



Transition to high school

Reflection guide

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

What is the purpose of this publication?

This reflection guide is a practical resource for teachers and school executive staff to support students' transition to and through high school. It draws on evidence presented in the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) practical guide [Transition to high school – What Works Best in practice](#). This accompanying reflection guide provides examples of strategies to support students' engagement and belonging in their transition. Read the examples and reflect on your practice using the following questions as a guide.

What does the evidence say?

Schools can help students transition to high school through 5 [What Works Best](#) practices: classroom management, advocacy at school (as part of the student wellbeing theme), relevance and explicit teaching, effective feedback and high expectations. Research explored in the practical guide demonstrates that these practices, when occurring in both primary and high school, support student motivation and engagement in high school.

Supporting student wellbeing

New Lambton South Public School and Lambton High School on Awabakal country in Newcastle collaborate on various activities to ease the transition from primary to high school. Lambton High School hosts STEAM Days, enrichment classes in creative arts and sporting events with feeder primary schools, including New Lambton South Public School, to promote teamwork and ease transition anxieties.

New Lambton South Public School prepares their students by supporting student wellbeing through specialised programs. An interpersonal relationship program teaches girls how to handle conflicts and build respectful relationships for a safer, more inclusive environment. For boys, a program to develop emotional resilience and intelligence helps them understand and control their emotions, navigate challenges and form healthy relationships. For further details, refer to the Lambton High School and New Lambton South Public School case study in the [Sense of belonging research series](#).



Classroom management: Effective classroom management creates an environment conducive to learning, where students can focus and participate without undue distraction. This structured environment helps students develop self-regulation skills, which are critical for maintaining engagement and positive behaviour in the more independent learning context of high school.

School Excellence Framework: Teaching domain – effective classroom practice – classroom management

What practices do I employ in the classroom to create a positive environment for learning?
How do these practices align with the latest educational research? How do I know they are effective for all student groups?

Supporting sense of belonging

Temora Public School and Temora High School in the Riverina on Wiradyiri country work closely together to create a connected and supportive community for students transitioning to high school. Their joint efforts include regular combined executive meetings to share ideas on student wellbeing and transition, as well as shared Aboriginal language classes and the Drumbeat program, which uses music to teach about resilience and emotions. In addition, Temora High School's Year 7 advisor has a time allowance to visit local primary schools, like Temora Public School, to get to know future students. For further details, refer to the Temora Public School and Temora High School case study in the [Sense of belonging research series](#).



Advocacy at school as part of student wellbeing: When students feel their teachers care about them and are attuned to their learning needs, they feel valued and welcomed as members of the classroom and feel a sense of belonging at school. In turn, students are more likely to value school and set positive goals for their learning in high school.

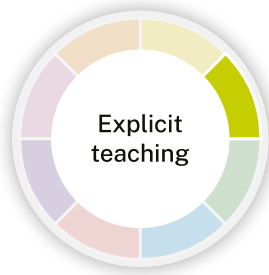
School Excellence Framework: Learning domain – wellbeing – caring for students

How do I show students that I care about them and am attuned to their learning needs?
Do I need to do this differently for different students?

Supporting sense of belonging

James Cook Boys Technology High School is an all-boys, comprehensive secondary school on the land of the Eora nation in Kogarah, Southern Sydney. The school has implemented an effective transition program that fosters student wellbeing and sense of belonging to high school. The 'Best Man' program is a whole-school initiative that delivers targeted support throughout the different phases of development that high school students explore. Beginning in Year 7, wellbeing workshops proactively teach students to effectively manage and regulate their emotions, build resilience, set goals for personal and academic growth and reinforce school expectations. These workshops introduce key staff to whom students can turn for help and support. Year 7 camp also provides an opportunity for students to build relationships with their teachers and peers and work closely with peer support leaders who can provide additional guidance when students are feeling uncertain.

The school provides additional support for late student enrolments through a 'buddy system'. These students are matched with another student based on common interests to help them build peer connections. Every late enrolment also participates in a 'transition meeting' with a staff member who will share information about the school. Both initiatives provide opportunities for students to establish positive relationships with their new peers and teachers, and become accustomed to school routines. For further details, refer to the [James Cook Boys Technology High School illustration of practice](#).



Explicit teaching: Explicit teaching ensures that all students, regardless of their prior knowledge or skills, have an opportunity to understand new content and can enhance students' confidence when faced with new challenges in high school. When students see the connection to real-world applications, they are more likely to value their education and set long-term educational aspirations.

School Excellence Framework: Teaching domain – effective classroom practice – explicit teaching

What practices do I employ in the classroom to ensure that all students, regardless of their prior knowledge or skills, have an opportunity to understand new content? How do these practices align with the latest educational research?



Effective feedback: When students receive feedback that guides their learning, they are more likely to set goals. As they move into high school, the ability to use feedback effectively can lead to better learning behaviours as students are equipped to adapt and improve continuously.

School Excellence Framework: Teaching domain – effective classroom practice – feedback

What does feedback look like in my classroom? How could I make the feedback I provide more explicit and relevant for students?

Strong relationships for continuity of learning

The transition program at Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College, Tumbi Umbi Campus on Darkinjung country in the Central Coast is built on strong relationships to local primary schools Bateau Bay Public School, Brooke Avenue Public School, The Entrance Public School and Wamberal Public School. Staff of the 5 schools come together as a group – called Middle Years Actions Research – throughout the year to support successful transitions to high schools while ensuring continuity of learning. For example, staff meet to discuss the academic, social and emotional needs of every transitioning student. NAPLAN and Check-In results help identify where individual students and the cohorts have strengths or need support. Primary school teachers also contribute to the formation of Year 7 classes, taking student data and dynamics into account.

Tumbi Umbi Campus also organises many opportunities throughout the year to make incoming students and their families feel known, valued and supported during their transition. For example, Year 6 students are invited to school tours and taster sessions, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Transition Day and a Gala Day, where students participate in a variety of sporting activities while being mentored and supported by Year 9 students. For further details, refer to the video on the [Effective transitions for students from primary to high school](#) webpage.



High expectations: When teachers hold high expectations, they communicate a belief in their students' capabilities, which in turn encourages students to strive for excellence, persevere through challenges and take ownership of their learning as they transition into a new learning environment.

School Excellence Framework: Learning domain – learning culture – high expectations

How can I demonstrate to students that I expect them to continue to grow in their learning? Do I need to do this differently for different students?

Communicating high expectations

Corowa High School is a comprehensive high school on Bangerang land in the Southern Riverina. A key activity to communicate high expectations to future Year 7 students is a cross-school curriculum project in Term 4. This is a 4-week project in a specific subject area, covering Stage 3 and Stage 4 of the NSW Curriculum. Students complete 75% of the project in their primary school and the remaining 25% at Corowa High School, during the 'Transition Week', when students have the chance to attend classes and participate in extracurricular activities with their future Year 7 teachers. Partner primary school teachers also attend 'Transition Week' to provide wellbeing support for students.

The cross-school curriculum project aims to emphasise continuity of learning between primary and high school, and requires close collaboration with partner primary schools. Students receive feedback on their project, and their accomplishment is celebrated at the end of the 'Transition Week'. The project makes students more confident about starting high school, since they are challenged to recognise the differences and similarities between what they learn in primary school and what they learn in high school. Corowa High School keeps track of student motivation with a survey that students complete before and after transition. For further details, refer to the [Corowa High School illustration of practice](#).

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