By understanding children’s development at school entry, communities can begin to examine the ecological or environmental factors that may be influencing child development outcomes in their community. The ‘ecological’ model of child development (see Figure 2) originates from Bronfenbrenner (1979).

As the following illustrates, parents and family remain significant influences throughout childhood, but other environmental influences, such as peers and the school environment, also play a role. The larger social structure, economic, political and cultural environment impacts on the resources available to families and to children. The character of the communities in which children live, including the economic climate and accessibility of appropriate services, has significant influence on children’s development (Sanson et. al., 2002).
There is evidence that long term positive outcomes can be achieved through interventions in the early years.

These are results from the Perry Preschool Project, a research trial in the 1970’s which found that at age 27:

For men who had been in the program:
- Less arrests
- Less need for social services
- More likely to be homeowner at age 27yo

For women:
1. Less likely to have needed special education program
2. More likely to have graduated high school
3. More likely to be married at an older age
There are therefore a number of ways to reduce risk and promote protective factors by addressing:

• Poverty
• Access to health services
• Addressing family functioning and family violence

And ALSO

• Promoting literacy for the child and the parent
• Promoting parenting support
• Ensuring the child attends a preschool program
• Investment in the early years of life before the formal school system, gives the greatest return.

• Investing in the early years is cost effective and is associated with improved outcomes later in life.

• Gaps in child development trajectories stay mostly constant after eight years of age – that is, beyond the age of eight, school environments can only play a small role in reducing these gaps.

• Whilst it is never too late to invest efforts to shift developmental trajectories, the cost and effort required increase substantially after the early years period.
This graph based on Feinstein’s (2003) research using data on a cohort of British children, shows how high SES children (the blue lines) tend to progress well between 22 months and 10 years of age (and particularly between 22 months and 40 months) whether they have high or low measured IQ at 22 months. The reverse true for children from low SES backgrounds (the red lines).