

Case study

Respect for diversity

Our regions across Queensland are diverse. Each community and school is unique, as is each child and their family. Diversity is multi-faceted and relevant to all; encompassing multiple differences including but not limited to social, geographic, economic, cultural, ability and linguistic.

'Respecting diversity means within the curriculum valuing and reflecting the practices, values and beliefs of families. Educators honour the histories, cultures, languages, traditions, child rearing practices and lifestyle choices of families. They value children's different capacities and abilities and respect differences in families' home lives.' (EYLF; DEEWR, 2009)

The *Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool* acknowledges this diversity and encourages schools to plan and implement transition-to-school strategies that support partnerships and foster a sense of belonging.

Inclusion allows us to see diversity as a strength with an underlying assumption that all children are capable and competent. Therefore, each school's knowledge of and responses to the diversity of the community and children, is important in any transition-to-school strategy.

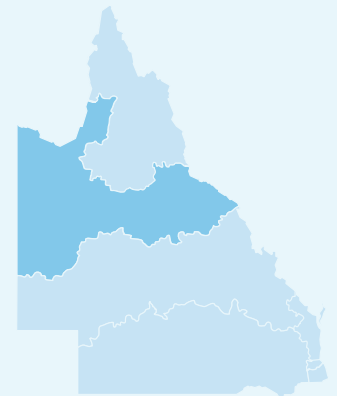
The *Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool* (page 14) has a number of practical strategies or actions that schools can take, represented in the table below.



In this case study Kerri Giebel, Early Childhood Education and Care Director, North Queensland region has gathered practical examples of how three schools respect diversity, particularly in relation to transition-to-school strategies.

The North Queensland region is a diverse region, with 6 per cent of the total state enrolments (33,296 students) in 110 state schools. The region consists of a number of regional, rural and remote schools in addition to culturally diverse communities.

Each example takes a different focus on the broad definition of diversity. The first example reflects on Aitkenvale State School's transition-to-school strategies, highlighting cultural diversity. The second example from Normanton State School highlights how learner needs are considered in their transition-to-school strategies. The final example is from Bwgcolman Community School, which is located in a remote area and reflects how their geographical location influences their transition-to-school strategies.



| Action area | Possible strategies / Actions |
|-----------------------|--|
| Respect for diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with community leaders to discuss transition practices and clarify inclusive strategies Redesign orientation programs with respect to culture, language, traditions and identity Use information about child strengths/likes contained in transition statements to develop a profile of individual students School transition storybook — what children can expect as they transition to school (multiple languages) Early engagement with agencies and early childhood services supporting students with disability Outreach programs for rural and remote families — orientation packs for children issued over terms 3 and 4 Community mapping to consolidate knowledge of school diversity School-based playgroups delivered by relevant organisations and supported by community leaders and elders |

Aitkenvale State School



Mr Justin Burgess

Principal

Aitkenvale State School

Mr Justin Burgess is the Principal of Aitkenvale State School, which is located in the suburb of Aitkenvale in Townsville. The school welcomes all students, and aims to foster healthy and productive partnerships with all families and community members.

Focus: Respect for diversity – cultural diversity

Aitkenvale State School is a vibrant and diverse school community with cultural groups from all around the world, striving to build positive relationships with families who are new to our school. Of the children enrolled at our school 38 per cent have migrant, refugee or English as an additional dialect or language backgrounds. A further 25 per cent are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Recently, we also had some families move to Townsville from Papua New Guinea. The children of these families are enrolled at our school and their parents are studying at James Cook University. We work in close partnership with Townsville Multicultural Support Group and the Townsville Intercultural Centre.

Actions

At Aitkenvale State School we have an Intensive Learning Centre (ILC). Children and families at the ILC have refugee or migrant backgrounds and bring with them a diverse range of languages, cultures, religions and experiences. Our ILC works closely with other agencies to support our children and families to settle into a new community and transition to school. Our ILC has a two-fold effect, first catering individually for children with language barriers, and second, smaller class sizes, enabling our teachers to spend more individual time with children attending to the learning needs of each child.

We also have a year round transition-to-school strategy, which includes community events, playgroup and a *Step-to-Prep Program*. A number of events held at our school, including a movie night, were very well attended by migrant and refugee families. At our events, families connect through their children and culture and are building strong relationships within our school.

Our *Step-to-Prep Program* and playgroup provide an environment where families and children learn through play. Each prior-to-school strategy provides opportunities for children and families to get to know our teachers, our school grounds and other families. Our strategies have also had a secondary side effect of creating intercultural connectedness.

Learnings informing next steps

Trusting partnerships support successful transition to school

We have established the Aitkenvale Network Group. Membership consists of myself, Prep teachers, directors and educators of early childhood services, local organisations such as speech pathologist and the local library. Our network is new and growing and we will continue to work together on transition-to-school strategies – reflecting, revising and refining where necessary.

Prior to school activities contribute to successful transitions to school and the on-going growth of the school

Families in the *Step-to-Prep Program* are much more engaged with our school and their child's learning as they enter Prep. Enrolments have traditionally been 40 - 45 in Prep in previous years; this year Prep enrolments are at 60. We will continue to promote our prior-to-school strategies and work towards opening an Intercultural Hub at our school. This would be a place where families can meet, participate in activities and access information.

Normanton State School



Ms Tonia Smerdon
Principal
Normanton State School

Ms Tonia Smerdon is the Principal of Normanton State School, which is a remote school situated in the Gulf of Carpentaria, North West Queensland. There are three traditional owner groups - Gkuthaarn, Kukatji and Kurtijar people. The school offers learning experiences for children from Prep to Year 10, catering for a range of learning needs and interests.

Focus: Respect for diversity – learner needs

At Normanton State School we have a high percentage of children with English as a second language or dialect, 90 per cent are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent and some children are from the Philippines and Bangladesh. Normanton State School has been proudly serving the community of Normanton since 1892. Here students experience success, participate in many extra-curricular activities and master new skills. We make every effort to keep parents and the community informed of student success, school events and provide opportunities for them to be involved with the learning of their children.

Actions



This year in Prep we decided to take a focus on the individual child as a learner. To do this we engaged with families, as the first teachers of their children; respecting their knowledge of their children's learning. We have also embedded intentional planning and programming for each child. When appropriate, a specialist literacy teacher is responsible for planning and programming for children.

One of our transition-to-school strategies has been the implementation of the *Abecedarian Approach* (3a) and sharing this approach

with our early childhood partners in our Early Years Network Group. We have also been able to train a number of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school support staff, and *Remote School Attendance Scheme* and Family and Community Engagement officers in 3a.

Our network meets monthly, sharing knowledge, practice and ideas strengthening the Normanton early childhood sector. The 3a training has given the members of our network a common approach. Taking this approach as a sector has ensured that

children, their families and their home language are respected. Value is also placed on the child's learning strengths and builds on existing skills. To do this, early childhood services and our school encourages families to play *3a Learning Games* and *Conversational Reading* with their children at home.

Learnings informing next steps

Respecting that the learner is a diverse individual

Programming and planning specific to diverse learner needs will be maintained. Knowing and responding to children has been crucial in this learning and informing our next steps. We will continue to cultivate reciprocal relationships with families through respectful intentions and interactions. Building relationships in this way has already resulted in an increase in Prep parent engagement and an increase in individual adult-child interaction. A next step for us will be to partner with families, building their confidence in their child's learning.

Establishing a common approach to supporting families and children

Establishing our network and using 3a as a common approach has resulted in a consistent community approach. Parents have been engaged in a strength-based way, through, 'what is working well already' techniques. Our network is committed to continuing to meet each month, and we are planning on increasing the dosage of 3a for families, supported through our Prep programming. Additionally, we will add *Conversational Reading* into our, 'buddy reading' program in the upper school.

Bwgcolman Community School



Mr Ross McHutcheon

Principal

Bwgcolman Community School

Mr Ross McHutcheon is the Principal of Bwgcolman Community School. This school is a National Partnership Pre-Prep to Year 12 school located on tropical Palm Island which is 65 km north east of Townsville in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. In 1993, the school changed its name from Palm Island State School to better reflect the importance the community plays in their children's education.

Focus: Respect for diversity – geographic diversity

Our school, Bwgcolman Community School aims to help our children maintain a strong cultural identity while also developing the skills necessary to participate in the global community. Respect, responsibility and safety are at the forefront of everything we do. Bwgcolman is situated on Palm Island which can be exciting but also challenging at times. The diversity of our community is a strength, with 42 tribal groups settled on Palm Island, there is a need to be respectful of these tribal groups and the Bwgcolman People, the people who now reside on Palm Island.

Actions

As a school we have embedded respectful relationships into our practice across the school – for staff, children and families. To familiarise teachers new to the island we provide professional development about the importance of developing respectful relationships. Our professional development is followed up with ongoing support to live as a minority population in the community, as teachers may be more accustomed to being a majority population of a community.

We have also established collaborative partnerships with early childhood services, with the shared goal of supporting children's transition. Through this partnership we have been able to engage across the sector with families of children 0 to 3½ years. Our established partnerships include St Mary Mackillop Goodo Early Learning Centre, Palm Island Community Company, Queensland Health and Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council.

Our Pre-prep program further supports children's transition to our school. The children and families participating in this program are invited to participate in all activities offered at our school. Our program runs on the school site, ensuring that children and families build familiarity with our community. It has also opened the doors of the school to families through celebration days including Mother's Day, open days and barbeques.

Learnings informing next steps

Being a part of the community

We are part of a remote community, an experience to which staff may be unaccustomed. By supporting new school staff in developing respectful relationships with the Palm Island community, we are building their knowledge about the community and incorporating information about families into our transition programs. Conversely, it is equally important that we offer this support to children and families if and when they transition off the island.

Engaging families

By being accepting, non-judgemental and receptive with families, our school is demonstrating the importance we place on relationships. As a result we have had increased engagement with children and their families. Engaging children and families in reciprocal relationships is continuous in nature, which is the reason we have embedded it into our practice across the school.

More information

For contact details for your region's Transition and Partnerships and Innovation officers visit <https://oneportal.deta.qld.gov.au/earlychildhood/forschools/Pages/Transitiontoschoolsupportcontacts.aspx>

For more information and resources on supporting successful transitions visit www.qld.gov.au/transitiontoschool