

Linking Schools and Early Years

A partnership approach to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) Transition Learning and Development Statements *within the Linking Schools and Early Years (LSEY) project communities*

The Corio/Norlane, Footscray and Hastings communities each undertook a partnership approach to implementing the Transition Learning and Development Statements. The processes involved in the partnership approach varied across the three communities to ensure the processes and information sharing was relevant and meaningful in the local context.

Local processes involved:

- An agreement by all local early years educators and prep teachers to attend the DEECD Transition Statement professional development as a group of local practitioners.
- A workshop for local early childhood educators and prep teachers to come together and discuss what information is already collected by early years services that could be incorporated into the statements and how information shared would be useful for schools in informing their planning for individual children.
- Regular conversations between early years educators and prep teachers to support the completion and use of the Statements.
- Handover meetings where early years services and schools came together to personally handover the Transition Statements.
- Meetings planned in early 2010 to review the effectiveness of the local process undertaken in implementing the Transition Statements and to discuss how the statement information has been used.

The partnership approaches undertaken by each community, recognise the importance of each of the following practice principles:

- Developing strong relationships – Building strong relationships between early years services, schools and families.
- Local relevance and meaning – Ensuring partnership action plans are informed by local context and stakeholders.
- Reflective practice – Continually reflecting on the effectiveness of partnership actions to enable continuous practice improvement.

Each of the three project communities undertook an anecdotal evaluation (group discussion) of how effective the local processes were in implementing the Transition Statements and used this information to adapt and improve their local processes. Their collective feedback on their partnership approaches are detailed below:

Experiences in completing and using the Transition Statements	
Time pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough time to complete the statements with large numbers of children – ‘overwhelming’.
Engaging families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most services sent the statements home with children for parents to complete; one early years service also offered support for families to complete them at the centre (particularly those with English as a second language). • Many parents signed the form to give permission for it to be completed but did not add any of their own comments. • Some felt that families didn’t see the value of completing their section of the statement. • One early years service used staff who have languages other than English to interpret forms for parents/support parents to complete them.
Framing information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be no surprises for parents in the statements as parents would have had lots of feedback throughout the year. • Although early years services had spoken with parents about the concerns and challenges for their child, they felt that putting them in writing may be confronting for some parents and that it was challenging to write about some issues and vulnerabilities using positive language. This was found to be particularly sensitive when parents weren’t engaged with early years services in acknowledging and working together on these issues. In some cases this led to important information for vulnerable children not being shared. • It was highlighted that it is very important to use language that is family friendly as families have to give consent for the information to be shared.
Usefulness of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kindergarten teachers in long day care settings commented that it was often difficult to reflect on how children settled in when they have already been in childcare at the centre for a significant period of time. • From an early years perspective it is important to note that the way the child is functioning in the early years setting may not be reflected in the child’s response to beginning primary school, e.g. a child who settled into kindergarten confidently, started wetting himself when he started school. • From a prep teacher perspective, information on how a child settled into the early years service were not necessarily helpful for teachers.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The statements were very helpful to prep teachers, particularly for children who did not attend transition sessions at the schools. They were used to plan classrooms and getting to know the children. • Prep teachers found that they got more statements for children who were coping well with kindergarten and who transitioned to school smoothly and not as many for children who didn't. • The families' information and child's concerns and feedback were very important for prep teachers but there was not a lot of this information provided. • A key bit of information was the kindergarten attendance, particularly where school absenteeism is an issue across the community.
<p>Effectiveness of the locally developed processes and partnership approach</p>	<p>Two of the three project sites had previously developed a local template to enable information sharing across early years services and schools (throughout the 2008-09 transition period).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It was helpful having been through the process of developing and completing the LSEY Information Sharing tool in the 2008" <p>The opportunity to have conversations between schools and early years services before writing the statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gave early years professionals an opportunity to find out that prep teachers valued/would value (four) essential points relevant for the individual child, as opposed to a lengthy information that has been cut from the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development framework (VEYLDF). <p>The face to face handover from early years professionals to prep teachers (or transition coordinators) was 'invaluable' because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early years services got an insight from prep teachers around what would be helpful for children to know regarding starting and engaging in school • It provided an opportunity to elaborate on information in the statements • It was felt that there could have been more time for networking before and after the face-to-face handover, as opposed to just between the schools/services that were handing over the statements. <p>The partnership approach taken was also beneficial in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the awareness of prep teachers about the content and arrival of the statements (feedback from schools outside LSEY sites has seen prep teachers that haven't sighted or heard about the statements even as at June 2010). • Conversations about what information would be useful to share (starting to develop a common language between schools and early years services). • Strengthening relationships between early years educators and prep teachers.

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Recommendations and considerations for the future

The Transition Statements

- The name 'Transition Statements' is not a simple and clear description of what the statements are actually about, particularly for families where English is not their first language. The title needs to reflect what the statements are about – moving from early years services into primary school.
- The language in the body of the statement was not clear. Need to avoid using jargon and use simple and direct language.
- Language used within the Statements was thought to be problematic for parents/guardians with low literacy levels (possibly parents/guardians of the children that would benefit most from family involvement in the process).
- One early years service used an interpreters service ('All Graduates') and found this useful.
- The forms are too long and it would help to cut out all unnecessary sections including the pictures that are included on each page. This would also reduce printing costs as early years services have to incur the costs of printing.
- It would be useful to be able to have and send the statements electronically.
- Conversations about the statements with parents were beneficial. Some commented that they have now started these conversations early in the year.
- Need to work out how to engage families to provide this information, in particular how families from Culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can be supported to provide this.

The supporting resources and professional development

- The languages the statements and information were translated into were not sufficient – no Hindi and in one early years service 20% of the children were of Indian background.
- Would have preferred less background information (on policy direction etc) at the professional development and more focus on the tasks that had to be completed (writing the statements). It would have been helpful to be given a copy of the PD booklet beforehand and then the focus could have been on practicing completing the statements.

Local processes

- Some key plans were made about how the local processes and partnership approaches can be improved and strengthened.
- Early years professionals will start to complete the statements in early October. This will be sufficient having had all year to plan and document information

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about children within the VEYLDF and statement outcome sections.

- Prep teachers and schools, at their formal transition/orientation activities, will talk with parents about the value of the information from both families and early years professionals and will encourage families to complete their section.
- Hold the face-to-face handover in the first week of December and build in more networking time (important to check that it is legal to continue to have a face-to-face handover. The Statement includes an option for early years professionals to tick a box to indicate they can discuss the statements if prep teachers require further information).
- Early years professionals and prep teachers will continue to share information and feedback about the statements through the relationships they have started to develop and activities of the Linking Schools and Early Years project.