

# CONTINUITY of LEARNING



Follow Brooklynn's  
journey from  
early childhood  
education to school



## A positive move to school is good for a child's future

Starting school is an important time in a child's life. Rather than a one-off event, transition is a process where children settle into learning. Children and families experience it in their own way and in their own time.

When children start school, they experience changes in:

- how they're expected to learn, behave and spend their time
- relationships
- teaching approach
- their environment and space
- what they learn.

Helping children to have positive and rewarding experiences as they move from early childhood education to school sets them confidently on a continuous pathway of learning.



Read more about Brooklynn's journey from early childhood education to school on the next pages.



Brooklynn recently moved to school from early childhood education. Brooklynn was the oldest of her friends so she didn't know many new entrants at the school. Brooklynn is very curious and determined, loves music, stories and being outside. She can sometimes be a bit shy.

Brooklynn's early childhood teachers, school principal and teacher, and parents and whānau worked together to help make her transition as smooth as possible. Brooklynn is now putting her curiosity and determination to use while she continues her learning pathway.

## What's most important for continuous learning?

- » High-quality leadership that recognises the importance of transition.
- » Early childhood services and schools working together.
- » Understanding and linking *Te Whāriki* (the early childhood curriculum) and *The New Zealand Curriculum* (for schools).
- » Early childhood services using assessment based on children's interests and ways of learning. Schools using early childhood records of learning and interviews to get to know their new entrants.
- » Knowing the child's culture, background, interests, strengths and what they've already learnt – and using this to tailor learning.
- » Early childhood services and schools having strong relationships with the child and their parents and whānau.
- » Self review of transition practices – analysing what's working well and what isn't – and making improvements.

“The sparkle in the five-year-old eyes when they start school must be sustained”

*Deputy principal of a large urban primary school*

## What did ERO evaluate?

The Education Review Office (ERO) reviewed how well New Zealand early childhood services and schools are helping children settle into school. We asked questions about:

- how well curriculums take into account children's interests, strengths and capabilities
- whether assessment practices support learning
- how services and schools establish and maintain collaborative relationships with each other, with parents and whānau and with other agencies
- leadership
- support for children at the highest risk of poor educational outcomes
- self review – where services and schools review what they're doing, what works and what doesn't, and make improvements.

Information was gathered by talking with staff, children and families and reviewing early childhood services' and schools' documents.



## What did we find?

This evaluation told us what's working well and what's not – this leaflet provides a summary of the key points.

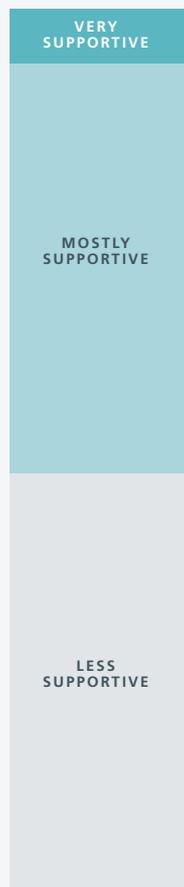
Overall, we found that early childhood services and schools need to do the same things to support children moving to school so they can keep learning.

We talk about these in more detail on the inside pages.

The full details of the evaluation are captured in a report from the points of view of both early childhood services and schools.

You can read the full report at [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz).

### EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES



Early childhood services that were **very supportive**:

- had **curriculum** that supported children's transitions
- had supportive ways of **assessing children**
- worked collaboratively with **schools, parents and whānau**
- had effective **self review**—looking at what's working, what isn't and making improvements.

### PRIMARY SCHOOLS



Primary schools that were **very supportive**:

- had effective **leaders** who emphasised the importance of successful transitions
- had teachers who **knew about the children** as learners and **tailored their learning**
- made links to **Te Whāriki**
- worked collaboratively with **early childhood services, parents and whānau**
- had effective **self review**—looking at what's working, what isn't and making improvements.



## Building strong relationships with the child and with their parents and whānau

Transitions to school involve the whole family. Parents and whānau play an important role in their child's ongoing learning.

- » Some early childhood services have a key teacher for each child so parents have a dedicated person to ask for information and support.
- » Services and schools might hold parent evenings about transition to school, give information packs to whānau and transition books to children, and set up visits to help parents make informed choices about schools.
- » Enrolment interviews can offer a chance for the whānau to meet people at the school and for school leaders and teachers to find out as much as they can about the child and what their parents want for them.
- » Genuine partnerships and two-way communication helps the child's family and school leaders, teachers and other staff work together to support the child's learning.

### Children's 'dispositions' influence how they learn

Dispositions are combinations of children's emerging knowledge, skills and attitudes to learning. They include characteristics like courage, curiosity, trust, playfulness, perseverance, confidence and responsibility. They include the way children approach learning, such as persisting with difficulty or expressing a point of view. The early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* encourages early childhood teachers to help children develop dispositions that help them learn.

A small primary school with many immigrant families gives parents as much information as possible to help them understand the New Zealand education system and teaching approaches.

The leaders use a range of strategies to make families feel welcome and develop a sense of belonging to the community.

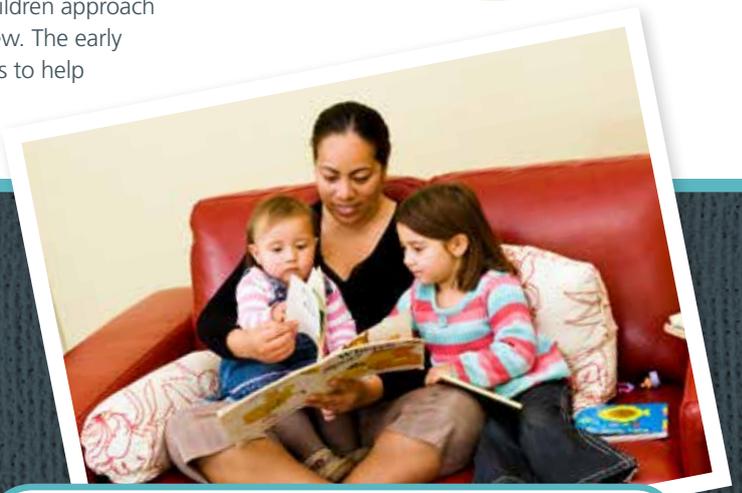
The new entrant teacher displays photographs of children before they start school so that other children know they are coming. The school holds information evenings, provides comprehensive new entrant packs and has a staff member who can speak several of the families' first languages.

Leaders regularly seek feedback from families and use this to refine the transition process.

Māori children at a large primary school feel a sense of belonging through integration of te reo and tikanga Māori into school programmes and values. A strong kapa haka group is popular and teachers deliberately engage families in the life of the school.



Brooklynn's journey from early childhood education to school



When Brooklynn was 4½, the early childhood teacher responsible for transitions to school asked her parents which school she was likely to go to and what they could do to help. She arranged for Brooklynn and her parents to visit two schools and produced books with photos about the schools for Brooklynn to share with her friends and whānau.



## Getting to know children and how they learn

Leaders and teachers can help children settle into school by basing transition programmes on children's interests and building on what they already know and can do.

- » Learning about and connecting the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum* for schools is important.
- » Getting to know each child – including finding out about their strengths, interests, culture and capabilities, and their parents' aspirations for them – can help to design curriculum to suit each child.
- » Māori and Pacific children can be supported in their sense of belonging by making their language and culture part of the curriculum and environment.
- » For children with English as a second language, teachers learning and using words from the child's first language can help.
- » Information about support needed for children with special education needs should be shared and applications for funding started early so that support is continuous or in place once the child moves to school.



## Improving and using assessment and records of learning

Assessing children in supportive ways and using this information are very important to a child's continuous learning.

- » Good practice includes focusing early childhood assessment on an individual child's interests and ways of learning, and on their learning in relation to the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*, rather than just on participation.
- » Assessment information and records of learning – such as profile books – should be shared with parents and schools, as well as information about any extra support the child might need for a successful move to school.
- » It's important that new entrant teachers use the information provided from early childhood services and make links between how a child learns and the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

At one early childhood centre, an assessment at 4½ years old focuses on three strengths of each child and one area they are developing. Another assessment when they're about to start school provides information about their learning in relation to *Te Whāriki*.

The teachers at Brooklynn's early childhood service give all parents a summative assessment report – a detailed story of their child's learning based on the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*.

Brooklynn's parents let the early childhood service share this with the new entrant teacher at her new school. The teacher used it to talk to them in detail about Brooklynn during an enrolment interview.

She also used the information about Brooklynn's interests, strengths, ways of learning and what she already knew to plan the next stage of Brooklynn's learning in relation to *The New Zealand Curriculum*.





## Early childhood services and schools working together

In some early childhood services most children move to just one local school, while in others children move to many different schools across a city. This can affect how easy it is for leaders and teachers at early childhood services and schools to build and maintain collaborative relationships, but doing so is vital for children's continuity of learning.

- » Working together is more than just visits in the time leading up to children starting school.
- » Seeing children in their familiar early childhood environment can help new entrant teachers add to the information provided through portfolio books or other records of learning.
- » Two-way visits between an early childhood service and a school can help children connect with older children already at school and get used to the school environment.
- » Two-way visits between teachers can help them understand what the teaching and learning looks like in each place and how they can connect these experiences for children starting school.
- » Some schools and early childhood services are part of 'professional learning clusters' or 'readiness for school forums' where teachers share what they do, including what's worked and what they could do better.
- » To support some children, early childhood services and schools also need collaborative relationships with external agencies and specialists – such as speech-language therapists, early intervention teachers, advisers on deaf children, Child, Youth and Family staff and providers of 'B4 School checks' such as Plunket.

Teachers at a Samoan early childhood service (Aoga) meet regularly with teachers at the adjacent school. They share information about the children's learning, language, culture, identity and family. The new entrant teacher at the school visits the Aoga to observe and get to know the children and the teachers and see the curriculum in action.

The principal reviewed transition after realising that his school's processes weren't working well for all children.

She trialed a new process of weekly visits for children due to start and their parents. The programme involved literacy games where the children were observed, formal question sessions with parents, and feedback from participants to help identify what worked well and what could be improved.



Brooklynn's early childhood service has a wall display with photos of the local schools and children who recently started at each. It gives children a clear sense of connection to their school before they start and is the basis of many conversations between children, teachers and parents.

The head teacher at the early childhood service invited new entrant teachers to come and watch how her team teaches. This helps them connect the teaching and learning experiences for children when they start school.





## High-quality leadership and systems to help children settle in and keep learning

Good leaders and systems are very important to help children move from early childhood education to school.

School leaders can:

- » ensure the most appropriate teachers for new entrant classes, give them additional resources, support when needed and appropriate professional learning and development
- » provide an environment tailored to new children
- » support increased understanding of children's early childhood experiences (for instance, by connecting someone with early childhood experience or qualifications with the new entrant class) and the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*

- » have systems to help a smooth transition, such as visits before the child starts school and buddy systems once they're there.

Early childhood service leaders and school leaders can:

- » provide time for their teachers to establish relationships with each other and with parents and whānau of children moving to school
- » lead 'self review' for their service or school – looking at how effective the transition programme is and what they could do better.



## Self review – what's working well and what isn't and making improvements

Early childhood services and schools need regular, robust and formal self review that focuses on practices that support children moving to school. This helps services and schools work out how well they're doing and if they need to make any improvements.

- » Self review should take into account feedback from many sources including children moving to school, their parents and whānau, families of children who've recently started, teachers, external agency staff such as therapists, and

recent research about best practice.

- » It might include analysing children's wellbeing and assessment information and looking at how to improve the whole transition process.

The transition process at Brooklynn's school meant that her transition from early childhood went smoothly. Through a series of information evenings, meetings and visits, Brooklynn and her whānau got to know the school and teacher well, even before her first day.

On her first day, two early childhood teachers and some of her whānau attended the pōwhiri (Māori ceremony to welcome her into the school).

Brooklynn's new teacher had learnt all about her and tailored her learning according to this – connecting it to how she learns, her interests, what she had already learnt and to the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*. Being assigned a buddy helped Brooklynn to make friends, and she settled in quickly so she could get on with the important part – learning.

Brooklynn is now continuing on her way to becoming a lifelong learner.



READ THE FULL REPORT

**Continuity of learning:  
Transitions from  
early childhood services  
to schools**

**[www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz)**



If you have a smartphone with  
a QR code reader installed,  
you can scan this code to go  
straight to the report.

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