highly complex and anxious time for families
- there are negative long-term implications if transition problems that emerge are not addressed.³⁴

In addition to considering the above issues, early childhood educators should also refer to the *Sharing Our Journey* kit which includes a planner identifying key personnel and

³⁴ Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood.

activities to support the child with disabilities to start school, as well as a copy of the Transition Learning and Development Statement adapted to ensure specific information is provided for children with a disability or developmental delay (see Part 1A of the Statement). Early childhood educators should work with those other professionals in contact with the child when completing the Statement. In some cases, it may be more appropriate for one of these professionals to coordinate the Statement. This decision should be made in consultation with the family on a case by case basis.

The *Sharing Our Journey* kit is distributed by Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service (KISS) providers and early childhood intervention services. These resources can also be downloaded from www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/healthwellbeing/sharingourjourneykit.pdf

What the families may want to tell the school

Families are experts about their child. They are invaluable in supporting the child's smooth transition. Gaining trust is a vital process (as it is with all families). Families often share sensitive information when trust has been established. Therefore, it is important that relationships can form as early as possible with future school staff. Parents/guardians must consent to written and verbal information about their child and family being shared – early childhood educators can support families in recognising the importance of the information for schools and encouraging families to build trusting relationships early on.

Transition to school is successful when families feel that teachers and schools have the best interests of their child at heart and their knowledge of the child is valued. Families of children with disabilities and developmental delays may wish to tell the school about:

- their child's strengths as well as challenges
- goals for their child
- what to do in an emergency (e.g. if the child is having an epileptic seizure)
- sharing practical skills and tips with school aides in their child's day-to-day self-care (e.g. how to help their child get changed for physical education)
- approaches that help settle their child (e.g. soothing movements and sounds, 'time out', etc.)
- how to assist their child be as independent as possible (e.g. at lunch time)
- types of instructions to which the child responds well (or not)
- cues and prompts that help engage their child (e.g. picture exchange cards)
- behaviour management ideas that work at home (e.g. types of praise and rewards)
- assessment reports that they may like to share with the school or Prep teacher about their child's medical background and early intervention history.

Part 1A of the Transition Learning and Development Statement gives families of children with a disability or developmental delay the opportunity to provide further information. The whole Statement is included in the *Sharing Our Journey* kit.

To help support children with a disability or developmental delay, one pilot developed a 'Boardmaker service'. Boardmaker software is used to produce printed picture-based communication and special education materials supporting language. The service was designed to promote stories about the child (social stories) that can be used for conversations with the child and visual prompts to help children understand and adapt to new routines at home and school, which could be used by both families and educators.

What other services may want to tell the school

Children with disabilities and developmental delays may have had extra support within the kindergarten setting from a preschool field officer (PSFO), KISS, or from community-based therapists and special education teachers in Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS).

Each professional involved has a different role to play in supporting the child and family and preparing for transition to school. Some services are required to finish when a child starts school. Therefore it is important that (with families' consent) information specific to each child is shared with the school in time to assist with planning and organisation.

This information may be about many things. For example:

- how to maintain the child's safety and wellbeing at school
- a child's level of development
- preferred approaches to learning new things
- specific skills they have achieved and other skills they are working on
- how independent they are
- what equipment or aids are helpful with their vision, hearing, mobility, play, recording their school work, or self-care
- types of support (e.g. assistance to hold objects, or supervision in the playground)
- potential modifications required within the school environment.

As previously noted, incorporating this information will require early childhood educators to work with other professionals in contact with the child when completing the Transition Learning and Development Statement.

What the school may want to know

Some children may require support and special learning programs at school so that they can participate fully in the range of activities. Schools may want additional information that helps them understand a child; the impact of a child's disability or developmental delay on learning; and how the disability or developmental delay may affect their participation in life at school and the school environment. They will also want to know if there are any key strategies they should be aware of to help children settle into the school environment and support their learning and development.

Recognising that schools need time to plan for any outsourced assessment, and adaptations or supports the child may need, it is important to ensure a timely referral to the school (Term 2 or 3 of the child's kindergarten year).

In some circumstances, children with a disability or developmental delays may benefit from a second year of kindergarten prior to school entry (refer to Section 2: Second year of funded four-year-old kindergarten). This needs to be a planned process and, if the child

A four-week transition playgroup for children with intellectual disabilities in a special school was run on a weekly basis in the latter part of Term 4. Teachers were released from school to run the groups and families had the opportunity to meet them and discuss their child's transition to school in a supportive environment. In Term 1 of the following year, the school invited these families to join a Parent Support Group, organised by its parent liaison officer, to support and pass on information to other parents on student support groups, individual learning plans, behaviour management, communication, and allied health services to the school.

will turn six years of age during the kindergarten year, an application for school exemption needs to be made. Further information on this is outlined below.

In school support for children with disabilities or developmental delay

There are a number of programs aimed at supporting children with significant disabilities and developmental delays within schools.

Children with disabilities and developmental delays attending government schools

DEECD is committed to delivering an inclusive education system that ensures all students have access to a quality education to meet their diverse needs. The Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) provides additional support within the Student Resource Package for eligible children with disabilities in government mainstream and specialist schools. Guidelines are available from www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/default.htm

Children with a disability or a developmental delay enrolled in a Victorian government school are eligible for PSD, provided they meet the eligibility criteria for one of seven categories. These criteria are based on guidelines set by the World Health Organisation and are designed to identify that group of children with moderate to severe disabilities. The seven categories within PSD are:

- physical disability
- visual impairment
- severe behaviour disorder



- hearing impairment
- intellectual disability
- autism spectrum disorder
- severe language disorder with critical educational needs.

DEECD provides an outsourced assessment service for potential applications on behalf of children in the categories of 'Intellectual Disability' and 'Severe Language Disorder with Critical Educational Needs'. The assessment and application processes will be coordinated by the school the child is to attend.

A Student Support Group (SSG) is central to making an application under PSD and is a cooperative partnership between the parent/guardian/carer(s), school representatives and relevant early childhood professionals (such as allied health professionals) to ensure coordinated support for the child's educational needs. This is achieved through the development of specific educational goals and a tailored educational program. The SSG is mandatory for students in PSD, and strongly encouraged for any student with additional needs.

Information about SSG is available at

www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/handbook/default.htm

Children with disabilities and developmental delays attending non-government schools

Children starting at a catholic school, part of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM), should contact the Student Support Service for advice on how to support the learning needs of a child with a disability or developmental delay, their family and Prep teachers. For more information visit www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au

If the child is enrolling in an independent school, there will be similar processes for planning a child's school program. A program support group may be established as part of this consultation. For further information visit www.ais.vic.edu.au

Children with learning and developmental challenges

There are some children who may still require a higher than average level of support for their learning and development, as despite their many strengths and qualities, they find some aspects of life challenging. They may require a small degree of additional support and understanding to assist them with their learning and development, and are not suitable for programs for children with more complex difficulties. Early childhood educators, together with the child, families and Prep teachers should discuss their ideas for supporting the child's transition in the year before school starts to ensure the school is prepared. Advice may be sought from other early childhood professionals if necessary. This information is useful to include in the child's Transition Learning and Development Statement to inform planning to support the child.

8. Children with additional health needs

Children often attend school with either medical or health needs that, for most of the time, do not impact on their ability to participate in school life. It is important, however, that accurate information is provided to the school, with the parents' or legal guardian's consent. This information may indicate issues about what to do in emergency procedures (e.g. if a child requires an EpiPen®) or what medications a child takes (e.g. if a child has asthma).

In cases where a child has a chronic condition, for instance one that impacts on their movements and energy levels, it is recommended that schools be advised early to review their school program to ensure it meets the needs of all children from the first day at school.

The process for sharing this information is the same as for other children. Where appropriate other reports should be submitted with the Transition Learning and Development Statement to support the Prep teacher to plan for the coming year. Information about a child's health is also captured through the school's enrolment form and the School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ).

Student Health Support Plan

Government schools are required to have a Student Health Support Plan (or in the case of Anaphylaxis an Anaphylaxis Management Plan) for a child with an identified health need, guided by medical advice received by the child's medical/health practitioner and developed in consultation with the child and their family.

It is useful for schools to fill out the Student Health Support Plan as part of the transition program. Where this is relevant for an individual child, it should be completed with the family, who need to give direct consent for the release of this information to the school.

Further information is available from

www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/referenceguide

For more information about supporting children with additional health needs who attend catholic schools visit **www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au** and for those who attend independent schools visit **www.ais.vic.edu.au**

9. Children in vulnerable circumstances



A local transition co-ordinator, in an inner Melbourne pilot, helped develop a local network of educators and service operators supporting families of children with additional needs. Organising meeting times and places for schools, kindergartens, child care centres and other local support agencies to discuss how to work together has promoted a partnership approach and enabled better support planning for children as they transition to school.

Every child has the right to live a full and productive life in an environment that builds confidence, friendship, security and happiness, irrespective of their family circumstances and background.³⁵

Some children may experience vulnerability due to circumstances outside their control. Vulnerability can come in many forms. Children may be protected by receiving support from child protection services and/or living in out of home care:

All children and families rely on community support – relatives, friends, neighbours and informal networks. They also rely on services such as maternal and child health services, child care services, medical services, dental services and [early childhood settings and] school education services.³⁶

For further advice on child protection issues, and information sharing responsibilities, visit www.cyf.vic.gov.au/every-child-every-chance

Children in out of home care (OoHC)

Children and young people in out of home care (OoHC) are a diverse group who have been removed from their family home (via a protective intervention process) after experiencing abuse or neglect. The Victorian Government, through the Department of Human Services (DHS), and community service organisations (CSOs), in partnership with the Government, are responsible for looking after these children and young people by providing a range of placement options that are:

- foster care: a foster carer who has been trained and approved to look after children looks after a child (in the foster carer's home)
- kinship care: a child is placed with a relative or family friend

³⁵ Department of Human Services, *Every Child Every Chance*, 2008a, at www.cyf.vic.gov.au/every-child-every-chance/home

³⁶ Department of Human Services, *An information sharing guide for registered community services in Victoria*, 2008b, p. 6, at www.cyf.vic.gov.au/every-child-every-chance/library/publications/publications

- permanent care: a child is placed into the permanent care of an existing foster carer or kinship carer through the Children’s Court
- residential care: rostered workers employed by a CSO care for up to four young people in residential unit.

Partnering Agreement

In recognition of the importance of school participation and educational achievement in the lives of children and young people, and acknowledging that the background and circumstances of children and young people in care means that they require particular assistance to access educational opportunities, the DEECD and DHS have established the Partnering Agreement: School Attendance and Engagement of Children and Young People in OoHC. The aim of the Partnering Agreement is to ensure that both systems work together to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of children and young people placed in OoHC.

The Partnering Agreement sets out the roles and responsibilities of all those involved with the young person in care to ensure his/her educational development. A key process for which schools have accountability is the setting up of a SSG for every child/young person in care to identify and provide additional support for the young person to be successful at school.

The SSG consists of the parent, guardian or caregiver of the child, the DHS Protective Services case manager, a teacher or year level coordinator, the principal or nominee to act as chairperson, the school’s Student Welfare Coordinator and, where appropriate, the child or young person. An IEP should also be developed for each child or young person living in care who attends a school or education program. The IEP should be reviewed regularly to ensure its relevance for the child or young person.

Transition to school – who should be informed?

The DHS case manager (who has the legal responsibility for the child), the child’s CSO case manager, and the child’s carer should be informed of the transition-to-school process.

Supporting the education of children in OoHC

A range of strategies and best practice guidelines for supporting the education of children and young people in OoHC are outlined in the following documents:

Partnering Agreement – School Attendance and Engagement of Children and Young People in out of home care, visit

www.cyf.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/17049/partnering_agreement.pdf

Great expectations: Supporting children and young people in out-of-home care to achieve at school, visit www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/great_expectations.pdf

Calmer classrooms: A guide to working with traumatised children, visit

www.ocsc.vic.gov.au/downloads/calmer_classrooms.pdf

For more information about supporting children in OoHC who attend catholic schools visit

www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au and for those who attend independent schools visit

www.ais.vic.edu.au

10. Supporting families who have difficulties with literacy

Families who have difficulties with literacy speak a language that has a written form, but have not developed the same level of skills as others to read or write it. This does not imply that families have no skills in this area, rather that they will require additional support to help them to participate in transition processes and programs.

Families who have difficulties with literacy often have little or no experience with formal learning environments and may therefore have little knowledge of transition processes and programs, or school systems and procedures. Some of these families may also have had difficult, traumatising life experiences.

Supporting families who have difficulties with literacy

This section is relevant for those families from English speaking backgrounds who have difficulties with the written aspects of literacy. For families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, see Section 6: Supporting diversity.

Some non-literate people or people with low literacy skills learn to keep it a secret, and it may not be obvious to early childhood services and schools that a family is having problems. Non-literate people will often have developed their own ways to engage with printed materials and complete written tasks.

There are a number of ways to improving communication with families who have difficulties with literacy, and many of these strategies can be useful to engage all families. Suggestions include:

- conveying messages as a sequences of illustrations or pictures that clearly depict the activities involved without the use of words
- holding family information nights about transition, where information is provided verbally to all families



- incorporating visual cues in information provided to families about transition-to-school processes and programs
- talking with families about transition processes, and seeking their advice on how they would like to be involved
- make use of multimedia tools, to provide information about transition processes, and programs
- providing information about opportunities for families to improve their literacy skills, such as the Council for Adult Education's courses www.cae.edu.au.

Families who have difficulties with literacy or families with low literacy skills may have particular difficulties engaging with and completing the Transition Learning and Development Statement. Early childhood services and schools can play a critical role in helping families understand why it is important to contribute to the Statement for their child.

By providing opportunities for all families to meet in person to discuss and complete the Transition Learning and Development Statement together, families who have difficulties with literacy can be encouraged to participate without having to identify themselves as non-literate.

It is also important to acknowledge that some families who have difficulties with literacy may prefer to have a friend or relative complete the Statement for them.

Working with families who have literacy issues can be challenging, and may require educators to provide alternative models of support (should this be appropriate). In considering the transition planning process for these children, early childhood educators and Prep teachers should allow additional time to meet and speak with these families.

11. Children and families not participating in early childhood services

A challenge for many early childhood services, schools and transition programs is engagement with children and families who do not participate in an early childhood services prior to starting at school.

In one regional area, a primary school identified that a number of children would be starting school who had not attended early childhood settings. The school promoted a program of activities to provide these families with information about their transition programs and to attract families to participate in them. The promotional strategies used included local newsletter articles, leaflets at community centres and council offices, fliers and posters in local shops. Sessions aimed at developing the children's language and social skills were run at the school for two hours, three days in a row, by a teacher, assistant and allied health professionals.

In some communities, there are a large number of children and families who do not access either early childhood services or transition-to-school programs, and arrive at school on the first day straight from home. This can be for a variety of reasons, including families who have newly arrived in the local area. It is important to acknowledge as part of this process that there are many families across Victoria providing rich home-learning environments and opportunities for their children without attending early childhood services.

Tailoring transition-to-school programs to meet the needs of families who have not been in contact with early childhood education services may produce greater family involvement during their child's first year of school. This, in turn, contributes to successful child outcomes, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Strategies for engaging children and families not engaged in early childhood services

Many of the strategies and approaches noted in the other sections of this kit remain relevant for connecting with families who do not readily access early childhood and school services. Ensuring that families can easily access information about local transition programs and opportunities to participate is central to their engagement.

Connections between families who do not readily engage with early childhood services and schools can only be built in the context of good communication and trusting and respectful relationships, where the strengths of individuals and families are recognised, despite challenges and other difficulties. This process relies on families identifying the need for them to be involved in providing a positive start to school for their child.

For children who do not have any or limited experience of early childhood services when they arrive at school, schools have a valuable role in linking families to relevant services. Children and families whose children have not attended an early childhood service with early childhood services will most commonly first become known when a child is enrolled at school. Therefore, it is appropriate for the school to develop processes and programs to support those children and families.

Resources provided in this kit can assist school staff to complete a Transition Learning and Development Statement for a child. Schools can assist families not participating in early childhood services to complete Part 1: the family of the Transition Learning and Development Statement. Please refer to the Guidelines for completing the Transition Learning and Development Statement provided in this kit, and the strategies outlined. This information can assist schools identify where transition programs can be developed for children and their families.

It is essential to work in close collaboration with a broad range of other support services already involved with the children and family, especially where they have already gained the trust and confidence of the families involved. Consequently, the involvement of local support, health and welfare agencies as collaborators in the design and development of transition programs and processes is most important. This helps prevent families, especially vulnerable ones, from slipping through the gap.

Early childhood services and schools may like to consider how to make:

- information easily accessible and relevant, focusing on the importance of early childhood to children's futures and why families should consider being involved in transition-to-school programs, which also lists available services and how these can help
- services and information more visible in the wider community
- services more accessible by investigating what helps families engage (for example, help with communication, timing of conversations to allow for working family demands, transport, etc.).

13. Website links

These websites were live at publication, it is suggested you check them regularly for updates.

Aboriginal Strategies – Early Childhood – Services and Programs:

www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/aboriginal/earlychildhood.htm

AIFS Stronger Families and Communities: **www.aifs.gov.au/sf/communities.html**

Asset-based Approaches to Rural Community Development: Literature Review and Resources:

www.iacdglobal.org/en/projects/international-projects/asset-based-approaches-rural-community-development

Association for Children with a Disability: **www.acd.org.au**

Association of Independent Schools Victoria: **www.ais.vic.edu.au**

Australian Council of State Schools Organisations: **www.acsso.org.au/fsp.htm**

Australian Early Childhood Association: **www.education.vic.gov.au/oecd/earlychildhood/library/links/kindergarten/aeca.html**

Australian Commonwealth Government Entry Point: **www.australia.gov.au**

Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS):

www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/links/atsi_links

Australian Association of Special Education Inc. (AASE) : **www.aase.edu.au**

Aunty Wendy's Mob: **www.auntywendymob.com**

Autism Victoria: **www.autismvictoria.org.au**

Best Start: **www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/beststart/default.htm**

Catholic Education Office Melbourne: **www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au**

Centre for Community Child Health: **www.rch.org.au/ccch/index.cfm?doc_id=10556**

Community Builders. NSW: **www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au**

Community Building – Communities Growing Together: **www.communitybuilding.vic.gov.au**

Community Child Care, Victoria; **www.cccvic.org.au**

Council for Adult Education: **www.cae.edu.au**

Dardee Boorai: the Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and

Young People: **www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/aboriginal/charter/**

Dare to Lead: **www.daretolead.edu.au**

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: **www.education.vic.gov.au**

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development – Privacy: **www.education.vic.gov.au/about/deptpolicies/informationprivacy.htm**

Department of Sustainability and Environment: **www.dse.vic.gov.au/dse/wcmn203.nsf/Home+Page/8A461F99E54B17EBCA2570340016F3A9?open**

Department of Sustainability and Environment and Department of Primary Industries – Effective Community Engagement: Workbook and Tools: www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/australianedi/5Community_Engagement_Resources.pdf

Department of Victorian Communities – Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria: www.dvc.vic.gov.au/web14/dvc/dvcmain.nsf/allDocs/RWPoC64850047640DE5CA257045007FA734?OpenDocument

Disability Online: www.disability.vic.gov.au

Encyclopaedia on Early Childhood Development – school transition: www.child-encyclopedia.com/en-ca/school-transition/according-to-experts.html

Early Childhood Australia Inc.: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Early Childhood Intervention Australia (Victoria): www.eciavic.org.au

Early Childhood Intervention Services: www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/intervention/about

Early Years Learning Framework: www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx

Every Child Every Chance: www.cyf.vic.gov.au/every-child-every-chance

Good Practices and Pitfalls in Community-Based Capacity Building and Early Intervention Projects: A Toolkit: www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/families/pubs/SFCSevaluation/sfsc-toolkit/Pages/Section1_2.aspx

Gowrie Victoria: www.gowrievictoria.org.au

Family–School Partnerships Framework: A Guide for Schools and Families: www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/A1443756-85CE-4BDD-AED5-644A25C337F1/24590/FamilySchoolPartnershipsFrameworkFINAL.pdf

FKA Multicultural Resource Centre: www.fka.com.au

Indij Readers: www.indijreaders.com.au

Illawarra Transition to School Program: www.transitiontoschool.com.au

Indigenous Australia: www.indigenoustralia.info

Indigenous Portal: www.indigenous.gov.au

Kindergarten Parents Victoria Inc. (KPV): www.kpv.org.au

Koorie Heritage Trust Inc.: www.koorieheritagetrust.com

Koorie Kindergarten Inclusion Kit: www.education.vic.gov.au/ocecd/childrens-services/koorie.html

National Children’s Bureau (UK): www.ncb.org.uk

NSW Public Schools – Transition to Primary School: www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/primary/transition/index.php

Ontario Ministry of Education Planning Entry to School Kit:
www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/planningentry.html

Out of home care: www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/oohc/

Parents Victoria: www.parentsvictoria.asn.au/

Privacy Victoria: www.privacy.vic.gov.au

Program Development and Evaluation: www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande

Raising Children Network: <http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc. (SNAICC): www.snaicc.asn.au

Queensland Government Department of Education and Training Set for Prep:
www.education.qld.gov.au/strategic/advice/earlychildhood/prepkit.html

Share Our Pride: shareourpride.reconciliation.org.au/pages/topics/welcome-to-share-our-pride.php

Sharing Our Journey: www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/healthwellbeing/sharingourjourneykit.pdf

Society for Prevention Research: www.preventionresearch.org

The Asset-based Community Development Institute:
www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd/abcdtopics.html

The Community Portal: www.community.gov.au

The Community Toolbox: www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/getting_organised/setting_up/c_toolbx.html

The Social Audit Cookbook: Recipes for Auditing the Way We Connect:
www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/download/social_audit_cookbook.pdf

Transition: A Positive Start to School: www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/transitionproject/default.htm

Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc (VAEAI): www.vaeai.org.au

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF):
www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/eylf/default.htm

Victorian Kindergarten Policy, Procedures and Funding Criteria Update 2009:
www.education.vic.gov.au/kindergarten/fundingcriteria

Wannik (Learning Together – Journey to Our Future) Education Strategy for Koorie Students: www.education.vic.gov.au/about/directions/aboriginal/default.htm

Welcome to Early Childhood Booklet: www.education.vic.gov.au/welcomeearlychildhood/

Welcome to School Booklet: www.education.vic.gov.au/about/publications/newsinfo/welcomeschool.htm

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook: www.wkkf.org/Pubs/Tools/Evaluation/Pub770.pdf

Yarn Sista Strong: www.yarnstrongsista.com

14. Glossary

- **Aboriginal:** used in this kit represents people from all Indigenous Australian groups (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders). See also Koorie.
- **Assessment:** is a way to understand each child better, reflect on one's present practice and the Transition Learning and Development Statement for that child and for the group as a whole.
- **Childcare services:** services primarily for children aged 0–5 years. They generally open at least eight hours a day, five days a week, excluding public holidays.
- **Council of Australian Governments (COAG):** COAG is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). The role of COAG is to initiate, develop and monitor the implementation of policy reforms that are of national significance and which require cooperative action by Australian governments.
- **Community-centred approaches:** approaches to an issue or problem that meet a particular community's specific needs. For example, two schools within the same suburb or region may approach children's transition to school very differently, each reflecting the particular needs of children in its community.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CALD):** children and families with diverse cultural backgrounds who may speak languages other than English (often used in Australia to refer to groups of people whose culture and/or language is other than the dominant 'Anglo' culture and/or English language).
- **Day care:** means centre-based childcare services.
- **Early childhood:** the period between birth and eight years of age.
- **Early childhood educators:** early childhood practitioners who work directly with children in early childhood services, including unqualified, certificate qualified, diploma qualified and degree qualified (teacher) educators working across all forms of early childhood services.
- **Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS):** services that provide support to children with a disability or developmental delay and to their families, from birth to school entry. Such services include special education, therapy, counselling, service planning and coordination, assistance and support to prior to schooling settings, such as kindergartens and child care services.
- **Early childhood services:** care and education services for children and their families, including childcare, long day care, family day care services, Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) and kindergartens.
- **Educators:** people who work with children between birth to age eight in a service of care and/or education, such as an early childhood service or the early years of compulsory schooling.

- **Kindergarten:** A government-funded educational service provided for children in the year preceding school enrolment. Some kindergartens offer full-day programs; others operate on a sessional basis.
- **Koorie:** refers to specific groups of Australian Aboriginals.
- **Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group:** there are 31 LAECGs across Victoria that can support partnerships between Aboriginal families and educational settings.
- **Orientation to the school:** a process/program in which a school presents itself, its operations and its characteristics to families and their children who will be starting at the school. It can include touring the school, receiving copies of school policies, meeting school staff (especially the principal and the early childhood educators) and participating in school activities.
- **Outside School Hours Care (OSHC):** care of school-aged children before and/or after the school day. In Australia, a school usually provide out of school hours care on its premises.
- **Policy/ies:** planned actions and procedures of governments, education services and other organisations and institutions.
- **Practice:** a way of doing things and carrying out ideas and action plans.
- **Prep year:** the first year of their compulsory years of formal schooling; children in this first year can be between four-and-a-half and six years of age.
- **Promising practices:** strategies, programs, approaches or techniques designed to support positive transition to school for children, families, educators and communities that are typically based on educator-focused wisdom and research, but which are often not yet empirically 'validated' through systematic research and evaluation.
- **Readiness:** state of being prepared for an imminent particular task or event.
- **Schooling (compulsory):** the age at which children can start and complete school. In Victoria, all children between six and sixteen years of age must attend school.

15. Common abbreviations

AEDI:	Australian Early Development Index
CALD:	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
COAG:	Council of Australian Governments
CSO:	Community Service Organisation
DEECD:	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DHS:	Department of Human Services
ECIS:	Early Childhood Intervention Services
ESL:	English as a Second Language
IEP:	Individual Education Plan
KECFO:	Koorie Early Childhood Field Officer
KESO:	Koorie Education Support Officer
KISS:	Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service
OoHC:	Out of Home Care
OSHC:	Outside School Hours Care
PEDS:	Parents Evaluation of Developmental Status
PSD:	Program for Students with Disabilities (in Victorian government schools)
PSFO:	Preschool field officers
SEHQ:	School Entrant Health Questionnaire
SSG:	Student Support Group
VELS:	Victorian Essential Learning Standards

16. Local resources and services

This section is provided for services to include their own local resources and information relevant to transition to school.

