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.

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.
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.