

Linking Schools and Early Years Project

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Why Linking Schools and Early Years?

In Australia, a significant proportion of children, especially those from disadvantaged communities, arrive at school developmentally vulnerable.

Research conducted by the Centre for Community Child Health in 2006, explored the potential to refocus community-based services for young children and their families and found:

- ➔ That barriers faced by vulnerable children when starting school may be overcome by stronger linkages and partnerships between schools and early years services, families and the community.
- ➔ That there is the potential to bridge a gap between early years services and primary schools to ensure better planning for the individual needs of children entering school.

About the project

The *Linking Schools and Early Years* project is working towards the long-term outcome of all children arriving at primary school ready to engage with the many opportunities offered by their new learning environment. Three specific goals have been identified to work towards achieving the long-term outcome.

1. Children and families make a smooth transition between early years services and schools.
2. Early years services and schools actively connect with families.
3. Schools are responsive to the individual learning needs of all children.

The project is operating in three Victorian communities; Footscray in the City of Maribyrnong, Hastings in Mornington Peninsula Shire and in Corio/Norlane in the City of Greater Geelong and will run for a period of six years until 2012. It is being conducted by the Centre for Community Child Health with support from The R.E Ross Trust, The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Foundation for Young Australians.

Achieving the project goals

In each site the project is driven by a partnership group made up of the following key community stakeholders; schools, early education and care services, local government, child and family community services. The partnership groups gather and reflect on local contextual information (such as AEDI results, ABS data and community assets) to develop locally relevant strategies and activities that will form their local action plan. The action plans created are owned by the partnership groups and are reviewed and updated as actions become part of schools and services everyday practice and as new local contextual and evaluation information arises.

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 reflect on the effectiveness of partnership actions to enable continuous practice improvement.

A partnership approach to the *Transition Learning and Development Statements*

The *Linking Schools and Early Years* project communities have each taken a local partnership approach to implementing the *Transition Statements*. Although approaches varied between sites due to differing local contexts some consistent elements across the three communities emerged. These included:

- ➔ 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.

For more information about the *Linking Schools and Early Years* project and other strategies and activities implemented see www.rch.org.au/lsey or attend Bella and Jennifer's session at the 2010 Early Childhood Conference.