

SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS

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Transitions occur at several points throughout a child’s education journey, and as teachers we play a key role on these occasions. This article considers transition periods from a range of teacher perspectives, beginning with early childhood and concluding with secondary school. As teachers approach the end of a school year, transition will be a significant focus.

Part 1: Transition from the perspective of an Early Childhood teacher

Siobhan Hannan

Transition to primary school is a major milestone in the life of a child and their family. Starting “big school” is a momentous and universal occasion. Evidence demonstrates that a smooth transition is important in establishing a foundation for better learning in the first years of school:

Placing greater emphasis on the continuity of learning recognises that building on children’s prior and current experiences helps them to feel secure, confident and connected to people, places, events, routines and understandings. (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2017).

In the early childhood sector, we often talk about the importance of feeling a sense of belonging.

[The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework \(VEYLDF\)](#) underpins the work of Early Childhood professionals. It provides guidance on preparing children for successful transition from pre-school to kindergarten. Key learning areas are social skills, emotional independence, and communication. Kindergarten teachers typically offer children imaginative play opportunities to help them process the looming change and encourage families to attend school orientation programs. More ambitious transition programs might also involve visits between schools and preschools. Familiar faces work wonders in helping children settle into school – as does knowing where to find the toilet!

Early childhood teachers are very aware of supporting children and families to transition to primary school. We spend time supporting parents to choose a school, as well as decide when their child is ready to start school. The teacher in a funded preschool program will provide a [transition learning and development statement](#) (TLDS - Department of Education and Training, 2019) to the primary school. If filled out electronically, these are accessed via the Insight Assessment platform. A lot of work goes into

preparing transition statements and they are a very important resource for Prep teachers. Early childhood teachers use strengths-based language. We focus on telling you what the child *can* do. This is part of our training and the culture of the sector and is also explicitly built-in to the transition statement template.

Teachers who want to support their local preschools with transition can:

- 📄 Provide information about enrolment, open days and orientation
- 📄 Make sure transition statements reach Prep teachers
- 📄 Get to know the teachers in feeder kindergartens
- 📄 Arrange visits and events for preschool classes to visit the school
- 📄 Visit preschool classes to meet the children.

At a more philosophical level, we can all be involved in thinking about how to improve communication, and how to reduce the distance between school and preschool. It is frequently said that it is not so much about whether the child is ready for school, rather how ready is school for the child.

Part 2: Transition from the perspective of a Prep teacher

Kayla Kelly

Prep transition is a vital part of establishing a positive tone for the learning journey ahead. A successful transition program has many aspects, including promoting family interaction with the school community to foster relationships and ease the nerves of both students and their parents. Allowing parent engagement during the transition period enables carers to gain better understand how the school functions, easing their nerves of saying goodbye to their children at the door. This also supports students with separation anxiety, encouraging them to engage confidently with their new learning adventure. It is beneficial to Prep transition if students have had multiple exposures to the learning space and staff.

To best support future students and parents at Featherbrook P-9 College, we work to establish a positive relationship prior to the beginning of the school year. A series of four half hour reading sessions provide an opportunity for new learners and their parents to come into the learning space and meet the Prep teachers. These enable students and parents to feel more confident and become familiar with the learning spaces and teachers before the first day of school. Following this, our future Prep students participate in a series of four two-hour transition sessions whilst their parents attend parent information forums about topics such as curriculum, uniform, after school care and services such as the school nurse program.

Throughout the year, early childhood centres within the area are invited to visit the school with prospective students. These tours are informal and give the children an opportunity to explore the playground and school environment with childcare educators. Similarly, parents and carers have the opportunity to participate in a school tour which provides insight into the learning experiences and environment. Towards the end of the year, future Prep students are encouraged to participate in transition sessions with current Prep teachers, allowing both the students and teachers to familiarise

themselves with what the new year may bring. Finally, we also hold a Family BBQ night, encouraging open conversation between Prep families and staff from the College.

As a Prep teacher, take your time during this transition period - get to know your new learners and their backgrounds. Remember everything will need to be explicitly unpacked multiple times. This means staying calm and pre-empting any questions or concerns that may arise. Provide opportunities for question between you and new families. Establishing an open communication line is key, so think about ways to provide relevant and appropriate information without overwhelming parents. Consider the timing of delivering new information, including expectations and school routines. Finally, enjoy this experience, they are learning just as much as you are, so have fun and celebrate the little wins!

Part 3: Transition from the perspective of a Grade 6 teacher

Kate Chinner

The transition from primary school to secondary school involves significant change for students. They move from having one main teacher who looks after their needs (academically, socially and emotionally) to having a range of teachers for different subjects. With different teachers come different expectations, different homework due at different times and sometimes different students in each class. A child may have had the same friends who have supported them across all their years of primary school and now suddenly they only know a few people in the whole school.

As a Grade 6 teacher, we can help with this transition by talking to them about what secondary school will be like, how classes might run, the fact they will need to work with different teachers, and helping them to understand the need to become more independent and organised. Term 4 is a good time to put into place some strategies to help them understand the changes that are coming. If you have a secondary school close by, your school might be able to set up some events at the high school even if some students are not going to be attending here. Some suggested transition and orientation activities in Years 5 and 6 can be found [here \(DET, 2018c\)](#).

Not all students will have received their first choice of secondary school and so once this has been finalised you may find some families are disappointed. This is a time for you to encourage and support children and families in either helping them to work out their next step (they may now consider a different school) or particularly in helping them to move through their disappointment and focus on the educational opportunities that lie ahead.

Year 6 teachers also play a critical role in transferring key information to the secondary schools:

The timely and accurate transfer of student information is critical to the success of a transition. This requires primary schools to update student data and information and then transfer this information to the secondary school once a Year 6 student has had a Year 7 placement offer confirmed. Ensuring the destination secondary school has a minimum set of information about a newly enrolled Year 7 student is possibly the most important component for a successful transition. [\(DET, 2018b\)](#)

This information is mostly transferred via CASES21 in a government school but may take different forms in other schools.

If you teach students with additional needs, it is helpful to set up a meeting with the secondary school transition coordinator. Parents can also attend this meeting so that a clear, shared understanding about the student's learning needs is effectively communicated and ensures the secondary school has all the available information to comprehensively support the student. The student may need a few extra transition days to ensure they are comfortable. The Department of Education suggests that transitions be 'clearly planned over a longer duration' (see section '[Students with a disability](#)').

If you have students for whom particular behavioural or academic strategies have worked successfully, consider how to pass this information on to the secondary school also. Teachers of Year 7 may also contact you if the students need extra support making the transition to secondary school.

In December each year there is a state-wide transition day where students visit their future secondary schools. Independent schools and some Catholic schools run their transition day separately. This is an important step for students, and you can support them by preparing them for what to expect as well as debriefing afterwards.

For some students, the transition from primary to secondary school places them at additional risk of disengaging from school. It is important to identify potentially vulnerable students and families and consider ways the school might provide additional transition support. The Department of Education has some helpful tips for supporting [Vulnerable students](#). The [Student Transition and Resilience Training](#) (START) resource has been designed in partnership with clinical psychologist Andrew Fuller to support Year 6 and Year 7 students transition from primary to secondary school.

Part 4: Transition from the perspective of a secondary school teacher

Laura Zinghini

Secondary school can feel like a completely different world to a student who has just made the transition from primary school. As teachers, there are plenty of things to consider as we think about how to make that transition as smooth as possible.

Firstly, it's helpful to think about the differences between the two learning environments. If we have never taught in a primary school environment, we may not even be aware of some of these. You could consider having some of your current secondary students make a list of differences between the two, and then as a team discuss what steps you could put into place to address them before the students begin. As an example, some comments made by my secondary students included; 'in primary schools, classes generally take place in one room, they do not have to carry multiple books for multiple classes, and the school canteen is only open one day!' We could address these differences by doing things such as limiting the amount of classroom movement within the first term to ensure they become accustomed to moving spaces and therefore easing them in to it; collecting text or workbooks and keeping them in the space to limit the amount they have to carry between rooms; and as for the canteen.....well, welcome to luxury!

Secondly, try to understand the concerns of the students, and pre-empt them by attempting to address them.

Will I make new friends?

Try to create opportunities for them to work in constantly changing group settings so that they can get to know people quickly. It is also a good idea for school camp to take place as soon as possible when the year begins because you can get them out of the school setting and get them to know one another.

The year 12s are scary!

My school also includes taking Year 12 leaders on camp, to assist the year 7 students to relax around them and feel comfortable with older students.

There is so much more work in high school!

Most teachers will try to limit the workload for year 7 students to ease them in, but constant positive reassurance that they are working well is a must.

It is equally important to communicate with the parents of the students in a consistent manner. Introductory nights are a great idea, as parents can meet staff early in their child's year and put a face to a name, whilst also outlining concerns that staff may need to know. Parents are such an integral part of the primary years, and as their children become adolescents there may be less opportunity for them to be as involved, so where possible ensure that communication is often and consistent.

Some other suggested orientation activities are included [here \(DET, 2018a\)](#).

Where possible, try to create links between the feeder primary schools and secondary schools. Programs such as STEM, VCAL and Community Learning are a great way to get secondary students to meet and work with primary students. Every second year my school utilises six local primary schools in the annual college production, giving primary students the opportunity to be part of a secondary school performance and utilising secondary students as peer leaders for the primary students. Programs like this assist the transition and make the older students seem less scary!

Every effort should be made to understand the learning abilities of your new students as quickly as possible and transition data is crucial. There is an increasing emphasis on providing data to secondary schools that provides rich and useful information about each student's achievements, abilities and areas for development. As a secondary teacher, make it your priority to find out what information your school has received, particularly via CASES21, and use that data to inform your teaching practice.

Communication, understanding and assistance are the keys to a smooth secondary transition.

Part 5: Transition from a senior secondary school perspective

Marino D'Ortenzio

Leaving secondary school is an exciting time for many students, but can also bring a unique set of challenges. There will be plenty of soul searching. They need to make some big decisions and will need teacher and caregiver support. Will I be choosing the right course, career or job? Will I get a score that will give me entry into my first option? What if I change my mind? These are all legitimate questions and you'll find yourself moving between urging students to do their best and also giving them the clear message that their score is not a proxy for their worth or intelligence. It's likely that they will change careers through their life and it's important to remember that there are always multiple pathways to get to any chosen career point or path.

A senior school certificate is not the end of a young person's education but can be considered a stepping stone between one form of education and another, whether that be on the job training or a further qualification. Some students will be entering the world of tertiary education. As a teacher, you can play a vital role in supporting students to make decisions about careers and vocations that suit them well. You can also provide support in selecting tertiary courses that will help them achieve their goals. The Careers Advisor is invaluable at this time and should take the leading role in supporting year 12 students. Be sure to refer students to them frequently as they will have up to date knowledge about universities and TAFEs.

For those who do choose a university option, they may feel the pressure of gaining the best possible Australian Tertiary Entrance Rank (ATAR) score. Some students will find themselves disappointed in their result. Schools' Careers Advisors will also have all the relevant information about backup options and next steps for students who find themselves in this position.

For students who are planning to move into employment, the period in between finishing school and finding a job can be particularly worrying. Schools can help students to prepare for this period by teaching them how to prepare resumes, undertaking mock interviews, organizing work experience or connecting them with opportunities such as job fairs and employment agencies.

In all the conversation around transition, it's important to keep in mind that we are still dealing with young people who are developing their own identity and finding their place in the world. How many times have you heard it said by those in their twilight years that school was the best time of their life? These final school experiences can still be uplifting and positive. Let's remember that as we share the transition experience from school into the wider world with our students.

A key takeaway

Transitions occur at many points during the span of a student's education. As teachers, we must be proactive, prepared and enthusiastic about supporting students through each of these changes. Our focus should be both on what is absolutely necessary – documentation and data transfer – as well as on what is helpful and supportive to students, families and schools.

Discussion with your mentor

Consider the transition stages that apply to you, and discuss:

- What role can I play in best supporting these students to make a successful transition?
- What activities can be done in my classroom to better support transitioning students?
- What information is required from me, or do I need, to make a transition more successful?
- What evidence-based resources are there to support developing my knowledge and expertise in successful transitions?

References

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