

Transitions

Transition from an early childhood education and care setting to a primary school

Starting school is a significant milestone for children and their families. This can involve new routines, new friends, new skills, and longer separations from a parent than a child has had previously. Moving from one primary school to a new primary school can also involve changes to routines and friendships or social groups. Primary school involves lots of many smaller transitions across the day too. Children transition from recess or lunch to their classroom, from one class or learning activity to another, and from school to home. For children with disabilities and their families these changes can be particularly challenging.

Planning the transition

Transition Learning and Development Statement

Schools and teachers can help a child make a positive start to primary school by reading and actioning key information from a child's [Transition Learning and Development Statement \(TLDS\)](#). Considering a child's strengths and the steps or actions the TLDS suggests will support a child when planning transitions and school activities.

Student Support Group

There are many ways in which you can partner with a child's family to help a child with a disability thrive at school. You can partner with a child's family by forming a [Student Support Group \(SSG\)](#). Members of the group usually include:

- The school principal (or nominee)
- A key teacher
- The student and their parents

Health professionals who work with the student, such as speech pathologists or occupational therapists, can also be asked to join the SSG.

Members of the SSG can work out what adjustments the school needs to make so that a student with a disability can fully participate in all aspects of school life. These may include making changes to the buildings and classrooms (for example, adding ramps or creating quiet spaces), providing assistive devices and furniture (for example, providing specialised desks) or allowing students to use specialist software and personalised computer settings (for example, software for writing and translating Braille). The SSG provides ongoing support for the student throughout their schooling. This involves the regular monitoring of adjustments in relation to the student's educational progress and care for their overall wellbeing at school.

Individual Education Plan

A Student Support Group (SSG) can help create an [Individual Education Plan \(IEP\)](#). An IEP identifies a child's educational strengths and abilities and sets up strategies to support their learning. To do this, teachers and parents share information about the student's strengths and interests as well as strategies that have worked well with the child in the past. It is important that the child can have input into their IEP and let their new teachers know about their likes, dislikes, favourite past-times and hopes for the future.

If a child's family do not wish to form an SSG but would like an IEP, the main classroom teacher can create one for the child.



Family input

Some parents may not wish to disclose their child has a disability, or they may not be aware of it yet. If you notice a child needs extra support in your classroom you can sensitively discuss this with their family. When talking with family members, focus on the learning tasks the child finds difficult, as well as the child's strengths. Read more about communicating with parents in our [teacher guide to parent-teacher meetings](#). Work with the child's family to develop effective learning strategies and modifications for their child. These can become part of an Individual Education Plan.

Be sensitive to cultural and language differences. Check that the family are comfortable with all aspects of the learning plan. If you develop the goals and strategies together everyone will likely have more commitment to them.

Supporting a child with the transition

A child with a disability may feel anxious about the upcoming changes. Below are a few strategies for teachers that may help a child with the transition:

Consider a child's strengths and abilities when planning orientation activities

Plan activities that ALL children can fully participate in. Some key considerations might be:

- 'Do activities allow a child who has a physical disability or is low or blind vision to join in?'
- 'Have we included small groups or pairs for children who become anxious in large groups?'
- 'How can we manage noise levels on the day?'

Support a child with separation anxiety

Children with separation anxiety become upset when separated from family members, such as at morning school drop off. Separation anxiety can be more severe in children with developmental challenges or disabilities. If a child has previously had challenges with separation, early planning for how to manage separation when they start school can help.

- Visit our [anxiety](#) page for evidence-based strategies for separation anxiety
- Talk with the child's family to come up with suitable solutions for the child and their family

Read positive stories about school

Help a child and their family access [AllPlay Learn's primary stories](#). These stories show a child what happens at school. This helps them feel confident about new situations they may encounter. You could read the stories to the students during transition activities and give them the 'colour-in' covers as an activity or take-home item.

Transitions from a primary school to a new primary school

Many of the strategies that can help a child transition from an early childhood setting to primary school will also be relevant for transitioning between primary schools, including forming a Student Support Group, creating an Individual Education Plan, encouraging family input and supporting a child with the transition. A child with a disability may feel anxious about the upcoming changes. Some may be anxious about changes to routines and friendships, particularly if the change is occurring part-way through the school year. Below are a few additional strategies for teachers that may help a child with the transition:

Tell students what doesn't change

Highlight the similarities between their former school and new school so that they feel confident they already have some of the skills they will need.

Provide visual supports

Visual supports such as photos of school buildings, maps, photos of teachers and staff, checklists and visual timetables may be helpful for some students.

Consider a peer buddy system or a safe person/space for students

Peer buddies can provide social support, in addition to a safe person or place that a child can access when they need support.