



# Strong and successful start to school

Transition guidelines

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# Supporting a strong and successful transition to school

A focus on the importance of successful transition has increased throughout many countries worldwide. Planning and implementing successful transition to school practices as a team, engaging with community and investing in reciprocal relationships, is a critical part of quality education.

These guidelines and accompanying resources provide NSW schools with policy advice and practical support to ensure all children experience a strong and successful start to school. The guidelines are aimed at principals, leadership teams and Early Stage 1 teachers; to inform improvement planning and evaluation, collaboration, community engagement and networking, and teaching and learning to meet the needs of all children. The guidelines can support schools in:

- defining what high-quality transition practices look like and developing a shared understanding of terminology
- exploring the evidence base, in particular the importance of cross curricula and pedagogy links with early childhood and the importance of young children attending an early childhood service prior to school
- principles of high-quality transition practices
- highlighting the importance of whole school transition planning that engages children and families, local early childhood service providers, other professionals and the community
- unpacking what is and isn't an appropriate orientation program.

Continuity of learning and transitions are a priority across all levels:

- Australian government
- NSW Department of Education
- Schools
- Teachers.

## Australian government

The [Alice Springs \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration \(2019\)](#) presents a vision for education across the prior to school and school sectors. The Declaration has two distinct but interconnected goals:

- Goal 1: The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity
- Goal 2: All young Australians become:
  - confident and creative individuals
  - successful lifelong learners
  - active and informed members of the community.

## NSW Department of Education

The [NSW Department of Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#) highlights successful transition practices in the following goals:

- All children make a strong start in life and learning and make a successful transition to school.
- Every student is known, valued and cared for in our schools.
- Community confidence in public education is high.

## Schools

The [School Excellence Framework](#) (Learning Domain: Learning Culture) describes good practice as *'The school engages in strong collaboration between parents, students and the community that inform and support continuity of learning for all students at transition.'*

## Teachers

The [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#) require teachers to:

- know students and how they learn
- engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community.

## What do high-quality transition practices look like?

Supporting a strong and successful start in life and learning involves reconceptualising how transition to school has been viewed in the past and embracing new and innovative ways of working including:

- acknowledging that children start school with funds of knowledge and have already begun their educational journey both at home and an early childhood service
- supporting and promoting all children in Australia's right to universal access to early childhood education
- viewing transition as a two way experience, both an opportunity to build relationships with children, families and community as well as an opportunity to orient children to the school context
- finding out as much information about what children know and can do, their development and dispositions to ensure children experience a successful transition to school. This includes accessing Transition to School statements from early childhood services
- understanding what and how children learn in early childhood settings and how it connects with school curriculum
- offering children and families multiple opportunities to feel a sense of belonging to the school community. This will be achieved over a period of time and draw on a range of transition practices including; an orientation program, school tours, classroom visits, invitations to whole school events and activity days, parent sessions and connecting with early childhood services and community groups
- recognising that a strong start to school involves more than an orientation program.

### A shared language

Throughout these guidelines a range of terminology is used to describe elements of high-quality transition, the following definitions are included to ensure a shared understanding:

**Transition to school:** Is an active process of continuity of change as children move into the first year of school. The process of transition occurs over time, beginning well before children start school and extending to the point where children and families feel a sense of belonging at school and when educators recognise this sense of belonging.

**Continuity of learning:** is where children experience familiarity in how and what is taught and have opportunities to build on, apply, transfer and adapt their learning in a new context. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is the framework that guides curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood education, including setting learning outcomes for children. Understanding the links between this framework and the NSW syllabuses is crucial to support continuity of learning.

**Transition practices:** are embedded behaviours, plans and strategies supported by evidence-based research and engaged by schools within the transition process. Transition practices are long term and apply to all components of transition to school, such as connecting and building relationships with all stakeholders. Ongoing evaluation of practices supports continual improvement.

**Orientation programs:** are short term and involve visits to the school by children and families for the purpose of orienting them to the school environment. They may include school tours, classroom visits, family activity days or social events, whole school activities such as Book Week and the like and provide a familiarity and sense of belonging for children and families.

**School readiness:** the traditional use of this term focusses on the child, and their readiness for school in terms of academic knowledge. School readiness programs aim to "make" the child ready for school, however the focus of readiness should be on more than a child's age and academic knowledge. Holistically, school readiness refers to ready children and ready schools, as well as the family and community's readiness to promote and support the child's transition. School readiness refers to a shared responsibility that should be viewed in a broad, holistic way, incorporating not only a child's readiness for the learning environment and learning dispositions, but also the learning environment's readiness for the child.

**Push-down curriculum:** this term is used to describe early childhood education services adopting practices that are more related to primary school (for example, more teacher-directed pedagogies, less opportunity for play, greater attention given to academic content), in the belief that this will support school readiness. Research is showing this is counter - intuitive. The more age and child appropriate pedagogical practices are, the greater the benefits for children's social and cognitive development (OECD, 2015).

**Play-based learning:** a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations (EYLF, 2009).

## Evidence base for successful transition to school

There is a large body of national and international evidence that supports the importance of a positive start to school for all children. Contemporary research identifies crucial aspects of transition practices to guide schools, including collaborative and consultative processes that reflect the local school context, and provide evidence markers to enable continuous school improvement. Relationships between all stakeholders that move from surface contact to meaningful pedagogical discussions and practices, support children in their transition, wellbeing and academic engagement (Bond, Brown, Hutchings and Peters, 2019, ECD Folio, 23:2). Key pieces of evidence emphasise the importance of the following concepts.

### Engagement and shared understandings

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) [Starting Strong V: Transitions from Early Childhood Education report](#) highlights the importance of engaging children, families, professionals, educators and community as key to planning meaningful transitions.

The report emphasises shared understanding and collaborative practice between early childhood and primary school teachers.

The OECD report identifies findings from international research that demonstrate the following key indicators for supporting successful transitions (p. 23):

- shared views between early childhood education and care and schools on transitioning
- alignment and balance between what and how children learn in early childhood education and care and primary school (curriculum and pedagogical practices)
- shared understandings on individual differences and how each child learns differently
- collaborative practices between preschool and primary school teachers, such as sharing written information on child development and children's experiences
- alignment of pedagogical understanding of preschool and primary school teachers through training

- alignment of working conditions of preschools and primary school teachers
- flexibility and responsiveness to individual communities, families and children
- collaboration among staff, managers, parents and the community based on reciprocal communication, inclusivity, mutual trust and respect.

### Early learning matters

The [CESE Transition to school literature review](#) highlights the critical importance of early learning for a positive transition to school.

The review identifies factors that contribute to a successful transition to school as:

- the home learning environment and support from families
- attendance at high-quality early childhood education and care
- collaboration between families; early childhood and care services and schools.

The review concludes that:

- school readiness needs to be considered in a broader, more holistic way
- families, early childhood services and schools play an important role in transition to school
- the traditional view of school readiness which once focussed on a child's age and skills has been replaced by a view of readiness meaning ready families, ready schools, ready early childhood services and ready communities supporting ready children
- there is a need for more rigorous studies into specific practices that best support successful transition.



## Laying the foundations for learning

The report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools, [Through growth to achievement 2018](#) identifies three priorities for schools, with the first recommendation being directly related to transition and laying the foundations for learning:

- Promote high quality early learning and seamless transitions into school
- Engage parents and carers as partners in their children's learning throughout the school including engaging with community to support learning opportunities
- Ensure all students have the opportunity within school to be partners in their own learning.

Identified within the findings of this review is that early childhood education makes an important and significant contribution to school outcomes. Further, that the transition between preschool and school education should be a seamless continuum and lays the foundation for future learning. Laying these strong foundations closes the differential learning between advantaged and disadvantaged students and is essential in ensuring that all children have the best start in life.

## Continuity of learning

Continuity of learning supports successful transitions and is crucial for optimising improved outcomes for children. Educators in both the school space and the early childhood space need to place children and their experience in the education continuum at the centre of their practice, particularly at points of transition. This involves knowing what and how children learn in each other's spaces and occurs when there is a focus on engaging, connecting and building relationships with local early childhood services.

In the early childhood context curriculum is child-centred and covers both content and dispositions for learning. Learning is seen in a more integrated way with learning outcomes centering on; identity and culture, connection and contribution, wellbeing, confidence in learning and effective communication. These map to key learning areas within the NSW syllabuses.

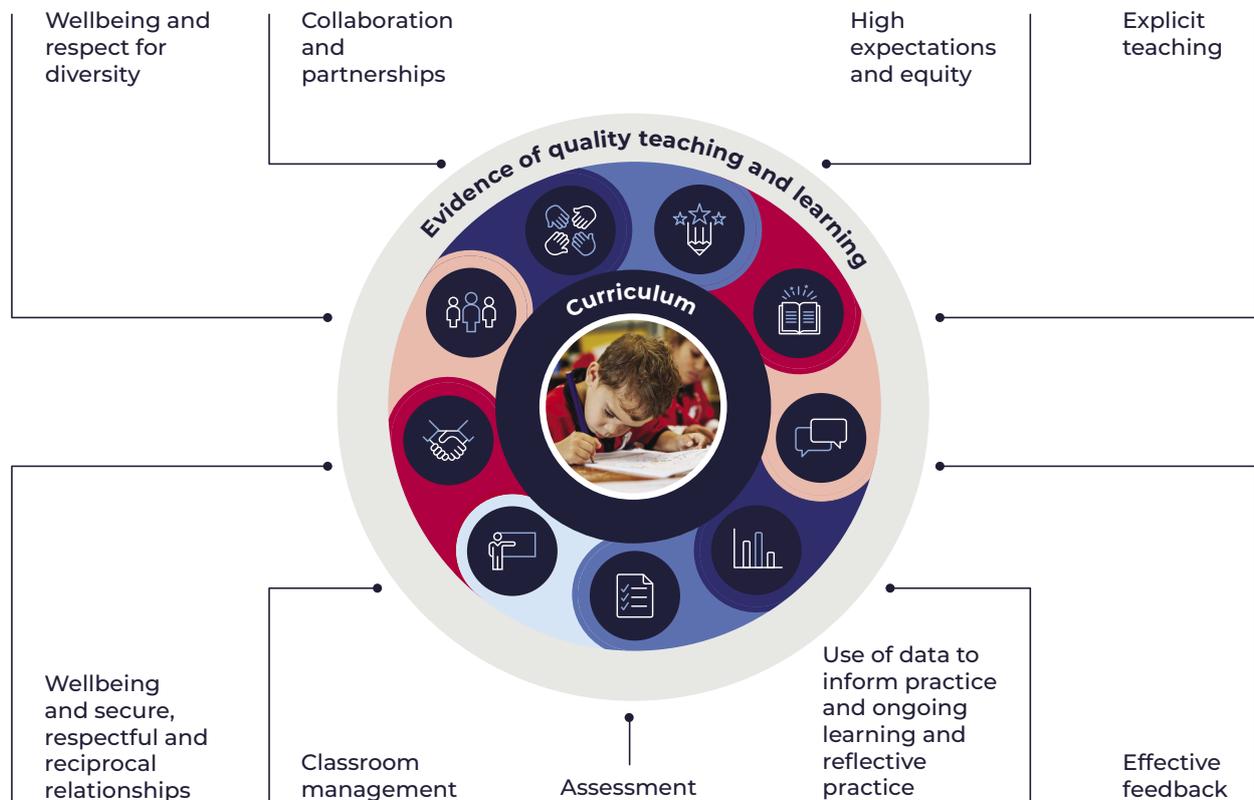
In terms of how children learn, play is seen as a context for learning. An inquiry and interest based approach is taken to ensure children are engaged and have agency over their learning. Learning through play:

- provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise, test theories and imagine
- enables expression of personality and uniqueness
- promotes positive learning dispositions such as curiosity and creativity
- enables children to make connections between prior experiences and new learning
- assists children to develop relationships and concepts
- supports a sense of wellbeing and promotes a valuing of diversity (EYLF P.9).

When schools invite preschool children and their families to visit the school as part of orientation, it is important to provide familiar, play-based activities that invite engagement and participation. Play is familiar, non-threatening and full of learning potential. Children, families, teachers and other staff are free to interact and respond to each other.



## Principles of high-quality transition practices



The [CESE What works best 2020 update](#) recognises that when a connectedness between the child and the school is evident, a sense of belonging exists and relationships with peers and teachers are well fostered. What works best calls out a set of eight themes that support effective teaching and learning, many of which are crucial considerations for high-quality transition. These themes align closely with the EYLF guiding principles and regard for both should be valued when planning and implementing high-quality transition practices.

### Wellbeing and secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

Relationships are at the heart of successful transitions and improved student learning outcomes. Many people are involved in a child's education and transition to school, including children, families, educators and the community. It is important to show that the contribution of each person is valued.

As children transition to school, relationships change. New relationships need to be established based on mutual respect, familiarity and empathy. It is important that children and families feel confident that school will be a great place for them with positive relationships.

### Transition practices to support wellbeing and relationships

- Plan connections with children, families, early childhood educators and community that focus on their strengths and respect their knowledge.
- Plan time to meet with families to discuss individual children.
- Invite and respond to family and other agency suggestions on strategies to support transition.
- Establish strategies for open, two-way communication between all stakeholders.
- Organise education and information visits for families of preschool aged children.
- Plan opportunities to hear the children's voices and listen to their questions, interests, stories and concerns.

## Collaboration and partnerships

The teacher-student relationship may well be the most essential of all relationships at school, with research suggesting that students who experience a positive connection are more likely to have high levels of engagement with, and at school. The research suggests that students who experience a positive connection with their teacher are more likely to have high levels of engagement at school.

Collaboration processes between the early childhood and school teaching teams supports the sharing of information and facilitates children to transfer prior knowledge, and their learning to be scaffolded across both curriculum outcomes in a steady continuum.

Teacher collaboration can be a powerful professional learning tool for transition practices. When schools support teachers to work together across curriculums, and gain a shared understanding of the outcome links between the prior to school and the school learning environments, high quality practices underpinning high performing schools is the likely outcome. Teachers who work together observing each other, engaging in professional discussion and reflection, and planning together are promoting the ideal conditions and cultures for meaningful collaboration, supporting a strong and successful start to school.

Strong leadership builds strong partnerships as a basis for shared understandings and collaboration. By working in partnership, much can be achieved that would not have been possible to achieve alone. Working as partners is crucial to effective transitions. By working together children, families, educators, other professionals and the community feel valued and can achieve common goals.

Good transition practices balance factors such as what and how children learn in their homes and in early childhood education with what and how they learn in primary school so that children experience continuity in their learning.

### Transition practices to support collaboration

- Meet with early childhood service providers to share professional learning and work together to plan transition.
- Provide open-ended, interactive, play-based experiences when planning orientation visits for children.
- Work with your local community groups, including the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) or local cultural group. Take time to help them get to know you and discuss how you might work together.
- Involve children as active participants in transition.
- Actively engage families to support learning at home.
- Involve community in all stages of planning, developing, implementing and evaluating.
- Engage in professional learning networks with local early childhood educators.
- Organise orientation visits to minimise disruption to children attending their early childhood service.
- Use the NSW Transition to school statement to work with early childhood educators to get to know children before they start school.



## High expectations and equity

All children need to be challenged and engaged in order to develop to their full potential. Research consistently finds that teachers' high expectations are linked to a child's performance and achievement. In planning transition into Kindergarten, schools need a shared understanding of the child's existing skills and knowledge against the EYLF learning outcomes, to enable differentiated planning and instruction.

Effective transition to school is based on recognising and acknowledging the strengths of children and holding high expectations for their participation and learning progress.

Schools support children from all cultural backgrounds to make a successful transition to school when they show that they value their cultures and communicate well with their families.

It is important that schools take action to support children and their families in identified equity groups during transition. These can include children who are EAL/D, High potential and gifted children, as well as children in out of home care.

High expectations are particularly important for Aboriginal children. An environment where Aboriginal children are able to feel strong and proud in their cultural identity is important to support a positive transition to school. Supporting connections with families, caregivers and community is especially important for Aboriginal people and crucial when planning transition. An environment that acknowledges, respects and values Aboriginal culture supports all children in their learning and development. The Australian government supports schools and early learning services across Australia to develop these environments through the [Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning program](#).

Transition to school practices link to social justice, human rights, ethical behaviour and equal opportunity. All children should enjoy educational opportunities that support them to access, engage and participate in school and to achieve socially and academically.

Highly collaborative and more detailed transition planning is important for children with a disability and/or learning support need.

## Transition practices to support collaboration

- Embed practices to acknowledge and build strengths in each child, family and the community.
- Plan for early identification and planning for individual children and groups at risk of making a less than successful transition to school.
- Plan to support children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to navigate the complex school system.
- Organise professional learning to build staff capacity to successfully include all children.
- Make transition practices flexible, responsive and inclusive, with adjustments and supports in place where needed so that each child and their family can access and participate.
- Draw on the expertise of relevant professionals, agencies and support groups, such as Aboriginal support agencies, early childhood professionals, disability support or ethnic support workers.
- Plan strategies to support transition when children arrive at short notice.

## Wellbeing and respect for diversity

Showing respect for the many ways local people express and live their culture is an important part of transition planning. Diversity can be about Aboriginality, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, language background, ability or many other individual differences.

It is important to recognise that while some families may have similar cultural backgrounds, they live in individual ways.

Welcoming environments that understand and show a respect for the diversity in the community and the individuals within it lead to everyone feeling cared for, valued, and accepted.

### Transition practices to support wellbeing and diversity

- Reflect the diversity of the school community in transition materials and activities.
- Focus on the strengths of the diverse cultures in your school.
- Acknowledge what families know about their children and provide opportunities for them to communicate this knowledge.
- Recognise and acknowledge that all communities have high expectations for their children's learning.
- Arrange times to talk with local families and communities and seek their guidance on how best to support their children as they transition to school.
- Acknowledge, support and include children's home language and use the language, songs, games and stories from the cultures in your local area in transition experiences.
- Develop ways of connecting and communicating across cultures. This could include staff training to develop cultural competence, working with staff members who have links with the community, arranging for interpreters when needed, or having materials translated.
- Provide for ways of communicating for families who may have limited literacy skills.

## Use of data to inform practice and ongoing learning and reflective practice

It is important for schools to continually reflect on transition to school practices in light of current research and the needs of all children and families and plan accordingly.

Supporting successful transitions requires careful collaborative planning and evaluation and effective use of data that leads to targeted, evidence-based action plans and evaluation.

### Transition practices to support use of data and reflection

- Allocate time and resources to plan and implement transition and orientation each year.
- Invite feedback from children, families, school and prior to school program staff, the community and other stakeholders.
- Use the [Australian Early Development Census \(AEDC\)](#) data to help target local areas of need.
- Establish ongoing professional learning networks and communities of practice with local early childhood services and professionals to support reflective practice and transition program planning.

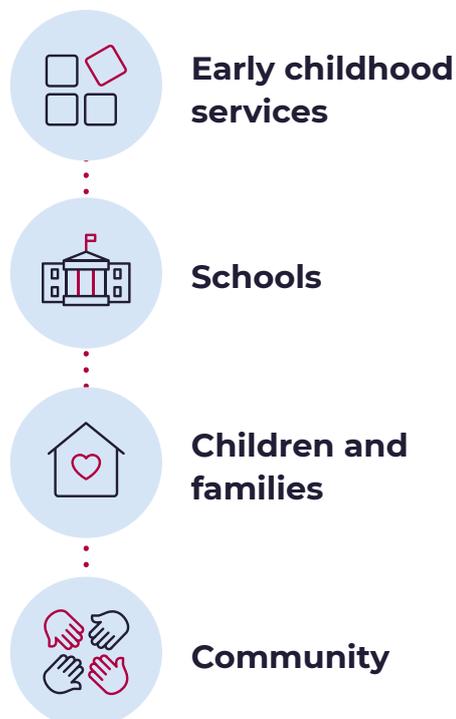
## Strong partnerships support strong transitions

The importance of a positive transition to school is well-recognised. It is one of the most significant events in the lives of young children and their families. It is important for each child's wellbeing and ongoing educational and social success.

Transition to school provides an ideal opportunity to connect with families and support them to become active participants in their child's learning. When schools work closely with families, and conversations are valued, they are able to respond to their school community's needs. It provides an opportunity to plan such things as parent information evenings and allows them to experience a positive relationship with teachers and school systems.

Transition to school is about much more than orientation or the first day at school. It is a process over time, beginning well before school starts and often extending well into the first year at school until children and families feel that they belong. It is about each child, their family, their early childhood education and care service/s, the school, other professionals and the broader community.

Key players in creating strong transitions include:



### Collaborating with early childhood services

Genuine collaboration begins with establishing relationships with improved outcomes at the centre of all interactions, planning and decision making. It is not a question of 'us and them' in the transition from early childhood to school any more than it is from primary to high schools. Schools are well placed to take the lead in this collaboration space as they are the common core, with children coming from many local early childhood services.

### Transition to School Statement

The [Transition to School Statement](#) is a practical tool for sharing information and supporting continuity between early childhood services and schools. Early childhood educators complete the statement which is then forwarded to the school with parental permission. It gives a snapshot of the learning, development and background of children moving from an early childhood service to kindergarten. Links to the EYLF and Early Stage 1 outcomes are embedded throughout the document.

As part of working with local early childhood education and care providers, schools can seek the completed Transition to school statements for children who will be attending their school.



The school transition planning team can reflect on information provided in Transition to school statements, considering how information can be shared with teachers and how it can inform programming. Schools can draw on partnerships with early childhood education and care services to unpack transition to school statements and inform future planning for each child.

Sharing information about a child's skills and knowledge through the Transition to school statement is just one part of the whole transition to school process and complements ongoing collaboration between all those involved in a successful transition. It provides a baseline for teachers to begin planning forward for the start of kindergarten year and beyond.

## Connecting with and supporting families

Families and children are likely to be experiencing similar emotions, such as excitement, anxiety, and uncertainty during the transition process. The experiences that families have during this time are likely to impact on the way they engage with their child's learning throughout the child's whole time at school.

The [CESE toolkit](#) provides schools with elements for consideration in supporting parental engagement:

- Engagement is often easier to achieve with parents of very young children. How will you maintain parental engagement as children get older?
- Have you provided a flexible approach to allow parental engagement to fit around parents' schedules? Parents of older children may appreciate short school visits at flexible times.
- How will you make your school welcoming for parents, especially those whose own experience of school may not have been positive?
- What practical support, advice and guidance can you give to parents who are not confident in their ability to support their children's learning, such as simple strategies to help early readers?

## Engaging with your community

Connecting with the community is crucial, particularly for vulnerable groups of children and families. Children are likely to benefit most from high-quality transition practices, with a variety of support networks in place. Knowing what support agencies and programs are operating in the school community and more widely, is essential for schools to make connections and work together to put relevant supports in place supporting all children to make a strong start to school.

### Community data

Through the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) schools and communities can access data on children's development in their local area and see the strengths and needs of children in their communities. The AEDC data can guide schools as they plan for the children transitioning and as they collaborate with local early childhood services, families and the community.

Schools and communities can access information about the number and percentage of children who are developmentally vulnerable, at risk or on track across the five AEDC domains:

- physical health and wellbeing
- social competence
- emotional maturity
- language and cognitive skills (school-based)
- communication skills and general knowledge.

### Professional learning communities

Schools that engage in professional learning communities commit to the belief that teachers learn best through collaboration with colleagues and have a collective commitment to improving student outcomes.

When fostering the sharing of expertise, schools can reflect on best practice for orientation and transition and call on each other to discuss shared understandings of effective practices. Together, they are able to interrogate their practice and learn and apply better approaches to enhance student learning through strong transition practices.

## Bringing it all together in a planned approach

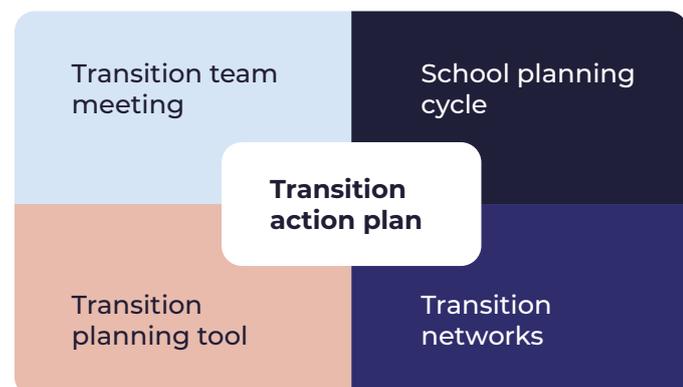
Transition planning is an important part of school leadership and the school improvement planning.

It is important for schools to identify a key team of people who coordinate transition to school planning and it is ideal for schools to invest in a strong and committed transition team.

Transition is about schools and early childhood services working together with young children, families and the wider community to help them make a smooth and seamless start to school. Planning will vary between and within schools to meet the individual needs of children, families and communities.

It is crucial for schools to consider how they will connect with children, families, other educators and professionals and the community throughout each stage of the transition planning process. Evaluation at each implementation stage will ensure that the plan stays on track, adjustments can be made and sustainability of the transition practices. Drawing on the evidence and research, the community data, equity groups and collaborative processes, schools bring it all together in a school transition action plan that incorporates:

- creating a transition team within your school
- analysing and deciding what high quality transition practices will look like, using the Transition assessment and planning tool or the linked planning resources when tailoring transition practices for identified equity groups
- considering what networks and connections already exist and where the gaps are
- incorporating the processes, practices and products into your school plan, and Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP) when identified as a strategic improvement.



## Transition assessment and planning tool

The Transition assessment and planning tool helps support and guide effective planning and processes in line with the previous diagram and supports ongoing identification of areas for continual improvement. Additionally, the resources for identified equity groups will support differentiation through targeted approaches.

It is anticipated that the tool is an evaluative process which will have buy-in from all stakeholders within the school's transition team.

The tool allows schools to work collaboratively in recognising areas of strengths and challenges and plan improvement measures.

## Transition planning team

Engaging in collaborative processes supports schools to embed transition practices as an investment with all stakeholders. Ideally, a transition 'champion' would drive the team and keep planning on track, ensuring ongoing evaluation against the Transition assessment and planning tool. A transition planning team may consist of:

- Principal and/or executive and appointed transition champion to lead the team
- Early childhood educator/s from early childhood centres and preschools
- Support staff such as Learning and Support teacher, AEO, CLO, school librarian
- Early intervention staff
- Families and carers
- Community agencies (example, Samaritans)
- Health and Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) (eg speech therapist/ physiotherapist)
- AECG representatives
- Early Stage 1 / Stage 1 teachers

## Transition networks

Transition networks primarily function so that early childhood educators, schools and other interested parties can develop partnerships. Through such initiatives, stakeholders can learn from each other and develop common understandings of learning frameworks and curriculum. This helps create a smooth transition from early childhood services to Kindergarten, promotes a shared vision, and acknowledges children's prior knowledge and skills. Meetings are usually once per term or more if the need arises.

Transition networks are often facilitated by schools and participants may include:

- other local public schools
- independent schools
- early childhood centres
- community health services
- early intervention classes or Itinerant early intervention teachers
- support units/classes
- Teaching quality and impact team
- school psychologists
- Schools as community centres (SaCC)
- other personnel that may be relevant for the community (for example, out of school hours (OOSH) and out of home care (OOHC)).

Establishing a transition network will provide avenues to support particular situations such as children with a disability, children and families with refugee status, Aboriginal children and families and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. A wide repertoire of knowledgeable colleagues and specialists meeting over the year prior to school, offers the school a source of information and support to target such areas. Relationships can be established and sharing of knowledge so that plans can be put in place well before the school year starts.

## School Excellence

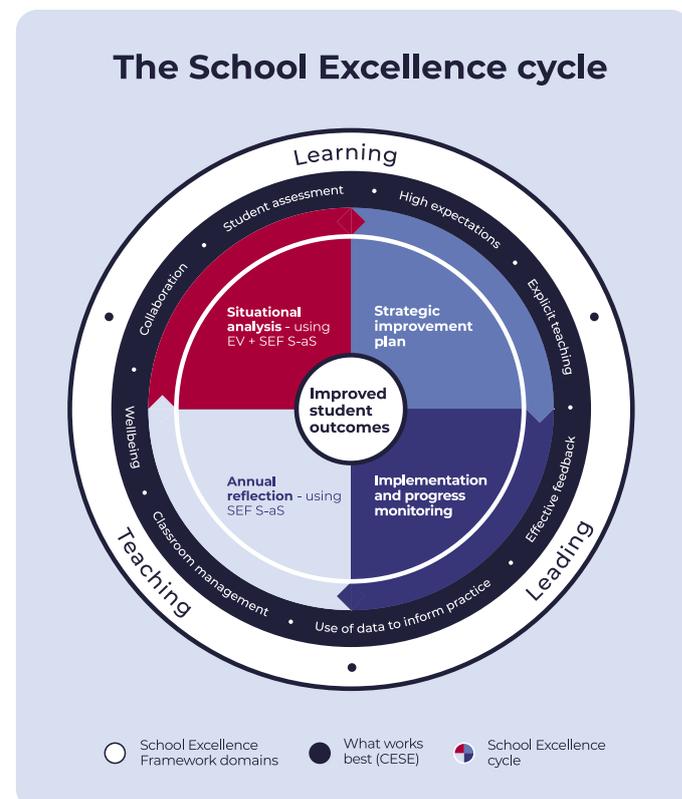
The school planning and reporting approach supports all NSW public schools in the pursuit of excellence and the provision of high-quality educational opportunities for all as identified in the [School Excellence in Action](#) resource and the [School Excellence Policy](#).

The policy is highly strategic, focusing on key areas for improvement determined by the school in consultation with its community. Authentic community consultation is embedded in all phases of the School Excellence cycle, to enable schools to make a profound difference to the ongoing growth and development of the school.

Planning for strong and successful transition practices is a highly effective means through which a school can plan to meet the needs of its community and invest in the ongoing cycle of assessment and change through every child, every teacher and every school improving.

Schools may consider data from the following to self-assess the effectiveness of their transition practices:

- community consultation/engagement
- literacy and numeracy links (Transition to school statement and Best Start Kindergarten Assessment)
- attendance, wellbeing and behaviour data.



Scout data may support schools in establishing baselines for improvement in relation to the SEF. This may inform how you target specific areas of transition planning (for example attendance patterns).

In schools that excel, the school culture is strongly focused on learning, the building of educational aspirations and ongoing performance improvement throughout the school community. The focus on guidelines for effective transition to school practices is articulated in the element of learning culture.

The SEF provides the following continuum descriptors to guide schools in planning for ongoing improvement within the Transitions and continuity of learning theme:

### Delivering

The school actively plans for student transitions (for example into Kindergarten; Y6 to Y7; Y10 to Y11). The school clearly communicates its transition activities to the school community.

### Sustaining and growing

The school collects and analyses information to inform and support students' successful transitions. The school seeks to collaborate with parents of students whose continuity of learning is at risk.

### Excelling

The school engages in strong collaborations between parents, students and the community that inform and support continuity of learning for all students at transition points, including highly mobile students and students with atypical enrolment.

## Excellence in transition to school planning

Planning for school improvement is a continuous process which does not begin or end with any one SIP. The development of a school's four-year SIP is supported by the situational analysis, a rigorous self-assessment process informed by external validation and the School Excellence Framework Self-assessment Survey (SEF S-aS). Each year, schools reflect on the progress and impact of the plan through the lens of the SEF S-aS.

The Transition assessment and planning tool suggests reflective questions to guide the SEF-SaS process. Self-assessment provides the opportunity for schools to engage with their community and deeply reflect on the effectiveness of their current transition practices, thereby informing the next four-year SIP.

The SIP sets out the specific steps a school will take in their pursuit of continuous school improvement and improving student outcomes, through engaging in strong transition practices for a successful start to school.

## Differentiated approaches

High-quality transition practices include avoiding a 'one-size fits all' approach to children starting school. The evidence base shows that for certain identified equity groups to experience a positive start to school, differentiating approaches support success. These groups include children with a disability, children from a low socio-economic background, Aboriginal children and children with EAL/D. Schools need to ensure that they are prepared for children in all their diversity and are inclusive of children and families at all levels of transition.

Positive beginnings at school occur when schools reflect practices such as facilitating supportive relationships, promoting identity and a recognition of diversity. When planning a strengths-based approach to transition, school readiness should be viewed as a reflection of many influencing factors, not only as an inherent quality of the child. The family, early childhood settings, communities, personal identity and family cultural history shapes the learning and development of the child coming into school.

Within the Department's [High potential and gifted student education policy](#), communicating assessment information to support transition and collaborating with families and communities is identified as a responsibility of the principal. Engaging with the Transition to school statement and early childhood services included in the cycle of planning will allow for the school to meet the specific learning needs of high potential and gifted students.

According to the longitudinal study [Starting School: a strengths based approach towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children](#), success of a strength-based approach is evident when schools acknowledge and plan accordingly to the skills and knowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to school with them. This is also acknowledged in The [NSW Department of Education and NSW AECG Incorporated Partnership Agreement](#). Further, recognition from the school's transition planning team that the community is a crucial resource needs to be highlighted and included across the transition process. Collaborative relationships with families encourages belonging, and positive expectations of children as learners facilitates a strong and successful transition to school.

One of the targets of [The Department's Multicultural Plan](#) is to support students who have English as an additional language/dialect (EAL/D) and refugee students through delivery of sustainable programs and resources. Schools whose enrolments include these students should identify and respond with appropriate

strategies to promote an effective and positive start to school.

## Transition for children with disability and additional learning and support needs

When a child has a disability and additional learning and supporting needs, transition to school can be a very anxious time for families. However, with some adjustments and modifications of transition plans, children can engage successfully with the school. Personalised planning based on consultation and collaboration is important for successful transition. Principals and other school staff, families, early childhood and early intervention professionals, medical specialists, therapists, allied professionals, the community, other advocates and the child themselves all have important roles to play.

Schools will need to draw on the expertise of the family, early intervention services and professionals to plan for transition. It is also important for the school to listen to the child, for their voice informs the expertise of the family and provides crucial input into adjustments and personalised planning.

Children with disability have the right to enrol in a school on the same basis as children without disability. The [Disability Standards for Education \(2005\)](#) (the Standards) define the educational rights of people with disability and are Australian law under the [Disability Discrimination Act \(DDA\) 1992](#). Under the Standards, all Australian schools have a legal obligation to make sure that every student is able to access education and participate on the same basis as their peers. For some students schools will need to make adjustments to the curriculum, to instruction or to the learning environment in consultation with the student and the family. This is where strong collaborative and consultative practices with other professionals is important and crucial to a successful transition.

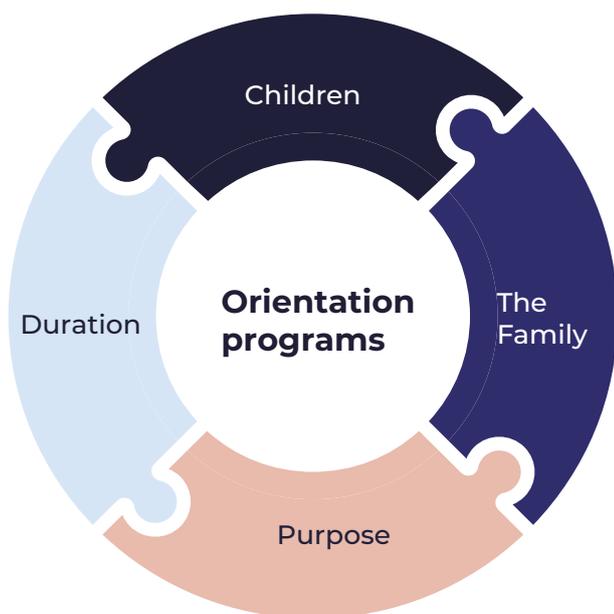
## What is and isn't an orientation program?

This section of the guidelines aim to provide clear advice for schools as to what falls in and out of scope when running an orientation program. The opportunity for children to attend an early childhood service in the year before school ensures that learning is being planned for and assessed within a developmentally and age appropriate curriculum and learning environment. The best place for children to experience a quality early childhood education is an early childhood setting, with a high quality and regulated program based upon the EYLF.

There are many factors to consider when deciding what an appropriate orientation program is, including:

- What is the purpose of the program?
- How long does it run for?
- How old are the children attending?
- Are families present?

Orientation programs that run for a full day, all year or several days a week for most of the year, run the risk of not only limiting access to an early childhood education for the child, but also may be considered an early childhood service that must comply with the legislature and quality standards of the National Quality Framework.



## Purpose

Any program that a school runs should be for the purpose of orientating children to the school. This includes:

- the school getting to know each child, their prior knowledge and skills and engaging in reciprocal relationships with the early childhood service to support this
- working with families and children to support development in a wide range of focus areas such as literacy, numeracy, social skills, healthy eating or wellbeing.
- building familiarity with school routines such as bells, places about the school
- children getting to know teachers and other children
- building relationships and familiarity within the new school

NOT a kindergarten 'push down curriculum' program (for example, teaching syllabus content).

## Duration

Orientation programs should be short-term, as they make up just one component of effective transition practices. Evidence based best practice and awareness of developmentally appropriate learning frameworks strongly guides the duration for children attending school during orientation. They should be 2-3 hours in total, offered across the second half of the year.

In total, the number of hours that children are attending an orientation program should be no more than 50 hours with a majority of that time in the second half of the year.

NOT a substitute for an early childhood service.

## Children

Any orientation program planned by schools should only be for children who will be attending the school in the following year. This point closely links to the purpose of the program.

NOT taking two and three year olds.

## The Family

Successful transitions recognise the family as the children's first and most influential teachers and good transition practices involving ongoing experiences for the children and their families, will encourage ongoing involvement in the school. Families should be involved in some if not all orientation sessions.

For children to participate in transition and orientation visits with their early childhood services, accompanying staff retain the duty of care, as per the law and regulations guiding ratios and excursions, and need to have appropriate parent permissions and risk assessment in place.

NOT offering a service for families that really should be an approved early childhood service.

### For more information

Visit the [NSW Department of Education, Early learning website](#)



## Resources

- [Reimagine Australia: Ready, Set, School- a transition guide for schools](#)
- [Always Be You Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being, knowing and doing](#)
- [Early Childhood Australia- parent resources for schools](#)
- [Be You Fact Sheet Transitions](#)
- [Continuity of Learning: a resource to support effective transition to school and school aged care](#)
- [NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.](#)
- [NESA Transitioning to school](#)
- [Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning program Positive Partnerships](#)
- [NSW Department of Education Website Starting School](#)
- [Supporting transition to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children](#)
- [Starting school: a strength-based approach towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children](#)
- [School readiness: what does it mean for Indigenous children families, schools and communities?](#)
- [Translated documents](#)

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Queensland Government Early childhood education and care- *Transition to school*, [earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/early-years/transition-toschool](http://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/early-years/transition-toschool)

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