Supporting successful transitions

Snapshot of initial implementation in 2015

Across Queensland our schools and their communities have been taking steps to enhance local transition-to-school practices. As every school and community is unique, principals consider what transition strategies are most appropriate for their local context. A suite of resources are available on the department’s website to support successful transition planning. Schools use the Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool to identify practices that support each child; building their individual strengths, setting up every child for success. This transition resource describes key principles, action areas and outcomes. The tool also provides suggested steps to assist schools incorporate transition-to-school practices into existing school plans.

The first step is for schools to reflect on their current transition-to-school strategies.

The second step encourages schools to plan in partnership with the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector and develop transition-to-school strategies that are informed by data and evidence.

To ensure sustainability, the third step in the tool is for schools to incorporate the transition-to-school strategies into their existing school plans.

Finally, evaluating the effectiveness of the transition-to-school strategies is conducted which schools may choose to report to the community. This evaluation can be conducted using an action research approach for continuous practice improvement, ensuring that the strategies used continue to support children and families.

This snapshot of initial implementation highlights some examples that have been collated from across the regions, illustrating how schools have taken steps to strengthen their transition strategies. One of the common themes that emerged was a focus on the development of reciprocal relationships. Many schools reached out to early childhood education and care services and other potential partners to start conversations.

As Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) note, there is a continuum of partnerships depending on the strength of the relationship, flow of communication, duration of relationship and the level of risk and reward.

In the following examples, the reciprocal relationships that have developed are at various places on the partnership continuum but all are beginning to flourish.

The journey often begins with some tentative steps by partners in getting to know one another and then finding appropriate and productive ways to collaborate, sharing the responsibility to support successful transitions.

Steps in incorporating transition-to-school practices in existing school plans.
See the decision-making tool on page 9.

More information
Regional Transition and Partnerships and Innovation Officers are available to support schools with their transition planning. Find the contact details for appointed officers in your region via this page on OnePortal:

To access more information around the statewide approach to transitions including the Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool and a range of supporting resources visit: www.qld.gov.au/transitiontoschool

Data in this snapshot of implementation correct at time of publication, 2016.
Metropolitan Region

Geebung State School is situated in the northern suburbs of Brisbane (approximately 11 km from the CBD).

Approximately 21 per cent of children live with professional working parents according to the 2011 census. While some parents identified as being born overseas, very few parents identified as being not proficient in the use of the English language. Geebung State School provides education from Prep to Year 6 for over 300 students, in addition to an onsite special education program.

Following step one of the Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool the leadership team of Geebung State School assessed their transition-to-school practices. This assessment highlighted that they valued the importance of effective transition-to-school and they recognised that they wanted to know more regarding students prior to school entry and what the ECEC services in the community were doing to support children’s transition to school.

Geebung State School leaders consulted with the department’s Transition and Partnerships and Innovation officers for support and guidance in engaging with local ECEC services for effective transition-to-school planning. As a result of this consultation, the school connected with the Brisbane Inner North Early Years (BINEY) Group. At this network they were able to share their data and learn about current services. Joining with this network has led to the establishment of positive relationships with educators.

The school also took steps to consult with other schools and their parent body. These consultations led them to differentiate between their ‘orientation’ and ‘transition’ programs and to value transitions statements for the unique information that they offer about each child. The school leaders have also jointly facilitated parent information sessions with ECEC services and shared professional development with ECEC services.

Tip from school: Engage with an existing early childhood network where possible, rather than re-inventing the wheel by initiating a new network.

Tip from school: Seek advice from department’s Transition and Partnerships and Innovation officers regarding unpacking data and its meaning and to establish new partnerships.
North Queensland Region

Currajong State School is situated on the border between the suburbs of Gulliver and Currajong in Townsville. The school catchment area includes the suburbs of Pimlico and Vincent.

Of the 400 children eligible for Prep residing in the school catchment 5 per cent have a disability and 20 per cent identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Currajong State School provides education from Prep to Year 6 for over 600 students.

After examining the 2012 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data; Currajong State School became curious about the experiences of their Prep students prior to school, connections to services other than school and their expectations of children starting Prep. These curiosities led the staff to research best practice models, prompting them to invite services in their area to a meeting. Attendees to this meeting included ECEC sector, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Services, Child Health services, Library services, Let’s Read, Communities for Children and Good Beginnings. This group unanimously agreed to work together to implement collaborative transition-to-school strategies.

From this initial meeting the Currajong School Early Years Network was formed. Some of the first actions that this network undertook were to conduct joint parent information sessions, develop a video A day in the life of a preppie, and produce information packs for the school website.

The Currajong Early Years Network has existed since July 2014 and remains committed to continuing to strengthen relationships in their community. Future actions for the network will be to consult with children, parents and students to support any modification of the strategies.

Tip from school: Initial engagement of ECEC services through data and professional development was crucial to setting the common agenda of improving outcomes for children.

Tip from school: Take an action research approach to ensure that the partnership is continuously reflecting on what skills parents, children and network members need to implement effective transition-to-school strategies.
Central Region

Biloela State School is situated in the rural town of Biloela.

Approximately three per cent of people in Biloela identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Biloela State School provides education from Prep to Year Six for over 300 students.

The department’s Transition and Partnerships and Innovation officer, alongside Biloela State School Principal and Prep Teacher, used the Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool to assess their current transition practice. Acting in a responsive, nimble fashion, the department’s Transition and Partnerships and Innovation officers, the principal and teachers presented at the district Early Childhood Teachers Association meeting to share information about transition-to-school strategies.

Those at the meeting agreed on the transition-to-school challenges in Biloela and the importance of addressing them in partnership. The partners agreed on mutual goals in the interest of children, with actions that included providing information to families about attending ECEC services, four-year-old health checks and the importance of transition statements.

Concurrently, Biloela State School empowered staff in the early years school to work together to develop a targeted transition plan and revitalise existing partnerships to reach all families in the region. These actions happening concurrently built the enthusiasm of the partnership; in addition to the quick wins of the partnership building their momentum.

Tip from school: Dockett and Perry’s (2014) statement, ‘Relationships are at the core of positive transitions to school experiences. This holds for all involved in transition’, resonated with all stakeholders and moved them further away from setting up experiences for children and families to be engaged in understanding the importance of really engaging with everyone in reciprocal relationships.
South East Region

Park Lake State School is situated in the suburb of Pacific Pines, Gold Coast. The school catchment area includes the suburbs of Maudsland and Gaven.

Approximately 12 per cent of people in Pacific Pines-Gaven identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, and 36 per cent were born overseas. Park Lake State School provides education from Prep to Year 6 for approximately 850 students.

Park Lake State School used the Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool to assess and plan collaboratively and to implement community focussed transition-to-school strategies. The school engaged a neutral third party to bring together relevant services to meet and begin establishing a collaborative partnership.

This person then had an ongoing role in building the partnership, developing a shared vision and goals, which lead the partnership to action a number of community events that engaged whole families. This also led to the establishment of the Park Lake Early Years Partnership in May 2014.

This partnership has implemented a number of transition-to-school strategies including co-facilitating information sessions for parents to support their knowledge and understanding about transition statements and a playgroup at the school.

Tip from school: Sourcing independent co-ordination of the initial network engagement can be a valuable strategy for ensuring fairness and equity in developing the vision, goals and actions.

Tip from school: A clear sense of shared purpose is critical to a strong network. Before considering the ‘what’ of a partnership between ECEC services and schools, allow time and space for partners to co-create the ‘why’ of the partnership and to acknowledge what is already working well and where we can travel together from there.
Far North Queensland Region

Hambledon State School is situated in the southern corridor of Cairns in Edmonton (approximately 12km from town centre).

Approximately 13 per cent of people in Edmonton identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, and 12 per cent were born overseas. Hambledon State School provides education from Prep to Year 6 for approximately 830 students.

Hambledon State School engaged with an existing Transition-to-School Network Cluster and shared information regarding the Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool. This was important to gain a shared understanding of transition-to-school strategies and to inform who else is important in implementing the strategies.

Additionally, the network also used Murdoch Childrens Research Institute’s (MCRI) Platforms Framework and Linking Schools and The Early Years Project to roadmap the networks next steps. This led the network to take on an ecological approach to transition to school, deciding that a whole-of-community approach was necessary, leading to the engagement of organisations outside of the school and ECEC services.

This network developed a terms of reference and established smaller working groups. The terms of reference formalised the purpose of the network, participants in network and how often the network meets. The working groups will have a focused project that each will implement and reporting back to the whole network.

Tip from school: Assessing the schools own transition and orientation strategies first is important, as it is impractical to engage with ECEC and community services to promote the schools strategies if the strategies are not suited to the community needs.

Tip from school: Co-design a transition-to-school strategy utilising the MCRI Platforms Framework to give your network a structural framework and to support discussions across sectors. It provided a basis of common reference and language across professions.
North Coast Region

Bribie Island State School is located at the southern end of Bribie Island in Bongaree.

Approximately 90 per cent of people in Bongaree speak English, with 74 per cent born in Australia. Bribie Island State School provides education from Prep to Year 6 for approximately 660 students.

Since 2012, Bribie Island State School has run a transition-to-school program called Soar into Bribie. The vision of the Soar into Bribie program is to create learning partnerships, collaborate with the community, enhance the social emotional wellbeing of Prep students, increase community confidence in the school and increase student and community engagement. Bribie Island State School engaged five local ECEC services to partner in the Soar into Bribie program. This partnership has developed and jointly implements the Soar in Bribie program with sessions for children and parents.

Over the course of the Soar into Bribie, the school has evaluated the program, noting the impact it has had on the Prep and Year 1 enrolments which were 163 in 2013 increasing to 187 in 2015. The school has also noted that Prep attendance was 86.8 per cent in 2013 which increased to 93.2 per cent in 2015.

**Tip from school:** Examine your school data to see if your transition-to-school strategies are working. If necessary collect further data to evaluate the success of the strategies. Additional data may include feedback from children, parents and community. Use this feedback in an action research loop to further tweak and improve your strategies.

**Tip from school:** “When enacting the plan, relationships were the starting point and key to our success. Open channels of communication, and welcoming ECEC staff into the school are great starting points. Nominating a key contact at the school was also helpful. I coordinate all of the communication with ECEC’s and parents regarding the transition program, strengthening relationships and ensuring that ECEC staff, parents and the wider community feel welcome at the school”

Rachel Roebuck, Master Teacher, Bribie Island State School.
Darling Downs
South West Region

Newtown State School is situated in the city of Toowoomba.

Eight per cent of the student population have English as an additional language, five per cent have a disability and 20 per cent identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Newtown State School provides education from Prep to Year 6 for over 400 students.

In 2011, Newtown State School shifted to a ready school mindset, meaning that the school is ready to support children rather than the onus being on children’s readiness for school. This shift in culture four years ago has seen the evolution of transition-to-school strategies, including an Early Years Network highlighted across the region, state and the country. Over four years the Early Years Network has grown to over 40 organisations and 80 individuals.

Through this network, Newtown State School has developed reciprocal relationships and effectively used data to adapt practices, design and deliver professional development and extend their partnerships beyond ECEC across sectors (including health and community services).

Using an action research model, the school has also measured the impact of the transition-to-school strategies that have been implemented. Consultation and feedback from children, families and the ECEC sector has provided additional data to measure the impact and allow for modification of the strategies.

Tip from school: When engaging a partnership, start with the ‘why’ as this will provide a vision for the initiative.

Tip from school: Empower leadership across the community to develop the planning and evaluation of transition-to-school strategies with children and families. This will also ensure that the strategies are not just another program done to children and families, but with children and families.

Tip from school: Ensure the strategies developed are strengths-based, focusing on what children, families and community bring to the school rather than focusing on what they might be missing.