

Strength-based approach

A guide to writing Transition
Learning and Development
Statements



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Contents

Acknowledgements	3
1. Background	4
Purpose of this guide	5
2. Strength-based approach	6
What is it?	6
What it isn't!	6
Underlying principles	6
3. Practices that support the strength-based approach	8
Integrated teaching and learning	8
Reflective practice	8
Equity and diversity	9
Assessment of and for learning and development	10
4. Writing strength-based Statements	11
Suggested inclusions	11
Framing the learning and development message	14
5. Practical examples	15
Outcome 1: Identity	16
Outcome 2: Community	17
Outcome 3: Wellbeing	19
Outcome 4: Learning	21
Outcome 5: Communication	22
Settling into school	24
6. Glossary	26
7. Bibliography	27

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Boroondara Kindergarten
Copperfields Preschool
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Early Childhood Management Services
Elwyn Morey Centre (Early Childhood Intervention Program)
Fyans Park Primary School (Geelong)
Hastings Preschool
Hastings Primary School
Langwarrin Park Preschool
Mount Martha Preschool
Park Lane Preschool
Ripple Logic, Early Childhood Consultancy
St Brendan's Kindergarten (Flemington)
St Francis De Sales (Lynbrook)
St John the Baptist Kindergarten (Sandringham)
St Joseph's Primary School
St Thomas More's Primary School (Belgrave)
Strathfieldsaye Primary School (Bendigo)
The Geelong College Early Learning Centre
University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre
Westbourne Children's Centre

1. Background

Starting school is a major life transition for children and their families which can be both exciting and challenging. Change is a critical feature of transition periods and while most children make the transition to school successfully, it may sometimes be associated with anxiety, uncertainty and confusion.

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 life¹.

In addition, international research has found that a family-centred, strength-based approach is associated with increased service engagement, increased parenting competency, and enhanced interaction among family members.

The *Transition: A Positive Start to School* initiative (Transition Initiative) aims to improve children's experience of starting school by strengthening the development and delivery of transition programs. A key component of the initiative is the *Transition Learning and Development Statement* (Statement)—a tool for the consistent sharing and transfer of information about a child's early learning and development irrespective of the setting to or from which the child is transitioning. Its aim is to support continuity of learning as children transition to primary school.

The Statement outlines a child's strengths, interests and self reflections (child's voice) which educators can use to plan appropriate learning programs that build on children's learning and development, promote children's sense of agency and enhance their overall learning potential.

The child is critical in the transition to school process.

The Statement reflects the five learning and development outcomes identified in the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* (Victorian Framework). The Victorian Framework is a guide for families and educators involved with children's learning and development from birth to eight years of age. It provides information about how children learn and develop and how early childhood educators can use this information to guide their partnerships with families and other educators to improve outcomes for children.

The Transition Initiative was developed with the understanding that transition is a process, not a point-in-time event. It starts well before, and extends far beyond, the first day of school and involves and affects children, families, early childhood services, schools, and outside school hours care (OSHC) services.

The 2010 evaluation revealed an overall positive perception of the Transition Initiative in its first year. Early childhood educators identified the Statement process as the most challenging aspect of the initiative and a key recommendation of the final report was to develop material that further explains the strength-based approach to writing Statements².

¹ Family-School and Community Partnership Bureau, see www.familyschool.org.au/ as cited in the *Transition Resource Kit*, section 3.1 <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/transitionschool/one.htm>

² Success Works 2010 Evaluation Report (in full) is available at: <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/learning/trans-finalreport.pdf>

Purpose of this guide

The purpose of this guide is to deepen educators' understanding of, and to dispel misconceptions about, the strength-based approach to writing Transition Learning and Development Statements.

In doing so, it provides:

- further information on the strength-based approach: what it is, what it isn't
- practices that support the strength-based approach
- suggested inclusions and considerations when framing the learning and development message, and
- practical examples of Statements written using a strength-based approach.

Throughout the guide, these terms are used to collectively describe the following:

Educators	Early childhood education and care, school (prep teachers) and OSHC educators and professionals
Families	Parents, guardians, relatives, foster carers, people whose primary responsibility is the welfare of a child
Services	Early childhood education and care services (public and private), OSHC services and early childhood intervention services

2. Strength-based approach

What is it?

The strength-based approach is an approach to people that views situations realistically and looks for opportunities to complement and support existing strengths and capacities as opposed to focusing on, and staying with, the problem or concern. The problem and the person are separate; however, the problem is never minimised.

The strength-based approach is a paradigm shift.

The strength-based approach represents a paradigm shift—a movement away from a deficit-based approach which can lead to a long list of things considered to be ‘wrong’ with a child’s learning and development or things a child cannot do. The deficit-based model fails to provide sufficient information about strengths and strategies to support a child’s learning and development.

In response to the limitations associated with the deficit-based approach, a growing body of research and evidence has shown support for the strength-based approach that encourages educators to:

- understand that children’s learning is dynamic, complex and holistic
- understand that children demonstrate their learning in different ways
- start with what’s present—not what’s absent—and write about what works for the child.

The strength-based approach consists of questioning strategies to identify *what* works for the child and *how* it works so that those strategies can be continued and developed to match the child’s abilities. In other words, the strength-based approach is about assisting people (educators, children, families) to build a picture of what a child’s learning and development *could* look like in the future.

What it isn’t!

Feedback from the 2010 evaluation of the Transition Initiative revealed early childhood educators’ concern that the strength-based approach was an impediment to relevant information being included in Statements. Some felt they were expected to frame Statements in positive terms and were not able to give a complete picture of a child’s learning and development. In addition, the evaluation noted a concern raised by educators that they are required to write Statements for a ‘dual audience’ i.e. families and prep teachers.

A strength-based approach is not about describing a child’s learning and development in a positive light and neglecting to identify areas for further development and/or areas of concern. Nor is it about framing the learning and development message one way for families and another way for prep teachers – it’s about the consistent sharing of information.

Underlying principles

The underlying principles of the strength-based approach include:

- all children have strengths and abilities
- children grow and develop from their strengths and abilities
- the problem is the problem—the child is not the problem

- when children and those around them (including educators) appreciate and understand the child’s strengths, then the child is better able to learn and develop.

Strengths can be defined as a child’s intellectual, physical and interpersonal skills, capacities, dispositions, interests and motivations. The Ecological Model of Child Development places children at the centre and identifies families and a strong network of services and programs as significant factors that support children’s learning and development within the broad social, political and economic environment. All of these resources may impact on children’s learning and development.

The strength-based approach supports the Victorian Framework’s perspective of children as competent and capable learners and the National Framework’s (*Belonging, Being, Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*) view of each child’s unique qualities and abilities.

Based on this position, it is not appropriate to describe children’s learning through a deficit-based approach.

To further understand the nature of the strength-based approach, the zones of proximal and potential development (see ‘Definitions’ p.26) are concepts that describe the *space or zone* in which a child’s learning and development occurs and in which learning and teaching (pedagogy) takes place.

The strength-based approach to writing Statements encourages educators to look for:

- what a child can already do
- what a child can do when provided with educational support
- what a child will one day be able to do.

The strength-based approach lies in the *space or zone* of teachers identifying what a child can or could achieve when provided with educational support and motivation.

In order to simplify what a strength-based approach is and what it isn’t, a summary is provided at Table 1.

Table 1: Summary clarifiers

Strength-based approach	
IS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • valuing everyone equally and focusing on what the child can do rather than what the child cannot do • describing learning and development respectfully and honestly • building on a child’s abilities within their zones of proximal and potential development • acknowledging that people experience difficulties and challenges that need attention and support • identifying what is taking place when learning and development are going well, so that it may be reproduced, further developed and pedagogy strengthened
is NOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • only about ‘positive’ things • a way of avoiding the truth • about accommodating bad behaviour • fixated on problems • about minimising concerns • one-sided • a tool to label individuals

3. Practices that support the strength-based approach

Integrated teaching and learning

When educators are actively engaged and responsive to children there is not only potential for immediate learning but ongoing assessment opportunities leading to meaningful and comprehensive Statements.

Learning is an active process that must involve children's engagement. Play is essential for its ability to stimulate and integrate a wide range of children's intellectual, physical, social and creative abilities. Active engagement with and attunement to children in their play extends and supports their learning.

When an educator teaches from and supports a child within the zones of proximal and potential development, they are interacting in a way that is consistent with *sustained shared thinking* (referred to as sustained shared conversation in the Victorian Framework. See Glossary p.26). This is an integrated teaching and learning approach where two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, or extend a narrative.

Figure 1: Integrated teaching and learning approaches, Victorian Framework 2009, p 12



Reflective practice

The strength-based approach requires educators to engage in reflective practice. This is best described as a continuous process that involves educators thinking about their own values and professional practice and how their values and practice impact on each child's learning and development.

Reflective practice allows educators to develop a critical understanding of their own practice and continually develop the necessary skills, knowledge and approaches to achieve the best outcomes for children. It also helps educators to create real opportunities for children to express their own thoughts and feelings and actively influence what happens in their lives.

Educators become more effective through critical reflection and a strong culture of professional enquiry.

Table 2 provides educators with important factors to consider when approaching the writing of Statements that are based on the underlying principles of the strength-based approach and the practices that support it.

Table 2: Important factors to consider

Consider	
Relationships and communication	<p>When good relationships and communication exists, families are able to understand the content of the Statement and will support what is written.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality relationships and consistent, authentic communication make the difference. • Engage families in conversations regularly throughout the year. • Engage families before the Statement is written. • Organise an interpreter to help you support the family if needed.³ • Relationships and communication supports a family to celebrate their child’s achievements.
Ethical practice—honesty and transparency	<p>Being honest and transparent when writing Statements is critical.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators should be comfortable discussing what is written with the child’s family and the prep teacher. • Families need to know and understand what the educator has written in the Statement <i>before</i> they consent to that information being shared with the school/OSHC service. • The Statement should contain no surprises. • The Statement should reflect professional judgement of what a child can do, make, write, draw and say, and the strategies that work for that child.
Language—clear, specific and concise	<p>Statements should be written using language that is clear, specific and concise – and make sense to everyone. They should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline a child’s knowledge, interests, achievements and challenges. • Be considerate of family background and cultural needs. • State how best to facilitate and support learning and development. • Be a prompt for conversations with families, schools and OSHC services.

Equity and diversity

Children’s personal, family and cultural histories shape their learning and development. Children learn best when educators respect their diversity and provide them with the best support, opportunities and experiences. To that end, educators:

- ensure that the interests, abilities and culture of every child and their family are understood, valued and respected
- maximise opportunities for every child
- identify areas where focused support or intervention is required to improve each child’s learning and development

³ Further information about supporting diversity can be found in section 6 of the *Transition Resource Kit* at: <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/learning/trkpart2.pdf>

- recognise bi- and multi-lingualism as an asset and support these children to maintain their first language
- promote cultural awareness in all children.

Inclusion is strongly linked to the strength-based approach, and an inclusive early childhood program operates from a strength-based perspective. Early childhood services promote development and belonging for all children by creating high expectations for every child and building from the strength of families and children to ensure access, engagement and the meaningful participation of all children in their learning and development.

Children with a disability or developmental delay may require extra planning so that the necessary adjustments and supports are in place prior to school entry⁴. Educators are encouraged to look beyond the disability or delay when writing Statements and to focus on the child's strengths, interests and abilities.

Similarly for gifted and talented children⁵, the strength-based approach looks toward the child achieving their full potential, and educators are encouraged to provide challenges and opportunities to expand the child's learning and development at a faster pace.

Assessment of and for learning and development

Educators assess the progress of children's learning and development: what children have learnt, what they are ready to learn, and how they can be supported. Assessment is designed to discover what children know and understand, based on what they make, write, draw, say and do.

Assessment is an integral component of any learning and development program. Assessment for learning and development that occurs continually, in different contexts and using different ways best reflects the progress of children's learning and provides a holistic view of the child. Through assessment processes, the educator and the family understand what children are ready to learn and how they can be supported.

Ongoing assessment processes that include a range of methods capture and validate different pathways that children take towards achieving outcomes. Such processes do not focus exclusively on the endpoints of children's learning; they give equal consideration to the 'distance travelled' by individual children and recognise and celebrate not only the giant leaps that children take in their learning, but the small steps as well.

Over time, the documentation that supports assessment of and for learning can be used to understand a child's learning dispositions, learning style, skills and abilities that can support the education and care program and the child's transition into school.

The strength-based approach is fundamental to the effective implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

⁴ If an application is to be submitted for the Program for Students with Disabilities (in Government Schools) additional assessment may need to be carried out. The assessment and application process will be coordinated by the school the child is to attend. See: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/default.htm> also see: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/intervention/publications.htm>

For more information about the process for children entering independent schools see: <http://www.independentschools.vic.edu.au/schools/gov-programs/special-education.htm>

For information about the process for children entering Catholic schools see: http://web.cecv.catholic.edu.au/resources/LNSLN/2011_LNSLN_glines.pdf

⁵ For more information about programs to support gifted and talented children see: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/gifted/highpotential/default.htm>

4. Writing strength-based Statements

Suggested inclusions

Statements need to tell the reader (parent and prep teacher) what learning and development has taken place and what strategies have been used to support the child's learning and development.

Table 3 provides a number of suggested inclusions that can strengthen the information in the Statement and provide the reader with a valuable insight into a child's learning and development.

Table 3: Suggested inclusions for Statements

Consider including		Example
Triggers	Outline what event, situation or circumstance helps or hinders a child's learning and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1:1 adult support in whole group contexts • Paired or small group work
Qualifiers and/or examples	Provide detail on how often something happens, for how long it happens, whether adult support is required and what support has worked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrates for up to 10 minutes • Accesses art-based activities approximately 3 times per week
Dispositions for learning	Describe the child's tendencies to respond in characteristic ways to learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to persevere • Confident with new experiences
Multiple intelligences and learning styles	Explain how the child constructs their understanding of the world and how they convey that understanding to others—in other words, how the child makes and expresses meaning and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through music and rhythm • Hands-on exploration
Strategies	Show what plan, activity or learning sequence has been developed and used in order to enhance a child's learning and development, based on a child's learning dispositions and what they know in any given context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual supports • Verbal and tangible reinforcements

A word about multiple intelligences and learning styles

Children of all ages have varying forms of intelligence that they use to process information and express meaning. There are several different forms of intelligence that children may possess: logical-mathematical, linguistic, musical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Children use one or more of these intelligences to understand and learn new concepts and demonstrate their learning through making, sharing and negotiating meaning.

Educators who have carefully observed a child's skills and learning preferences can encourage children to see and understand a specific issue or phenomenon through one, or a combination of, these intelligences.

Understanding learning styles helps to inform educators about the differences in how children learn or solve problems. Learning styles theory proposes that how much children learn is mostly the outcome of whether the educational experience is geared toward their particular style of learning—in other words, responding to a child’s preferred way of learning.

Multiple intelligence and learning style theories give educators an insight into thinking about the different ways that children make sense of their environment, their relationships, and their learning and development experiences.

Table 4 lists intelligences and how these are demonstrated or evidenced by the child as a preferred learning style.

Table 4: Intelligences and learning styles, Gardner, 1983

Intelligence type	Preferred learning style evidenced by
Verbal-Linguistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> words and language
Logical-Mathematical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> numbers and logic, sequencing, patterns
Musical-Rhythmical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> music, sounds, rhythm
Body-Kinaesthetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> physical experience and movement, touch and feel
Visual-Spatial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pictures, shapes, images and 3D space
Interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> other people’s feelings, human contact, cooperation, communication
Intrapersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> self-awareness, self-reflection, self-discovery

A word about writing versus verbal feedback

Some educators have questioned the importance of providing written documentation of a child’s learning and development as opposed to verbal feedback (i.e. telephone conversation between kindergarten and prep teachers). While face-to-face and telephone conversations are valuable and sometimes necessary, a written record is equally important as it:

- ensures accountability to parents by evidencing what learning and development has taken place
- identifies the child’s baseline skills and development from which the prep teacher can track, evidence, assess and support progress
- provides a record to which parents and educators can refer.

A word about writing versus checklists

A range of methods can be used to document children’s learning and development, including anecdotes, audio recordings, checklists and rating scales, qualitative techniques, narratives or explanations, diagrams and sketches, and learning stories – to name a few.

Given that the purpose of the Transition Learning and Development Statement is to provide rich, detailed and specific information about each individual child, the qualitative (using words) approach to writing Statements allows:

- each child and family to tell their particular story and to capture the nuance, complexity and specificity of a child’s learning and development journey

- school educators to understand the child as an individual so that they can cater to their individual learning and development needs and build strong relationships with the child and family
- the voice of children, families and educators to be captured in an authentic way, in their own words.

By contrast, a checklist refers to a comprehensive list of important or relevant actions, items, or steps to be taken in a specific order. A checklist observes whether criteria have been met (or not met) by ticking a box. Checklists are commonly confused with rating scales, in which a number is often given to ascertain the level of agreement, frequency or importance against particular items.

Closed-ended responses, such as checklists and rating scales, only allow a person to choose within a small, narrowly defined range of options.

While checklists and rating scales are useful ways to provide a summary of children’s learning in a particular area such as physical development, they do not give sufficient information to be useful for sharing with families or for planning to extend learning. In short, checklists and rating scales do not sufficiently reflect the voice and contribution of families and children.

Table 5: Summary uses for checklists

Checklists and/or rating scales	
USEFUL for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making decisions whether to refer onto other services i.e. assessing if the child meets certain referral criteria • comparisons and measurement • understanding the characteristics of a group • grouping people or things by their characteristics • helping to generalise about a group • capturing a set of tasks or a process that needs to be completed, particularly if the process or tasks contain many detailed elements that need to be completed with accuracy
NOT useful for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • capturing specific details that describe a child (e.g. nuance, subtlety, complexity or variation) • understanding an individual’s experiences and views • planning responsive learning experiences for individual children • capturing information that is unexpected or that doesn’t fit within the categories on a checklist • capturing what else children can do—often checklists focus on what children cannot do • capturing how a child learns best

Framing the learning and development message

Identifying what children have learnt and how they are developing enables educators to make curriculum decisions about how best to support and extend that learning.

Table 6 lists some questions to ask when thinking about the learning and development messages to be conveyed in the Statement. This will help make Statements clear, specific and concise as well as respectful and transparent.

These questions also play a role in educators' understanding and expanding pedagogical practice and are a demonstration of reflective practice in action.

Table 6: Questions to ask yourself

Learning and development	<p>Strength and/or achievement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When/where/how/with whom does the child learn best? • What does it look like when the child is learning and developing at their best? • What is an example of this? • How and when does the child prefer to communicate? <p>Concern and/or challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When/where/how does the challenge/concern happen? • How does it impact on the child's learning and development? • What, if anything, sets this off (triggers)? • How often does this happen? • How long does this go on for? • Has this concern/challenge been discussed with the family? If yes, what did they say? • Does it happen at home? If yes, what is the family's strategy at home?
Disposition for learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the child generally respond to learning opportunities?
Learning style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the child demonstrate understanding or learning? • What is the child's preferred learning style(s)? • How does the child understand and process information?
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have I observed that works well for the child? • What tools, activities or learning sequences bring out the best in the child? • What has been or can be done to support the child's learning and development where there is a concern/challenge? • What supports/external services are already in place?

5. Practical examples

The Victorian Framework recognises that every child:

- will take a unique path towards the five learning and development outcomes
- has the ability to learn and develop
- has personal, family and cultural histories that shape their learning and development.

The Victorian Framework also recognises that:

- some children require more support(s) and different learning experiences and opportunities to help them learn and develop
- having high expectations is important in achieving better outcomes for the most vulnerable children.

The following section offers some of the learning and development messages that educators may need to convey to parents and prep teachers.

Examples have been grouped against the five learning and development outcomes as reflected in the National and Victorian Frameworks and the Statement, which are:

1. Children have a strong sense of identity (**Identity**)
2. Children are connected with and contribute to their world (**Community**)
3. Children have a strong sense of wellbeing (**Wellbeing**)
4. Children are confident and involved learners (**Learning**)
5. Children are effective communicators (**Communication**)

It is equally important to apply the strength-based approach when writing information about assisting a child to settle into school. The final set of examples refers to things that might help the child settle into school. That section can be found in the *Transition Learning and Development Statement—Part 2: the early childhood educator*.

Examples show various learning and development achievements and/or challenges written using the strength-based approach and provide comments from school educators explaining why the examples are helpful.

When reading through the examples, note that:

- they can be placed against more than one outcome area
- they are written clearly and succinctly—the number of words used on average is 120 and up to 170 for more complex issues
- some examples are deliberately written as short, precise sentences to illustrate that a ‘dot point’ style works well when the points are meaningful and clear.

Outcome 1: Identity

Strength-based example	This is helpful because it tells the reader...
<p>David enjoys being in the company of his peers. He often engages in dramatic play and will act out various roles (e.g. mother, father) with 2-3 other children. When playing, he confidently expresses his ideas and asks other children for help.</p> <p>When faced with a new learning activity, he benefits from clear 1:1 instructions so he can focus. Once focussed, he will persist with challenging tasks (e.g. fine motor based activities) especially when given encouragement and praise.</p>	<p>David enjoys dramatic play</p> <p>He requires adult assistance to focus his learning</p> <p>David responds well to praise and encouragement</p>
<p>Olivia has very positive interactions in a range of situations with her peers and teachers. This is her first year in this service and she settled very quickly and formed trusting and mutual relationships with other children and teachers. Her relationships in play are very positive and her input to group play is constant. When playing, she shows awareness of the perspectives of others and shares play materials with her peers. Olivia is able to reflect on actions and consider consequences for her and others and she recognises her achievements and those of others e.g. "You did a good job with eating your lunch today Mia". She shows great pride in her work, often articulating this to staff by saying "I am a great artist!"</p>	<p>Olivia demonstrates social and emotional skills which are consistent with typical development</p> <p>She is able to reflect on actions and consequences</p> <p>Olivia has a positive sense of self</p> <p>She identifies herself as an artist and demonstrates confidence in her abilities</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angus is highly communicative and frequently initiates conversations with adults/peers to express his ideas. • He has developed close friendships with a wide range of children in the group and varies the children that he will play with from day to day. • He lives with his grandmother (his primary caregiver), does not have any siblings. He has strong relationships with his cousins (all of whom attend the school he will be starting at). • He likes to bring various things from home to show others what his grandmother has made for him. Angus enjoys being part of large and small group activities and often shows care for others, e.g. making room for a peer next to him or helping a friend with a difficult task. 	<p>Angus shows care for others</p> <p>He has a range of close friendships and will vary who he plays with</p> <p>Identifies living arrangements</p> <p>Angus shares aspects of his culture with others</p>
<p>Linh is confident in her cultural background as a Vietnamese-Australian and understands that other children and families have different cultural backgrounds and languages. Over the year, Linh made pleasing progress with her ability to socialise and play with a range of children in her class. Initially, she only played with a small group of Vietnamese-speaking girls. However, by the end of the year she has shown confidence in playing with many of the children in the group.</p>	<p>Linh recognises cultural differences</p> <p>Linh has improved her language and communication skills</p> <p>Linh shows confidence interacting with others</p>

Outcome 2: Community

Strength-based example	This is helpful because it tells the reader...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ilaria enjoys being part of group learning projects and is always actively involved. She listens to her peers and will respond with enthusiasm to their ideas. At times, she will even congratulate them for their contributions e.g. "I like how you made the tree different colours Joe". • Throughout the year, Ilaria's awareness of cultural diversity has significantly increased. She has shown a keen interest in and will talk about the different ways that people look. • A series of art based projects around diversity have helped to extend her knowledge about various cultures and she has benefitted from learning using a 'sensory' approach (e.g. hand painting in various skin tones and learning traditional Indian dance). 	<p>Ilaria responds positively to others</p> <p>She listens to her peers</p> <p>Ilaria notices differences between people and is interested in learning about various cultures</p>
<p>Kobi is highly imaginative and will often engage one or two other children to tell them about his ideas. He particularly enjoys outside play when he has access to materials where he can make various constructions with his peers. He contributes ideas to overcome problems (e.g. "no, that will be a bit too heavy") and will accept others' suggestions that are different from his own. When a child has been excluded by others, he will notice this and find ways to include the child in the group activity (e.g. handing them a shovel to dig with). He takes care of the natural environment whilst playing and has been observed walking between plants and only taking sticks that have fallen to the ground.</p>	<p>Kobi contributes his ideas and identifies possible obstacles</p> <p>He accepts the suggestions/contributions of others</p> <p>Kobi shows care for others and will take action to be inclusive</p>
<p>Gemma is learning how to respond to others' contributions and ideas in more positive ways. Dramatic play and puppet role playing have been used with some success to help her understand the feelings and points of views of others. Gemma is able to recognise how others are feeling and with adult prompting/modelling, is able to respond empathetically (e.g. getting a chair or tissue for a peer). Gemma's ability to show care for the classroom environment has vastly improved and she rarely requires reminders to tidy up with the group.</p>	<p>Gemma has developed ways to positively respond to her peers</p> <p>Her ability to help with tidying up has improved</p>

Strength-based example	This is helpful because it tells the reader...
<p>The kindergarten and Sean’s family have focussed on his social skill development and he continues to benefit from adult support to manage his interactions with other children. Sean can now manage turn-taking activities with minimal adult reminders and this has contributed to him beginning to develop friendships. At kindergarten and home, an egg timer has been used to help with turn taking.</p> <p>We’ve used his love of cars and vigorous play to support his participation in the program and interactions with peers. This has provided a focus for him and led to an increase in his ability to respond positively to his peers, reducing his aggressive behaviours towards others.</p> <p>Sharing toys, play spaces and movement between activities can trigger aggressive behaviour (pushing, hitting). Giving Sean a responsible task and having an adult engage him in conversation about the task helps him to move into the next activity. With these strategies in place, a significant reduction in aggressive behaviour has been noted (i.e. 1 or 2 per month).</p>	<p>Sean can be physically aggressive towards others</p> <p>Triggers for aggression are identified</p> <p>Integrating his love of cars and vigorous play will help him engage with the school curriculum</p> <p>Sean’s family have been involved in supporting the development of his social skills</p>

Outcome 3: Wellbeing

Strength-based example	This is helpful because it tells the reader...
<p>Mei is a quiet and reserved child. She settles best in the morning if given time to say goodbye to her mum and then by taking her hand and leading her to the mat for an activity. This usually takes about 10 minutes.</p> <p>Mei will respond to an adult positively if she is able to keep her special bunny with her, especially at the start of the day and doesn't need it as much later in the day. I have discussed Mei's separation anxiety with her parents and they are happy with our approach to settle her. Throughout the day, Mei will join in activities and play alongside other children. She is beginning to initiate conversations with peers to share her interests.</p>	<p>Mei needs the security of her bunny and a routine to settle – taking her by the hand helps to calm her</p> <p>Mei's family are aware of her separation anxiety and are supportive of strategies used</p> <p>She is beginning to share her interests and learning</p>
<p>Sharon uses appropriate verbal communication most of the time. When initiating play and contact with others, she will use physical actions such as firmly wrapping arms around her peers, pushing, hitting or taking items away from other children. Sharon wants to involve others in her active play and she is beginning to develop appropriate ways of having other children join her. I've worked with Sharon to model appropriate behavior and to understand that other children want their own 'personal time' and that it's ok. She has come a long way in understanding how to use her words instead of physical actions and will do well with being reminded gently and praised when she does.</p>	<p>Sharon uses appropriate language most of the time</p> <p>Sharon has difficulty understanding boundaries but responds well to adult-modeled behaviour</p>
<p>Andrew continues to need support to use the toilet. We have supported him by establishing a regular routine of reminding him every two hours. He will benefit from being introduced to and shown how to use the urinal and toilet blocks at school. He may need continued support in going to the toilet for undressing. He prefers privacy but feels comfortable knowing an adult is present nearby. If an accident occurs, Andrew may withdraw from a group or activity and cry. The best way to help him re-enter the group has been to take him to a private place to be changed. Reading him a quick story before he returns to the group to distract him from focusing on the accident also works well.</p> <p>Andrew has undergone a medical assessment (organised by his parents) with no medical conclusion determined.</p>	<p>What to do when toileting accidents happen – privacy, read a story before entering the group</p> <p>Reminding routine helps support Andrew to manage himself</p> <p>Assessment undertaken but no medical conclusions</p>

Strength-based example	This is helpful because it tells the reader...
<p>Oliver has a very close friendship with another boy going to the same school as him. He enjoys playing games based on dinosaurs and enjoys acting out various types of dinosaurs with his friend. At times, Oliver needs to be reminded not to push/scratch his friend during these games and personalised social stories have been used successfully to further promote this message.</p> <p>Oliver enjoys his time with his friend so much that recently, on the days when his friend has been absent, he has been very upset (crying throughout the day) and has found it difficult to engage in activities without 1:1 adult support. Oliver would benefit from being placed in the same class as his friend and/or receiving support to develop friendships with other children in paired and small group activities based around his interests of dinosaurs, cars and trains.</p>	<p>Personalised social stories have been used to reduce his physical aggression</p> <p>Oliver needs support to develop friendships with other children – possibly in paired or small group contexts</p> <p>He has as strong interests in dinosaurs, cars and trains</p>

Outcome 4: Learning

Strength-based example	This is helpful because it tells the reader...
<p>During the first half of the year Mia has shown an excellent ability to manage time and resources to complete short tasks. This has been particularly evident through her individual contributions to group projects. She shows persistence when working on set tasks and keenly revisits tasks over a few days. She has the ability to take initiative and work independently. She shows a strong interest in mathematics and is able to recognise numbers and represents them using objects e.g. 4 – makes four play dough cakes.</p>	<p>Mia shows positive dispositions for learning: persistence and review, initiative and independence</p> <p>She is able to recognise numbers and represent them in various ways</p>
<p>Thomas prefers reading and drawing things that are relevant and meaningful to him. He may need help with some formal learning skills (e.g. writing), as he's just begun to develop the necessary attention and concentration. With encouragement, Thomas is able to write his parents names and his own name.</p> <p>He willingly shares stories about animals and discusses scientific concepts such as 'how birds can fly' and 'what various animals eat'.</p> <p>He doesn't often choose to take part in creative, imaginative play; instead he's interested in 'real' things. When he participates in computer based activities, he will engage more creatively, e.g. draw various pictures.</p>	<p>Thomas has a learning preference for 'real' things</p> <p>He may need support with more creative or imaginative learning</p> <p>Thomas is developing early writing skills</p>
<p>Dominic is a 'hands on' learner, learning best from tactile, creative and concrete experiences. He has well-developed problem solving skills. He gives a lot of thought to planning and building his block constructions, collages and Lego projects.</p> <p>He is inquisitive and curious about the world with an infectious enthusiasm and keen desire for knowledge. Dominic has a great ability to retain and recall information.</p> <p>At times, Dominic may be distracted by other children or his imaginings, particularly in large group situations, and he may find it hard to concentrate on listening to an adult. Dominic responds well to visual signals such as lists, badges, signs, photos and auditory cues such as quiet gentle music.</p>	<p>Dominic prefers a kinaesthetic learning style</p> <p>He displays learning dispositions such as: eagerness and curiosity</p> <p>Dominic is effectively re-directed through the use of photos, signs and music</p>
<p>Tinh has learnt that she can use books to find out new information. For example, in a recent science experience about how tadpoles grow into frogs, Tinh used a photographic book to work out the progression of growth before returning to the activity and arranging the tadpoles/frogs in order of growth. She then shared with her peers what she had learnt and listened to their thoughts about what tadpoles ate. Tinh is incredibly eager to learn and will often use questioning to gain a deeper understanding. She has strong visual learning skills and is able to recognise and talk about numbers up to 30.</p>	<p>Tinh resources her own learning by using books</p> <p>She displays the learning dispositions of curiosity and enthusiasm</p> <p>Tinh has a strong visual learning style</p>

Outcome 5: Communication

Strength-based example	This is helpful because it tells the reader...
<p>Eve has benefitted greatly from her second year at four year old kindergarten. She has made pleasing progress in all areas of her development, especially language and literacy. She can write and recognise all the letters in her name and now uses sentences of up to 7 words e.g. "Kim likes the blue and green dots".</p> <p>Eve can be easily distracted and it has helped to sit her in positions of least distraction (e.g. front of class/away from windows) so that she can focus fully on the task at hand.</p>	<p>Eve has made significant progress in the area of language and literacy</p> <p>She would benefit from sitting away from possible distractions</p>
<p>George's first language is Greek and he communicates confidently in Greek with family members.</p> <p>He had a long period (about 6 months) of silence before he started to use English. This was a very valuable time for him as it was important to give him space and time to observe, listen and construct language in his own way. He may return to a silent period when starting school, as he adjusts to a new environment. His parents are aware that the transition to school may impact on his talking initially.</p> <p>Some things that have helped George's ESL development include: using pictures and objects to show him what you are talking about, repeating simple phrases related to what he is doing, play based learning and partnering him with a friend during new and whole group activities.</p> <p>Other children also learnt some simple Greek words for greetings, colours and numbers, to share in his culture and have him feel a part of the group.</p>	<p>George is learning English as a Second Language (ESL)⁶</p> <p>George may enter a period of silence upon entry to school</p> <p>Visual materials and partnering him with another child have assisted his ESL development</p> <p>Check if a teacher/parent is available on day one who speaks Greek to assist him, the family and the prep teacher</p>
<p>Dane enjoys expressing his ideas by speaking and acting. He enjoys using imaginative play to tell stories and has a strong interest in all sorts of animals, often pretending to be certain animals to express his feelings. He likes being a lion when he's upset or angry and uses his voice (roaring noises) to let others know that he doesn't want to play with them. He also uses language effectively to direct other children when setting up role plays and acting out scenarios.</p>	<p>Dane prefers to express his feelings non-verbally</p> <p>Dane is creative and explores new ideas and concepts through imaginative play and story telling</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ruby has increased her spontaneous communication with adults and peers substantially during the course of the year. She has received monthly speech pathology support focussing on improving her articulation and she is now understood by familiar people. Ruby is more willing to persist and help the listener to understand what she is saying, using a range of non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures. She has a great network of friends at kindergarten and is increasingly confident in initiating play with peers rather than continuing to follow the lead of others. 	<p>Ruby has received monthly speech pathology support</p> <p>She has made progress with her clarity of speech and social confidence</p> <p>Ruby is persistent and resourceful in helping others understand her</p>

⁶ The alternative term is EAL - English as an Additional Language.

Strength-based example	This is helpful because it tells the reader...
<p>Cameron has a diagnosis of Down's Syndrome and has received fortnightly support from a speech pathologist to develop his listening, attention and understanding, and use of verbal and non-verbal communication.</p> <p>Cameron understands simple questions and short instructions, e.g. 'where's the pig?' and benefits from the use of gestures, signs and pictures to aid his overall understanding.</p> <p>He uses a combination of single words and Makaton signs to make requests, comments and to join in songs. He enjoys group song times very much and the use of puppets, props and musical instruments has helped to keep and develop his attention during group activities. This increased level of attention has led to him learning song words, actions, turn-taking and some key words/signs associated with his favourite songs (e.g. Old McDonald).</p> <p>A kindergarten staff member attended a Makaton signing workshop which proved invaluable in facilitating Cameron's use and understanding of signs and verbal language. The most useful/relevant Makaton signs for Cameron have been collated by his parents and staff and are attached to this Statement⁷.</p>	<p>Cameron best accesses learning through singing</p> <p>The use of props and musical instruments has helped increase Cameron's participation in group activities</p> <p>Cameron communicates using single words and Makaton signs and is able to understand simple instructions and questions</p> <p>Staff training in Makaton key word signing would facilitate his engagement</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diego's primary language is Spanish. At home, he communicates confidently with his family in Spanish and can write his parents' and brother's names. • He uses English during play with cars and figures to create his own stories. • When he has not understood an instruction, he observes and copies what other children are doing. • He knows some English letters and their corresponding sounds. He shows a keen interest in print and understands that what he says can become words. He can match symbols and tell the difference between shapes, e.g. circles, squares and triangles. • Diego is beginning to contribute ideas in group settings, often coming to the front of the group to point something out in a book. 	<p>Diego speaks Spanish confidently</p> <p>He uses English in play</p> <p>Diego uses context to make meaning of what is being said to him in English</p> <p>He visually discriminates between shapes and symbols in a sequence.</p> <p>He is beginning to contribute non-verbally during whole group activities</p>
<p>Julia has an extensive expressive and receptive vocabulary and is using language to communicate complex ideas and thoughts. She also understands concepts about print and her parents have been providing a literacy rich environment to extend her learning in this area.</p>	<p>Julia is ready to engage with literacy learning</p> <p>Her parents are supporting her abilities in this area</p>

⁷ As this is an example only, the actual Makaton signs referred to are not attached to this document.

Settling into school

Strength-based example	This is helpful because it tells the reader...
<p>Thuy has made a number of strong friendships that are important to her and she'll miss the regular interactions with her closest friends. Thuy's older brother and sister attend the same school that she'll be going to and she has commented that she is "excited to play with the big kids".</p> <p>We've had a few small group discussions about starting school and Thuy has always responded well. She may need some initial support to be introduced to and play with new children in the classroom.</p> <p>Giving her some extra responsibilities in the classroom will make her feel important and help her adjust to the new room.</p> <p>Thuy loves to dress up and has particular interests in horses and ponies.</p>	<p>Thuy's siblings are at her school</p> <p>Provide Thuy with responsibilities as a strategy to help her adjust in her new environment</p> <p>Thuy likes to dress up and has an interest in horses/ponies</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lucas is the first child in his family to start school and is not familiar with the school environment. • He has really enjoyed his time at kindergarten and has often commented that he only wants to go to school if it's like kindergarten. • Lucas has not had the opportunity to visit the school grounds and may benefit from being included in a buddy program during playtime to help orientate him. • Include his favourite activities from kindergarten e.g. blocks and/or play-dough, and encourage him to show or talk about what he did at kindergarten. 	<p>Lucas is anxious about starting school</p> <p>He may benefit from a buddy program during play time</p> <p>Provide him with opportunities to play with blocks and/or play dough on his first day of school</p>
<p>Ellen has made pleasing progress with her ability to follow the routine at kindergarten this year. She responds well to the use of visual schedules to show her what she'll be doing during the day and if there are any changes to the routine.</p> <p>Sometimes moving to snack/story time can cause Ellen to feel distressed. Giving her an object to hold that gives a clue to what is happening next (e.g. hat for outside, animal book for inside) have helped to reduce her anxiety. In addition, Ellen responds very well when adults allow her opportunities for physical/outdoor play prior to sitting down for more structured activities. Ellen enjoys playing with colourful/shiny objects and wind-up toys.</p> <p>Ellen is currently seeing a psychologist who has indicated that she is undergoing assessments to determine whether she fits the criteria for a diagnosis of autism.</p>	<p>Ellen's ability to follow the routine is enhanced by the use of visual schedules</p> <p>Transition times can be distressing for Ellen and transitional objects have been used successfully</p> <p>Ellen benefits from doing physical activity prior to structured learning experiences</p> <p>She is being assessed to determine if she has autism</p>

Strength-based example	This is helpful because it tells the reader...
<p>Mohammed is excited and positive about starting school and I expect that he will have a smooth and successful transition, especially since he has close friends who will be going to the same school.</p> <p>Mohammed embraced the opportunity to speak with the school children who visited the kindergarten, asking them many questions about the play equipment and teachers.</p> <p>He displays a lot of confidence engaging in conversation with adults and children and he likes to involve himself in play with others rather than working alone. He has strong interests in reptiles, messy play and ball games.</p>	<p>Mohammed is positive and eager to start school</p> <p>He has participated in a transition to school activity – reciprocal visit</p> <p>He has friends starting school with him</p> <p>He prefers to play with others</p>
<p>Sophia is excited about going to school and has thought a lot about her prep teacher “I wonder if my teacher will be tall?”</p> <p>Sophia uses a wheelchair and has movement in her upper body, but not her lower body. She moves around the kindergarten classroom confidently and asks adults for help if needed.</p> <p>She really enjoys group songs and stories and eagerly participates in games like ‘I spy’. During outdoor play, she enjoys ball games (e.g. basketball and skittles) and loves to explore in the sensory trays (e.g. sand and water).</p> <p>Some suggested adjustments to make Sophia more comfortable in a prep classroom are things such as using small chairs for all children to sit on at carpet time, setting classroom expectations around helping one another, arranging tables and chairs with ample space between them, making sure materials and activities e.g. sand box are placed down low or within reach of sitting position.</p>	<p>Sophia is excited about starting school</p> <p>She is confident manoeuvring her wheelchair and asks for help if needed</p> <p>She enjoys singing, stories and ball games</p> <p>Sophia will benefit from ample space to move around the classroom and access to a range of outdoor activities with which she is able to play/use</p>

6. Glossary

Dispositions (for learning)	Enduring habits of mind and actions, and tendencies to respond in characteristic ways to situations. For example, maintaining an optimistic outlook, being willing to persevere, approaching new experiences with confidence (EYLF, DEEWR, 2009 p.45).
Inclusion	Involves taking into account all children's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes. The intent is to ensure that all children's experiences are recognised and valued, and that all children have equitable access to resources and participation, and opportunities to demonstrate their learning and to value difference (VEYLDF, 2009, p51).
Sustained Shared Thinking (SST)	Is an integrated teaching and learning approach where two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, or extend a narrative (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).
Zone of proximal development	Refers to the range of abilities that the child can perform with assistance, but cannot yet perform independently. Put another way, it is the gap between what the child has already mastered (actual development) and what he or she can achieve when provided with educational support (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Gauvain & Cole, 1997).
Zone of potential development	Is an extension of proximal development and refers to the child's sphere of possible (future) engagement. Motives are generated in the child when he or she observes others in activities that are socially and culturally significant, and reflect important and meaningful experiences. The child sees what they will one day be able to do themselves. In other words, engagement potential is generated for future activities (Kravstova, 2008 as cited in Fler, 2010).

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