

Transition to school at Marsden Road Public School

Case study

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



Under the School Success Model, the NSW Department of Education is committed to ensuring that every student, teacher, leader and school improves every year. This case study forms part of a series to support the NSW Department of Education's strategic goal of 'All children make a strong start in life and learning and make a successful transition to school'. A successful transition to school is about laying strong foundations for year-on-year improvement by ensuring that our students are engaged and ready for challenge. The case studies refer to and draw on the department's new Strong and successful start to school transition guidelines.

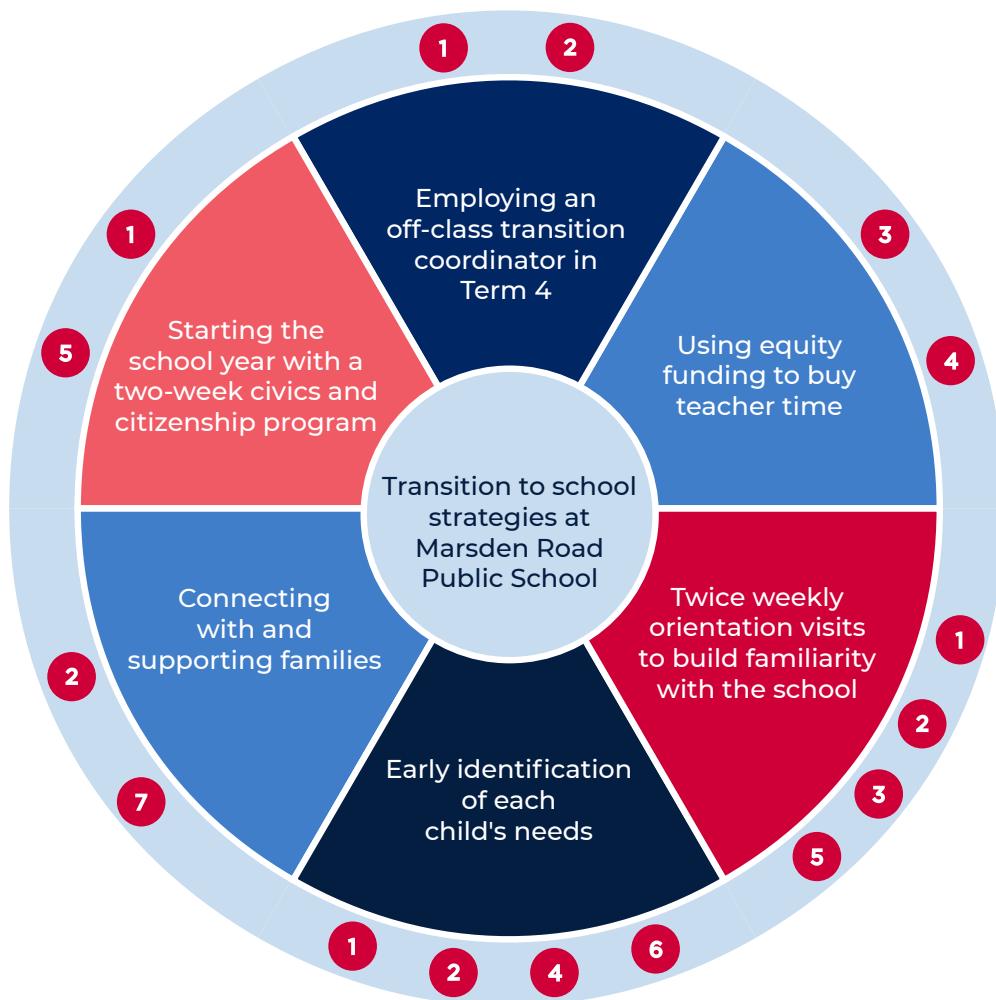
For more information about how the NSW Department of Education is supporting a strong and successful transition to school, visit the NSW Department of Education [Early Learning](#) and [Early Childhood Education](#) web pages. For an overview of the key findings from literature on the transition to school, see CESE's [Transition to school literature review](#).



Note. Fieldwork for the case studies was undertaken after the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, but before the 2021 Delta outbreak.

What works to support a strong and successful transition to school at Marsden Road Public School

The six strategies in the diagram below outline some of the ways Marsden Road Public School supports a strong and successful transition to school. The strategies overlap and connect with each other, and there is strong alignment between these strategies, the [School Excellence Framework](#) and the NSW Department of Education's [Strong and successful start to school transition guidelines](#).



Principles and practices of the Transition to school guidelines:



- 1 High expectations and equity
- 2 Collaboration and partnerships
- 3 Wellbeing and secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- 4 Use of data to inform practice and ongoing learning and reflective practice
- 5 Continuity of learning
- 6 Assessment
- 7 Wellbeing and respect for diversity
- 8 Explicit teaching

School context

Marsden Road Public School is a large primary school located in south-west Sydney with more than 700 students. It has a FOEI¹ of 135 and a highly transient student body. The school serves a diverse community, with approximately 90% of students coming from a language background other than English. Marsden Road Public School is proud of its varied multicultural population, with 57 cultural backgrounds represented and around 20% of students coming from a refugee background. Two-thirds of students have been speaking English for three years or less and Arabic is the dominant language spoken at home by students and their families.

Marsden Road Public School has a reputation for excellence in teaching and learning. This has resulted in educators from across Australia visiting the school to observe their instructional practices, including the delivery of systematic synthetic phonics. In 2017, Marsden Road Public School became an Early Action for Success² school, and in 2020 the school self-assessed as Excelling in all 14 elements of the School Excellence Framework (SEF) including in the 'Transitions and continuity of learning' theme.



Transition to school at Marsden Road Public School: an overview

Marsden Road Public School's transition program is carefully planned for a cohort of children and their families who have had limited experience of school-like settings in NSW. This is because the majority of children who start Kindergarten either have not attended any early childhood education (ECE) service, or have attended only one day each week in the year before school. Children who have attended an ECE service come from approximately 20 different settings. Marsden Road Public School's transition program is also purposefully designed to ensure that language barriers do not prevent parents and carers from engaging fully in their child's transition to school.

Supporting a strong and successful transition is a whole-school priority at Marsden Road Public School. This is demonstrated by the principal's ongoing commitment to invest significant time and resources into their transition practices so that children are ready for school and the learning environment is ready for all children. The Marsden Road Public School staff do not regard the transition to school as a discrete program. Instead, it is an important first step in a carefully considered sequence of interconnected learning experiences aimed at setting up all children for a successful primary school career. The school attributes much of its success to effective collaboration between the large team that supports the transition process.

“When children first come to school we want them to be emotionally and socially ready to come to school, that’s so important ... we want them to be comfortable and we want the environment familiar.”

Manisha Gazula, Principal

¹ Family Occupation and Education Index – a school-level index of educational disadvantage with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 50. Higher values indicate greater levels of need.

² Early Action for Success is a NSW government initiative that aims to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills through a targeted approach in the early years of schooling.

Marsden Road Public School: transition to school strategies

Employing an off-class transition coordinator in Term 4

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 1 High expectations and equity
- 2 Collaboration and partnerships

The principal sets aside a significant amount of equity funding³ each year to support a strong and successful transition to school. Some of this funding is used to employ an off-class transition coordinator who is responsible for organising much of the school's transition program, including student orientation visits. The transition coordinator works collaboratively with families and other school staff to ensure that the learning environment is ready before the first day of Kindergarten.

“I think that if you’re going to run a transition program, you need to know your community and you need to know your school priorities, what’s important to your school. There’s things that are general that are important for all kids who transition to school, but there’s some things that you might specifically want as a school to make sure it is known.”

Kathy Schey, Teacher

The preference of school leaders is to appoint a transition coordinator who has a strong understanding of Marsden Road Public School's distinct culture, context, systems and expectations. In recent years, this has been a teacher returning from leave in Term 4. When it is possible, the transition coordinator is appointed to Kindergarten the following year to support learning continuity and provide children a greater sense of familiarity with their new learning environment.

Using equity funding to buy teacher time

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 3 Wellbeing and secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- 4 Use of data to inform practice and ongoing learning and reflective practice

Marsden Road Public School also uses equity funding to support a strong and successful transition to school by releasing the deputy principal from some of her regular duties in Term 3. The deputy principal uses this time to complete in-depth enrolment interviews with every incoming Kindergarten child and their family. This involves approximately 130 interviews, and translation services are offered to families in advance of their interviews. The school has found that taking the time to get to know parents and carers early in the transition process helps to settle any anxiety they have about their child starting school.

“So, I guess that’s where I see the value of actually meeting one-on-one with families because in that initial interview I can put a lot of their worries at ease. I know what their concerns are and we can start to address those from day dot.”

Emma Meddows, Deputy Principal

From the interviews, the deputy principal creates individual student profiles that Kindergarten teachers use to inform their planning and prepare the learning environment for incoming students, supporting a continuity of learning. The deputy principal also uses the interview data to identify what supports need to be in place for identified children and liaises with the transition coordinator and assistant principal to make this happen before the start of Kindergarten.

³ Equity funding is provided to schools to address the additional learning needs of students and reduce the impact of disadvantage on student outcomes.



Twice weekly orientation sessions to build familiarity with the school

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 1 High expectations and equity
- 2 Collaboration and partnerships
- 3 Wellbeing and secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- 5 Continuity of learning

As the majority of children start Kindergarten with limited experience of school-like settings, regular orientation visits are an important part of Marsden Road Public School's transition program. Children attend two 2-hour orientation sessions for eight weeks in Term 4 on consistent days and times. The orientation sessions are carefully planned and delivered by the off-class transition coordinator who is supported by a designated school learning support officer (SLSO). When social distancing restrictions are not in place, the transition coordinator dedicates time to speaking with parents and carers after each orientation session to discuss any concerns that they have about their child starting school and to answer questions.

Marsden Road Public School uses the orientation sessions to help children become familiar with the school environment, expectations and what learning looks like in the classroom. The transition coordinator and designated SLSO use nursery rhymes to develop phonological awareness, take children on tours of the school, teach children how to walk in lines, and start embedding a culture of high expectations by accepting nothing less than a child's best effort. Marsden Road Public School teachers report that the introduction of regular orientation sessions four years ago has resulted in children starting Kindergarten more settled and ready to learn.

“The program itself that we run, it’s designed to reflect what happens in the classroom. So, it starts with a morning routine which is something that we do K to 6 at our school which is about building academic schema ... We do phonological awareness skills. So, we do nursery rhymes, and we talk about nursery rhymes and the words and the rhyming words and all those pre-reading skills that children need to get before they can start to read.”

Amanda Amiet, Assistant Principal

Early identification of each child's needs

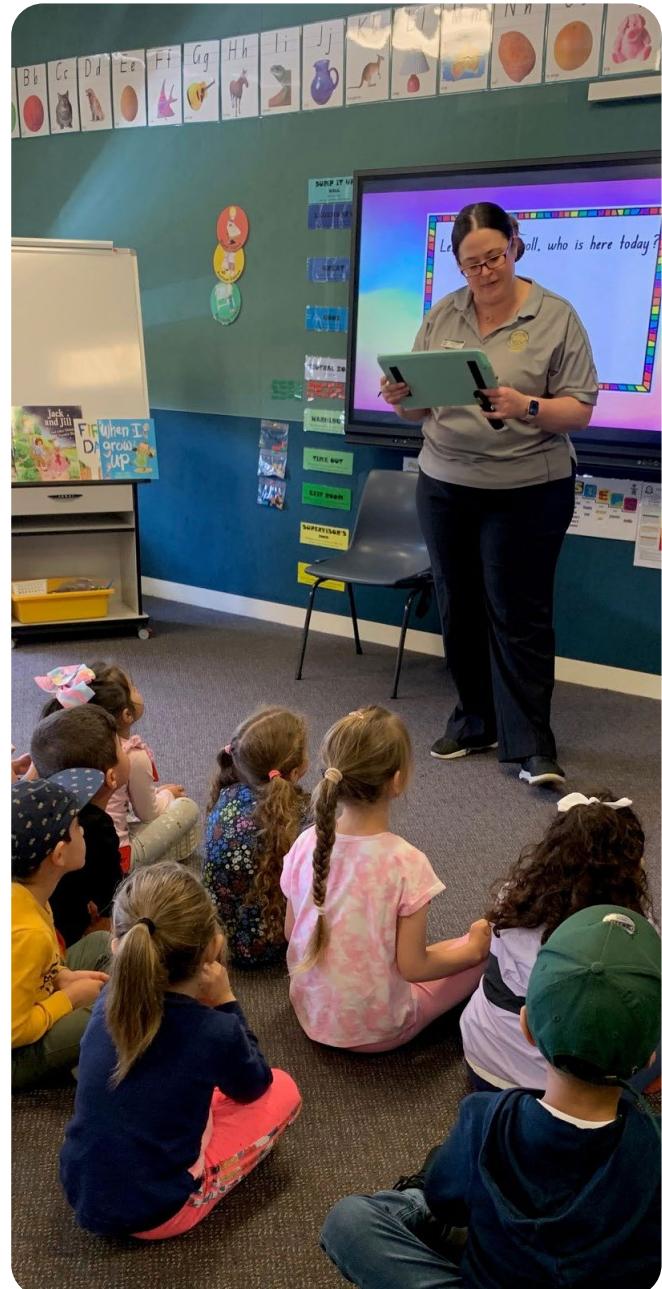
Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 1 High expectations and equity
- 2 Collaboration and partnerships
- 4 Use of data to inform practice and ongoing learning and reflective practice
- 6 Assessment

Marsden Road Public School also uses the orientation sessions to become familiar with the individual needs of each child before they start Kindergarten. One of the ways the school achieves this is by releasing the assistant principal from her regular duties to observe the orientation sessions. The assistant principal and transition coordinator both use an in-house observation sheet to record each child's strengths and possible areas for development. Both teachers add this information to each child's student profile. Marsden Road Public School also uses Transition to School statements from ECE services to find out information about what children know and can do. Statements for children that attended an ECE service are added to individual student profiles. Kindergarten teachers are expected to use the profiles to inform planning and differentiated instruction.

Marsden Road Public School also becomes familiar with the individual needs of each child by involving speech and occupational therapists in the orientation sessions⁴. The school-funded therapists work in partnership with the transition coordinator and assistant principal to identify any barriers to learning that are likely to affect a child's ability to access education. This allows the school to have conversations with parents and carers about the types of interventions that could be put in place before the start of Kindergarten, such as regular speech sessions. Identifying each child's needs during the orientation sessions is also advantageous because it allows the school to structure their Kindergarten classes strategically. For example, the school often places children with similar needs in the same class and assigns a teacher who has the expertise required to support those children effectively.

⁴ School leaders recognise the important role that speech and occupational therapists can play in supporting positive outcomes for students, however, the majority of their students do not have access to these services outside of school. As a result, the school uses flexible funding to employ full-time therapists who work with students across all year groups.



“In the classroom, each child has their own strengths and areas that they need to work on. As a collective you look at your cohort, you look at identified needs and areas to focus on, and then you differentiate accordingly for your students – to make sure all students have access to the curriculum. That makes learning meaningful for them where they can achieve success.”

Dianne Toms, Teacher

Connecting with and supporting families

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 2 Collaboration and partnerships
- 7 Wellbeing and respect for diversity

In response to social distancing regulations, Marsden Road Public School has found new ways to ensure that families continue to feel welcomed, informed and prepared for their child starting school. For example, the school used an online platform, ClassDojo, for the first time in 2020 to communicate and share information with the families of incoming Kindergarten children. Teachers and school leaders posted photos of the orientation sessions and uploaded all relevant information, including key dates, how to contact the school, where to get a school uniform, and practical tips such as how to pack a school lunch.

“In COVID times we’ve had to do things a little bit differently so we’ve been using technology and that’s been quite effective through ClassDojo.”

Dianne Toms, Teacher

Teachers also posted school readiness tasks for children to complete at home, such as tying shoes, putting on clothes, counting and writing practice. The platform allowed families to translate everything into their preferred language and they were encouraged to ask questions or share any concerns using the inbuilt messaging service. After receiving positive feedback from families, Marsden Road Public School will continue using the platform conjointly with face-to-face interactions to support a strong and successful transition to school.

Starting the school year with a two-week civics and citizenship program

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 1 High expectations and equity
- 5 Continuity of learning

In 2018, the school introduced the ‘The Marsden Way’, a civics and citizenship program to explicitly teach children respectful behaviour, school expectations and how to take pride in their school. This program also focuses on interacting with others in formal and informal situations, understanding differences and respecting opinions, and taking responsibility. The Marsden Way is taught across all year groups during the first two weeks of Term 1, supporting a continuity of learning. This means that children do not officially begin learning subject content from the K-6 curriculum in key learning areas until Week 3. While this school-developed program is not unique to Kindergarten, teachers and leaders believe it plays an important role in supporting all children to make a strong and successful transition to school as it lays a solid foundation for learning. Starting the year with The Marsden Way has resulted in very little learning time being wasted from Week 3 because children are settled, ready to learn and feel a strong sense of belonging at school.

“What we do in transition actually then gets transferred to Kindergarten, to Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and [Year] 6. So, what happens in transition is just a beginning. It’s a seedling of what a tree looks like in Year 6.”

Manisha Gazula, Principal



Where to from here

Marsden Road Public School is committed to continuous improvement and has identified some of the next steps they will take to ensure that their students continue making a strong and successful transition to school. These include:

- consolidating current practice and refining existing programs
- creating new documentation that will be integrated into the school's core teaching and learning program
- investigating and analysing data to identify trends and inform future practice.

Acknowledgements

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Case study schools were selected using a combination of School Excellence Framework data, Value Added⁵ data and Kindergarten attendance data.

⁵ Value Added (VA) is a measure which indicates the progress students have made in their learning over a period of time.

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