Supporting successful transitions

School decision-making tool

As a department, we know the early years have a significant impact on children's learning and development. We also know the important role families and community play as co-contributors to their child's learning.

This is why continuity of learning and wellbeing for children as they transition from kindergarten to school is essential to support their engagement in life-long learning. It is important that schools are ready for children and families to feel welcomed as part of the school community, from their first day.

The Department of Education strategic plan 2020–24 identifies the importance of children having a great start to school as a core outcome of their early years.

Equally, the targeted strategies, outlined in the *Every student succeeding — State schools improvement strategy 2020–24*, provide direction for school planning and help shape our statewide approach to transition-to-school practices.

Many children have attended early childhood services prior to commencing school. These services have built strong relationships with families and focused on supporting children's diverse range of life experiences, knowledge, understandings, language, history, traditions and cultures.

When families and children enter the school gate, it is important that we acknowledge these prior learnings and life experiences, to help promote a sense of belonging and connection, giving children the best possible start to their schooling.

By continuing to promote strong relationships with early childhood services, families and communities, we can make informed decisions about how to support each child's successful transition and continued learning at school.

The *Supporting successful transitions: school decision-making tool* is a framework that promotes shared leadership and guides inquiry with partners to identify, plan and implement transition strategies and practices that meet the unique needs of each community.

We have a lot to be proud of with the work that has been undertaken across our regions to ensure children and families have a great start to school.

We want Queensland schools to be ready to respond to the capabilities of the children enrolling, embrace diversity within their community, and maximise continuity of teaching and learning for children as they transition into school.

Using this tool is a crucial first step to support transition conversations with families, early childhood services and your community.

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Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool

The first five years of a child's life are characterised by rapid growth and development. The learning pathways laid down in these early years form the foundation for future learning and life outcomes.[1] Readiness to learn does not reside solely in the child, but reflects the environments in which children find themselves — their families, early childhood settings, schools, neighbourhoods and communities.[2]

Children's continued learning and development in school is optimised when the following factors are considered as integral to the transition to school process: children's readiness for school, school's readiness for children, and the capacity of families and communities to provide developmental opportunities for their young children.

Children are more ready to learn and more readily adapt to, and accommodate the practices of, a new setting when relational, procedural and pedagogical continuity links their prior experience with new understandings. 'Effective learning usually occurs over time as children practise and master new skills, concepts and techniques. It is rare that significant learning just "happens"; new learning typically builds on previous knowledge and experience. For this reason, effective learning environments plan for and build in continuity, predictability and repetition.[3]

What is the role of schools in supporting transitions?

Schools have a responsibility to plan and enact transition strategies that effectively support each child and meet their individual needs so that every child succeeds. The decision-making tool identifies and implements work towards optimal transition programs which begin before entry to Prep and continue throughout the Prep year.

Local strategies should be sustainable and achievable within the resources available to schools. Resourcing through the Investing for Success initiative may provide scope for schools to determine the most effective evidence-based strategies that lead to a high return on investment. Schools are responsible for planning and implementing transition strategies, monitoring their impact within the school community and improving children's outcomes.

What is the purpose of this decision-making tool?

The *Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool* supports schools in meeting a core outcome of *The Department of Education strategic plan 2020–24*, and the vision of *Every student succeeding — State schools improvement strategy 2020–24*.

This tool provides a framework for school reflection on current transition practices. It also provides scope to identify opportunities to plan and implement targeted, evidence-based actions to maximise the school's readiness to meet the needs of all children and families. It is designed to assist schools in strengthening their approach to transition and their selection of transition-to-school strategies.

[1] Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth February 2007, *School Readiness*.

[2] Sayers, M, West, S, Lorains, J, Laidlaw, B, Moore, T, 2012, *Starting school: A pivotal life transition for children and their families*, Family Matters, No. 90.

[3] Early Childhood Australia, 2012, *National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program e-Newsletter,* No. 46.

School teams and partners can use the tool to:

- reflect on the key principles underpinning the framework
- self-assess their current transition practices in priority action areas
- plan transition strategies to achieve the stated outcomes.

What does the transition decision-making tool include?

The decision-making tool begins with a set of **principles** drawn from research on the factors that influence successful transition practices. The principles outline the values and beliefs underpinning the statewide approach to transition to school. Five **action areas** guide reflection and identification of school-specific transition strategies.

These principles and action areas complement the areas for action identified in *Every student succeeding — State schools improvement strategy 2020–24*.

The intended **outcomes** as a result of engagement with the principles and action areas are:

- enhanced collaborative decision-making
- attention to the value of continuity
- a focus on the elements that support children's success in school.

Supporting the decision-making tool is a reflecting-on-transition matrix developed to illustrate growth in the complexity and interrelatedness of transition practice. The matrix is built around the five areas for action.

Descriptions of the practices and strategies that support successful transitions are included through elaboration of the principles, action areas and reflection matrix.

- Knowing children and families
- Showing leadership
- Trusting partnerships
- From evidence to action

Principles

- Respect for diversity
- Effective use of data
- Responsive environments
- Effective pedagogy and practice
- Reciprocal relationships

Action areas

- Collaborative decisions
- Continuity of teaching and learning
- Successful learners

Outcomes
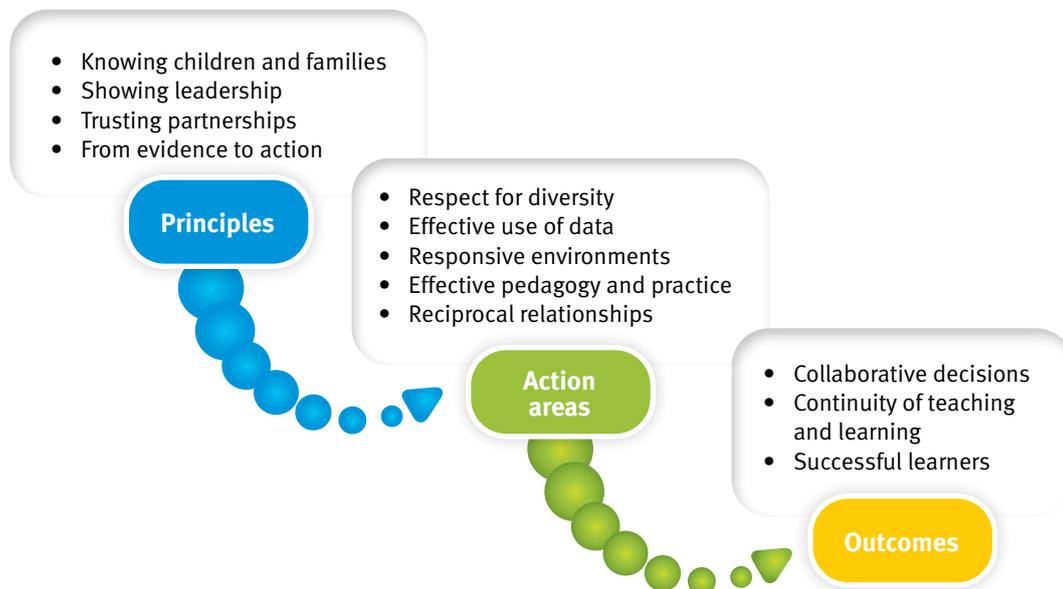
Using the principles

The four principles describe the core values and beliefs that guide thinking and action in regard to children's transition to school. A commitment to the principles will see school teams armed with the knowledge and understanding necessary to identify local transition actions.

PRINCIPLE	KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDINGS
Knowing children and families	• Each child is unique, and comes to school with diverse knowledge, understandings, dispositions and experiences. • Children are capable and competent learners. • Children have the right to learn in a safe, secure and nurturing environment in which their family's cultures, histories, languages and traditions are respected. • Children learn and develop at different rates in response to their experiences. • Children, families and communities have differing strengths and vulnerabilities requiring a range of contextual responses. • Knowledge of children and families informs practice and supports continuity of learning. • Families are children's first teachers, and the values and beliefs of the family shape the child's attitudes and understandings. • Each family has expectations for their child and expectations of the school.
Showing leadership	• School teams have a responsibility to show leadership in collaborating with the community. • Community leaders are valued, respected and engaged in decision-making. • School leaders instigate and sustain connections within the community for the benefit of children and families. • Teachers support families to understand the connections between settings. • Teaching and learning practices in Prep are appropriate and informed by evidence-based pedagogy for children 0 – 8 years.
Trusting partnerships	• Parents/carers know their children, and their vested interest supports engagement in their transition to school. • Consultation and collaboration with families enhances partnerships. • Early Childhood Education Care (ECEC) service providers have knowledge of the children and families to support the transition to school. • ECEC services know and understand child development and have evidence of children's learning progress. • Community organisations have knowledge of family and community contexts and provide insights into the strengths and vulnerabilities of the community.
From evidence to action	• Informed decision-making is based on sound evidence. • Accessing and analysing evidence provides a justifiable rationale for decisions. • Community- and child-level data creates a clear picture of strengths and needs.

Using the action areas – planning for transition

Locally determined strategies, processes and actions support effective transitions. The areas for action can assist in organising transition strategies. There is no priority order to the action areas. Schools may choose to focus on one action area and refine their practice in this area in response to a priority need. Alternatively, a suite of strategies may be determined that relate to several action areas. Schools prioritise the actions that will deliver the most effective transition outcomes and the best return on investment for their community.

Each action area is expressed as a series of reflective questions. Descriptors explaining the intent and scope of the actions areas are provided to support decision-making. Example transition strategies or actions are provided for consideration in Appendix 1 (page 14). These strategies are a guide only, and designed to provide a starting point for consideration.

ACTION AREA	REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS	DESCRIPTORS
Respect for diversity	• What do I know about the children and families in my community? • Do we have the skills, knowledge and understandings to respond to the cultural and contextual needs of children, families and the community? • How can the school respond to the needs of children and families from diverse backgrounds? • How do we ensure equitable access to learning for all children? • What services already exist in the community? • How can I access or develop knowledge of the community?	• Every student has the opportunity to learn and succeed in a supportive and inclusive environment. • A whole-school approach to student learning provides a continuum of support directed to different levels of student need. • Families have differing values and beliefs about schooling. • The languages, cultures, histories and identity of families are valued and respected, and are the basis for decision-making. • Assumptions can lead to misunderstandings.
Effective use of data	• Does the data from the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) School and Community Profiles identify a level of vulnerability in my community? • How do I find out what child-level data I can access? • How do I find out what information is available from ECEC service providers and other agencies? • What are the links between AEDC data and my school data? • What demographic or other contextual information is accessible to help build understanding of the local community or region?	• AEDC data provides insights into the child development vulnerabilities in the community. • AEDC data highlights the protective factors that support children's development. • Transition statements provided by the family from the kindergarten setting contain valuable information about children's learning in kindy. • Transition statements can provide information about learning preferences. • Historical school assessment data can show trends in learning needs. • A range of demographic and other contextual information about the local community or region is available on government and other agency websites and can help inform planning.
Responsive environments	• In what ways do the structural and procedural decisions I make support transitions? • Have I planned specific entry-to-school procedures that meet the needs of individuals and groups of children? • How do I use my knowledge of children to inform the decisions I make about school and classroom environments? • How do my learning spaces and resources support the learning preferences of young children? • How do social, temporal and physical environments reflect evidence-based beliefs about children's learning?	• Using familiar resources supports children's feelings of confidence and success. • Using information gathered from conversations with parents enables schools to plan to cater for identified needs and interests of individual students when creating indoor and outdoor spaces. • Providing a balance of indoor and outdoor experiences supports all domains of learning. • Blocks of uninterrupted time provide for deeper engagement in learning. • Spaces that mirror aspects of prior-to-school settings build confidence.

ACTION AREA	REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS	DESCRIPTORS
Effective pedagogy and practice	• What do I know about how young children learn? • What teaching approaches and resources are most appropriate for young learners? • How do school approaches to teaching and learning align with approaches in prior-to-school settings? • How do I find information about ECEC and schooling frameworks? • What do I know about children's prior learning? • Does my school team hold the appropriate level of early childhood pedagogical knowledge?	• Children are active learners. • Continuity of teaching and learning practices builds confidence and a sense of belonging that promotes success. • A range of early years pedagogies such as investigation, inquiry, problem-solving and play motivate children and engage them with learning. • Children's prior experience, culture and preference are considered when planning for learning. • Children have multiple opportunities to engage with learning area knowledge, understanding and skills in different contexts. • Learning experiences are flexible, with differentiated teaching that responds to the particular learning needs of all students. • Teachers differentiate teaching and learning based on the identified needs of all students.
Reciprocal relationships	• How can my school better engage respectfully with children and families? • How does my school engage with local ECEC service providers? • What information can we share that will support children's transitions? • In what ways do I draw on the knowledge of community leaders and elders to enhance relationships? • How can my school initiate opportunities to collaborate with other local schools and early childhood teachers?	• Families know their children best. • ECEC services hold a wealth of knowledge about children and their families. • Reaching out involves listening without judging. • Being involved outside the school breaks down barriers. • Being a participant, not a leader, in some contexts builds relationships. • Sharing perspectives, not giving answers, builds trust.

Steps in incorporating transition-to-school practices in existing school plans

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
Assess current transition practice	Plan collaboratively to establish strategies based on data	Incorporate strategies into school plans	Measure the effectiveness of transition strategies

How should this tool be used?

This tool acknowledges that every school and community is unique, with existing transition strategies in place. Many schools recognise that transition begins well before, and extends beyond, orientation and enrolment, and implement strategies to support partnerships and foster a sense of belonging. The tool serves as a guide for all schools, regardless of their current perspectives on transition. The information below provides a four-step process for reflection, planning, action and review.

Step 1: Assess current transition practice

Once familiar with this document, schools begin by reviewing their existing transition practices, supported by the reflective questions outlined for each action area.

Following the self-assessment, reflections can be shared and collaboration begin with partners, including early childhood services and families, to determine what is working well for children, areas for priority action and longer term aspirational goals.

Step 2: Plan collaboratively to establish strategies based on data

Community-level data provides an overview of the strengths and needs of children in the area. Using available data and contextual information, schools collaborate with early childhood services, community agencies and stakeholders to identify specific priority actions for the school cohort.

Community-level data to inform planning includes AEDC community- and school-level data including vulnerabilities and protective factors, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, community maps and profiles and parent surveys. School- and student-level data could include information from kindergarten transition statements, attendance patterns and enrolment trends and analysis of historical data from the previous year, such as the previous Prep cohort's Early Start results and analysis of progress towards achievement standards.

The assembled evidence informs discussion between schools and transition partners to establish a shared view of children's strengths and needs, and identify opportunities and barriers to effective transitions.

Step 3: Incorporate strategies into school plans

Once strategies have been identified, schools determine the most effective way to implement these, including refocusing current procedures and practice, communicating change, and approaches to monitoring outcomes. School leaders document their strategies within current school plans, e.g. School Plans, Investing for success plans or Annual Implementation Plans. Publishing information about transition-to-school practices on the school website will inform families and community partners.

Step 4: Measure the effectiveness of your transition strategies

By embedding the transition actions into existing school planning documents, schools accept accountability for delivering identified strategies and achieving outcomes.

Schools may choose to report to the school community on the success of their transition strategies through ongoing monitoring and analysis of data. Drawing on the principles of a community of learners, networks or clusters of school leaders can share transition strategies and collaborate where schools draw enrolments from similar catchments.

Decision-making matrix – a tool for reflection

This matrix (pages 11 –13) is designed for schools to reflect on their current practices and support approaches to strengthening transitions. The matrix describes a range of behaviours across three levels of decision-making (school-centred, consultative and collaborative) that inform the transition practices enacted by a school.

While it is intended transition practices will become more collaborative in order to engage and respond to the perspectives of all transition partners, practices across each level of the matrix are recognised as valuable in supporting children's transition to school.

ACTION AREA	FOCUS	SCHOOL-CENTRED	CONSULTATIVE	COLLABORATIVE
Respect for diversity	Knowing the community	• General information about community diversity is acknowledged. • Orientation programs and delivery are based on school-determined content.	• Proposed transition practices are presented to key community leaders. • School personnel are aware of the diversity within their class and have adapted orientation sessions accordingly.	• Community groups/ leaders participate in planning school transition processes. • School personnel access and incorporate information about families in transition programs.
	Knowing and responding to children	• Transition procedures and processes are planned in advance of children's attendance. • Attention is focused on supporting children to adapt to school processes.	• Aspects of the school transition program and processes are differentiated for some children. • The knowledge of ECEC service providers is used to adapt transition programs and processes.	• Transition programs are constructed in response to children's prior experiences and knowledge. • Transition programs acknowledge the need to promote social and emotional wellbeing.
Effective use of data	Community-level data	• AEDC data is used to identify strengths and vulnerabilities within the local community. • Curriculum differentiation is planned in response to previous school data.	• AEDC data is analysed to identify both vulnerabilities and protective factors within the cohort. • Differentiation of the curriculum delivery is planned, and procedural adjustments considered, according to the children's needs identified in the transition statements and school processes.	• AEDC and other data is used to inform discussions with partners and to inform transition practices. • Families have the opportunity to express views about transition. • Schools and ECEC services examine data about the learning needs of students entering the school, and collaboratively plan to differentiate teaching and learning to support continuity of learning.
	Child-level data	• Orientation and interview processes seek to gain knowledge of children's development. • Data gathering incorporates a focus on a range of knowledge and skills development.	• Orientation and interview processes incorporate discussion with families about their child's likes, motivations and favoured experiences. • Transition statements are sought and valued.	• Children play an active role in expressing their likes, motivations and expectations. • Orientation and interview processes incorporate information provided in transition statements.
Responsive environments	Processes and procedures	• Transition and orientation processes and procedures are organised around administrative requirements. • Processes and procedures commence in Term 4. • Information explains what school routines and expectations are emphasised and how they are implemented.	• Transition and orientation processes and procedures provide opportunities for children to be together in groups. • Some information is provided through ECEC services during the year. • Information includes understanding why transition processes and strategies are prioritised.	• Transition and orientation processes and procedures address family, child, ECEC services and school needs. • The school approaches transition as an integrated process throughout the year. • Information includes 'What do you think?' — capturing family perspectives.

ACTION AREA	FOCUS	SCHOOL-CENTRED	CONSULTATIVE	COLLABORATIVE
Responsive environments continued	Physical, temporal and social	• Orientation is characterised by discrete classroom visits. • Routines are uniform across year levels. • There is little differentiation in timetables. • Playground space is used during breaks. • Classroom environments are disconnected from ECEC learning environments.	• Orientation includes invitations to a variety of school events. • Routines are adjusted for the first week of school. • Timetables are adjusted for the first week of school. • Some use is made of playgrounds throughout the day. • Classroom environments include some spaces similar to ECEC services.	• Orientation includes information about school-based resourcing (tips, clips, advice) on school website. • Routines are established in response to learning needs. • Timetables are adjusted to respond to children's learning preferences and change over time. • Playgrounds are recognised and used as learning spaces. • Classroom environments reflect key aspects of ECEC services and are adapted over time.
Effective pedagogy and practice	Early childhood pedagogy	• Teaching and learning is organised around limited understandings of early childhood pedagogies. • School pedagogical frameworks have a limited focus on early years pedagogy and differentiation for the early years.	• Learning experiences in the first week of school reflect those offered in ECEC service. • Understanding about the place of a range of age-appropriate pedagogies is limited and supplementary to teaching content. • There is an understanding of how learning is organised in ECEC services.	• Programs incorporate a range of age-appropriate pedagogies, which include investigations, real-life experiences, focused teaching and learning. • Curriculum planning is resourced, delivered and assessed using multiple pedagogies. • School recognises how learning is organised in ECEC services and has adopted some similar approaches.
	Continuity of learning	• There is little acknowledgement of children's engagement in learning in ECEC services. • Curriculum programs have the same starting point in all classrooms for all children.	• School personnel are familiar with ECEC learning frameworks. • School personnel and ECEC educators have discussed teaching approaches in their context. • Support is provided to strengthen transitions for children with additional needs.	• Alignments between learning frameworks and school curriculum inform decisions. • Learning is viewed as a continuum for each child. • Schools and ECEC services have a shared understanding of curriculum and pedagogy and how it applies across settings.
Reciprocal relationships	Communicating with service providers	• ECEC service providers have not been identified. • Communication is focused on gathering or giving information for administrative purposes.	• Service providers are provided with information about the school to share with families. • School personnel visit local service providers.	• School and service providers meet regularly to discuss practice and determine transition strategies. • School staff and service providers share professional development. • Common practices are shared, e.g. behaviour management and parent engagement.

ACTION AREA	FOCUS	SCHOOL-CENTRED	CONSULTATIVE	COLLABORATIVE
Reciprocal relationships continued	Involving families and children	• Relationships are developed when children start school. • Information about the child's previous experiences focus on service type and duration of participation.	• Information about the child and family is gathered through enrolment interviews. • The school requests a copy of the transition statement at interview.	• School prioritises time to meet with parents to discuss their children. • School facilitates parent education sessions for families with children of prior-to-school age • Transition statements are used to inform discussions with families.
	Community participation	• Agencies are contacted once children have commenced school.	• Agencies are contacted prior to or following the orientation and interview • Agencies are invited to provide professional development for school staff.	• School involves relevant agencies in discussions and planning for individual children. • Advice is sought from relevant agencies about strengths-based transition strategies for specific groups of children.

APPENDIX 1 – Example school transition strategies

Schools are encouraged to consider transition-to-school strategies such as those below that provide the best return on investment. A return on investment can be considered in terms of the time invested by partners in planning, collaborating, consolidating and agreeing on an approach to children's transition to school, maximising the expertise of internal or external stakeholders, recurrent financial implications, and the outcomes achieved for children.

The strategies provided below are examples only, and schools will develop strategies and actions relevant to their context. They are provided as a starting point for reflection and discussion.

ACTION AREA	POSSIBLE STRATEGIES/ACTIONS
Respect for diversity	✅ 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 ECEC 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.
Effective use of data	✅ Local data network comprising school, ECEC services, local agencies and non-government agencies. ✅ Working group with local ECEC services to discuss transition statements, with a focus on content, what information is provided, what it tells you about students and how it can be used. ✅ Community consultations in small communities without ECEC services. ✅ Valuing transition statements — messaging built into orientation materials for families (why transition statements are important and how they support the child's transition). ✅ Review assessment tools used prior to school — how do they value add? How can they be used in conjunction with transition statements to provide a picture of the whole child.

ACTION AREA	POSSIBLE STRATEGIES/ACTIONS
Responsive environments	✓ Routine times for Prep are responsive to the needs of students. ✓ Consideration of the location, aesthetics and function of outdoor environments. ✓ Plan how the learning environment may change across a year to support growth but reflect continuity. How will it look in the first month and how will it track at the end of Prep? ✓ Differentiate for the needs of students. ✓ Reflect on aspects of Quality Area 3 (Physical environment) of the National Quality Standards and possible application to the school environment.
Effective pedagogy and practice	✓ Use a range of early years pedagogical approaches ✓ Differentiate learning experiences to enable all students to meet the Australian Curriculum achievement standards. ✓ Facilitate teacher visiting program in ECEC services. ✓ Invite local ECEC educators to school-based professional development. ✓ Compare prior-to-school and Prep pedagogy — plan a continuum of practice to support effective transitions.
Reciprocal relationships	✓ Facilitate parent education and information sessions in collaboration with ECEC services. ✓ Onsite playgroups facilitated by relevant community groups or agencies. ✓ Move from consultative to collaborative practice. ✓ Facilitated playgroups in conjunction with parent information sessions. ✓ Attend ECEC professional development. ✓ Review relationships with other agencies and services using Quality Area 6 (Collaborative partnerships with families and community) of the National Quality Standard.

Out-of-scope strategies/actions

The following strategies are outside the scope of the statewide approach and are not viable options for school communities:

✖ school- or P&C-delivered kindergarten programs (excluding State delivered kindergarten on school sites)

✖ programs delivered by schools and attended by kindergarten age children without parents in attendance

✖ defining school entry expectations for ECEC services

✖ developing and implementing assessment tools or screeners with school-determined expectations of children

✖ expecting early childhood services to implement programs designed for the schooling sector

✖ school-developed transition statements categorised around a set of defined skills and knowledge.

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