7. Children with disabilities and developmental delay

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.
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
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](http://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.


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.