Some children and families need extra support for a variety of reasons.

A range of factors can impact on the smoothness of the transition process for children, families and educators. For example, children with concentration difficulties may find it more difficult to settle into new routines, with new people, or environments. Families may not feel confident speaking with early childhood educators and Prep teachers if they perceive that they are not welcome, or if they find conversations challenging.

The level and type of support required can vary enormously from child to child and family to family. It may include (but is not limited to):

- providing information in languages other than English
- building a child’s confidence to try new things and become more independent in self-care skills
- referrals to early childhood services for further assessment and advice (e.g. paediatrician, occupational therapist, speech pathologist)
- consideration for funding where significant needs exist (such as the Program for Students with Disabilities for children attending government schools)
- developing appropriate learning and development plans
- linking families to community support agencies
- providing aids and equipment (such as communication devices or for mobility)
- adapting school environments to make them more welcoming and accessible to children and families.

Much of what creates positive transitions for children from specific groups, such as children with disabilities or, from disadvantaged backgrounds, highlights the need for policies and practices that can assist all children to make a successful start to school. Careful planning and inclusive practices support children and families who need targeted support to enable a positive transition to school.
6. Supporting diversity

We acknowledge and pay respect to all the traditional owners of the land we now call Victoria. There were approximately 40 language groups before colonisation that made up the state of Victoria.

Victoria is a multicultural society comprising people from more than 200 nations, speaking more than 200 languages and dialects and following more than 120 faiths.

‘While respecting our differences is necessary in an open, inclusive and vibrant society, it is also vital to acknowledge that we have much in common. We have much to gain, individually and collectively, by working together to build a positive and progressive future that enhances our state as a great place in which to live, work, invest and raise a family.’

All of Us Multicultural Policy for Victoria 2009, Hon John Brumby and James Merlino, MP, p 2

Transition programs that support and celebrate diversity and early childhood professionals who are culturally aware and competent help to support a positive start to school for all children and families. Respecting diversity, helping to foster supportive relationships and encouraging a strong, positive sense of identity are all key practices that will help early childhood services and schools achieve this.

Cultural competency

Educators who are culturally competent respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences. This is evident in everyday practice when educators demonstrate an ongoing commitment to developing their own cultural competence in a two-way process with families and communities.

Educators view culture and the context of family as central to children’s sense of being and belonging and to success in lifelong learning. Educators also seek to promote children’s cultural competence. Cultural competence is much more than awareness of cultural
differences. It is the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural competence encompasses:

- being aware of one's own world view
- developing a positive attitude towards cultural differences
- gaining knowledge of different cultural practices and world views
- developing skills for communication and interaction across cultures.

There are a range of documents that contain advice and information for educators about developing cultural competence amongst children, these include:

- Teaching about cultural diversity - provides advice for teaching about cultural diversity.
- The Keynotes Project - provides information to teachers with the history, principles and perspectives of nine world religions appropriate as background material in classroom programs and discussions.


**Transition for Aboriginal Children**

The information in this section is sourced from the Australian Government Indigenous Portal[^1], Share Our Pride[^2], and the Indigenous Australia website[^3].

Aboriginal cultures are complex and diverse. Aboriginal children, people and communities have a unique contribution to make to Australian society and to their local community. For the purposes of this Resource Kit, the term Aboriginal will be used to represent people from all Indigenous Australian groups.

Land is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. The land is not just soil or rocks or minerals, but a holistic environment that sustains and is sustained by people and culture. It is the core of all spirituality and this relationship and the spirit of ‘country’ is central to the issues that are important to Aboriginal people today. They identify themselves through their land areas, their relationship to others and their language and stories – which may be expressed through ceremony, the arts, family, religion and sports.

Maintaining a connection to family and community is also especially important to Aboriginal people. It is this connection that helps maintain the links to their cultural identity. Reconnecting and remaining a part of a family or kinship group are important issues. Learning the intricate pattern of kinship is part of every Aboriginal child’s education.

[^2]: [www.shareourpride.org.au](http://www.shareourpride.org.au)
[^3]: [www.indigenousaustralia.info](http://www.indigenousaustralia.info) Indigenous Australia’s website is written by Aboriginal people of Australia

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One Aboriginal early childhood setting used weekly cultural education sessions to strengthen children’s sense of identity and improve their gross motor skills. The children learnt traditional dances and performed in traditional costumes and face painting. Music was provided by a professional didgeridoo player for dances such as ‘Walk on’, ‘Birds and Animals’, ‘Yam’, ‘Fishing’, ‘Boomerang’, ‘Mother Earth’, ‘Basket Weaving’ and ‘Munji Maa’. The children practised and then performed at a number of events, including Elders Christmas Luncheon and the launch of [Dardee Boorai: The Victorian Charter of Safety and Wellbeing for Aboriginal Children and Young](http://www.dest.vic.gov.au/content/dardee-boorai-the-victorian-charter-safety-and-wellbeing-aboriginal-children-and-young). The children’s traditional dance performance was reported as the highlight of the kindergarten’s graduation ceremony.
Supporting Aboriginal children as they transition to school

Many Aboriginal children make a positive transition to school. Aboriginal children and families will have high expectations of their child’s learning and development experiences and it is important to recognise that many of the strategies previously identified in this Kit will be relevant to planning effective support for Aboriginal children as they transition into school.

Early childhood services and schools can do additional things to help further support the transition to school for Aboriginal children:

• acknowledge and support engagement with Aboriginal children’s families, recognising that this may include a wider group of people than non-Aboriginal cultures may associate with a child
• ask family members to come and stay in the classroom for a little longer at the start of the day
• recognise oral communication is greatly valued and used widely within Aboriginal communities when engaging with Aboriginal children and their families
• plan and organise transition programs for Aboriginal children in partnership with local Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs)
• incorporate resources reflecting Aboriginal culture into local programs and curriculum such as books, music and movement activities or Aboriginal art and flying the Aboriginal flag together with the Australian flag. These make places more welcoming for Aboriginal children and their families and give consistent, inclusive messages straight away to those visiting and attending early childhood services and schools
• get to know local Aboriginal communities, seeking their guidance on how best to support and respond to the needs of their children as they transition to school
• undertake professional development to find out more about Aboriginal culture (see Share Our Pride at www.shareourpride.org.au).

Victoria has specific Koorie support workers in each region who may be useful to link with for Aboriginal communities when planning transition programs:

• Koorie pre-school assistants
• Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESOs)
• Koorie Education Coordinators.

There are also 32 voluntary Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups across Victoria that can support partnerships between Aboriginal families and educational services. Their role includes:

• providing advice on all education and training matters affecting Koorie students
• monitoring the current trends in education that impact on all Koorie students
• providing an advocate role for Koorie students and their families in respect of education matters
• providing representation to local and regional committees and forums in relation to education and training
• providing representation to all Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. forums.

In a regional pilot focused on addressing the needs of Aboriginal children and families, transition coordinators and two community members were engaged to support children in the early childhood setting and to move with them to school. The presence of a familiar face from the Aboriginal community at kindergarten, and later at school, was reported to help children and families feel more comfortable and adapt to the new school environment and routines.
In a metropolitan area, group gatherings in familiar venues (such as community houses or church halls) were arranged to engage children and families from non-English speaking backgrounds. Interpreters were available at these sessions along with translated materials. Transport, childcare and culturally appropriate food was provided for families to support their participation and to make them feel more welcome.

**Wannik (Learning Together – Journey to Our Future): Education Strategy for Koorie Students in Victoria**

*Wannik*, from the Gunai/Kurnai language meaning ‘learning together – journey to our future’ is the DEECD’s new education strategy for Koorie students in Victoria.

Fundamental to *Wannik* is the fostering of a new culture of high expectations for Aboriginal children and systemic reform across government schools to deliver the best possible education to meet these expectations. It emphasises working in partnership with Aboriginal families and the community to respect, recognise and celebrate Aboriginal cultural identity.

*Wannik* identifies a number of key strategies for improvement. Those relevant to transition-to-school planning include:

- developing ready-for-school or pre-school Aboriginal programs in collaboration with KESOs in all areas where there are high numbers of Aboriginal families
- requiring all government schools to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each Aboriginal child in a partnership between educators, children, their families and Aboriginal support workers, covering key transition points from early childhood settings to school.
- Encouraging schools to use the Transition Learning and Development Statement to inform the development of IEPs for Aboriginal children entering prep.


For more information about supporting children from Aboriginal backgrounds who attend catholic schools visit [www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au) or for independent schools visit [www.ais.vic.edu.au](http://www.ais.vic.edu.au)

**Children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

As previously stated, Victoria is a multicultural society comprising people from more than 200 nations, speaking more than 200 languages and dialects and following more than 120 faiths. The diversity and richness this brings communities cannot be underestimated and should not be overlooked. Families from different backgrounds contribute in many meaningful ways to all children’s understanding of the world and they offer new insights on supporting all children to successfully transition to school, as well as their own.

In the Australian context, individuals from a [culturally and linguistically diverse] background are those who identify as having a specific cultural or linguistic affiliation by virtue of their place of birth, ancestry, ethnic origin, religion, preferred language, language(s) spoken at home, or because of their parents’ identification on a similar basis.33

Finding ways to develop strong, effective partnerships with families with diverse cultural backgrounds or who speak languages other than English is a very enriching experience.

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Engaging with these families provides opportunities for early childhood services and schools to better understand, appreciate and celebrate the experiences of families and their cultures. Understanding the experiences of their families and cultures can help educators link with a child’s experiences to better support continuity of learning and development.

Children and families with diverse cultural backgrounds speaking languages other than English may require support to participate in transition-to-school processes. Educators need to be aware of and be responsive to:

- varying levels of English language fluency
- experiences of trauma or war
- disrupted education for some children
- the pressures of resettlement
- racism and discrimination.

Improving the way children and their families are included in the transition planning processes and ensuring that programs respond to their needs are critical to ensure the start to school is a positive experience.

Given the diversity within and across cultures in Australia, it is important not to make assumptions about families’ backgrounds, cultures or practices, as these can be very different from family to family. Taking time to talk with families directly about their lives and culture is the best way to find out more about families histories and cultural practices.

Supporting children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Some key strategies that early childhood services and schools might like to consider when communicating and planning support for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as they transition into school are:

- be open to different notions of ‘family’
- acknowledge that, while some families may share cultural practices, values and beliefs, they all have individual features and characteristics
- work in partnership with other agencies who are involved with the family
• review the environment and resources used in programs regularly and be aware of the messages they convey to families
• talk to families about how they would like to participate and how they view their role as their child transitions to school
• link families with one another and encourage them to support each other and discuss mutual concerns
• make sure transition programs are flexible and encourage children and their families to participate
• provide opportunities for children and their families to give feedback on transition programs and participate in any evaluation exercises to ensure transition programs are relevant and meet their needs.

Communication is one of the most obvious challenges for children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Again, there are a number of things early childhood settings and schools can do to break down communication barriers to better support children and their families. These include:

• using the assistance of interpreters, bilingual staff, aides and translated materials to help families understand and feel comfortable
• displaying information in community languages
• becoming familiar with local agencies that provide language services in the relevant languages
• speaking clearly and repeating information to families who are not fluent in English
• using pictures and photographs to help communicate with families.

A range of services is provided to government schools to support students from language backgrounds other than English. This includes funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

Some children who speak a language other than English as their main language at home will require additional support in learning English as a second or additional language. If they are enrolled in a government school they are eligible for ESL programs.

Funding is provided to schools with significant numbers of ESL students through the Student Resource Package (SRP). ESL funding is given to schools to staff ESL programs. A targeted specialist ESL program is informed by a good understanding of each child and their learning background including their stage of English language development. Further ESL program information is available on the DEECD - ESL website on the following page: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/eslschools.htm

Funding may also be provided for Multicultural Education Aides (MEAs). MEAs in schools support ESL programs in several ways:

• facilitate communication between the school and families from language background other than English
• provide insights into students cultural backgrounds and experiences
• assist individual or small groups of students in the classroom
• assist the teacher with the development of materials.

Schools also have access to Regional ESL Program Officers in each of the nine DEECD regional offices. Regional ESL program officers provide ESL program support and advice to schools and professional learning opportunities for teachers in government schools in the region. For more information phone the DEECD Information and Referral Service for your DEECD Regional Office on 1800 809 834.

To improve support for refugee children, DEECD has developed Strengthening Outcomes - Refugee Students in Government Schools, which contains information for schools and other service providers about the range of resources available to support students from refugee backgrounds in Victorian schools. This document can be downloaded from www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/refugees/default.htm

Children who have recently arrived in Australia may also be eligible for additional support, if they are enrolled in a government school, through the New Arrivals Program. Further information about the New Arrivals Program is available on the DEECD-ESL website on the following page www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/esl/newstudents.htm

The Guidelines for Managing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Schools provide an overview of Government policies and DEECD initiatives in relation to the prevention of discrimination and harassment. These guidelines also include a range of learning materials. More information can be found at www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/schoolleaders.htm

Interpreting and translating services are also available free (within guidelines) to government schools. The services ensure that parents and guardians who require an interpreter have access to school information and are better able to communicate with schools. More information on the interpreting and translation services for schools can be found at www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/interpret/default.htm

For more information about supporting children with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who attend catholic schools visit www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au and for those who attend independent schools visit www.ais.vic.edu.au

It may be necessary to involve an interpreter to work with the family, advocate and/or early childhood professionals. When working with an interpreter, speak slowly and clearly. Try not to say too much in one go so that the interpreter can remember what was said. Focus on engaging with the family, not the interpreter, in face-to-face meeting situations. Ask the family questions to see if they have understood what was meant. Provide opportunities to listen to what families have to say and provide them with the information they may need/want.
7. Children with disabilities and developmental delay

Transition for children with a disability or developmental delay may be like that of any child, in that they are a child first and foremost, and starting school is an important transition in their life. However, transition may differ for these children as a result of the involvement of a range of other early childhood services and professionals; and the degree of information about the child that may need to be gathered, synthesised and made available to the school (for example, detailed reports and advice from allied health professionals).

It is important that early childhood educators engage with the family and other professionals who know the child when planning transition programs and completing the Transition Learning and Development Statement. Understanding the holistic impact of a child’s disability or developmental delay on their learning and development helps to plan ahead for any resources or adjustments that may be required. Many early childhood educators already do this by arranging collaborative meetings early in the year. Specific guidance is included in the Sharing Our Journey protocol about the roles of everyone involved in supporting the child’s transition to school.

The following issues should be considered when designing and developing transition programs for children with disabilities:

- the importance of early childhood experience for positive transition experiences for children
- the importance of long-term cross-sector collaborative planning and continuity of programs around transitions
- transition to school can be a highly complex and anxious time for families
- there are negative long-term implications if transition problems that emerge are not addressed.34

In addition to considering the above issues, early childhood educators should also refer to the Sharing Our Journey kit which includes a planner identifying key personnel and

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34 Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood.
activities to support the child with disabilities to start school, as well as a copy of the Transition Learning and Development Statement adapted to ensure specific information is provided for children with a disability or developmental delay (see Part 1A of the Statement). Early childhood educators should work with those other professionals in contact with the child when completing the Statement. In some cases, it may be more appropriate for one of these professionals to coordinate the Statement. This decision should be made in consultation with the family on a case by case basis.

The Sharing Our Journey kit is distributed by Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service (KISS) providers and early childhood intervention services. These resources can also be downloaded from www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/healthwellbeing/sharingourjourneykit.pdf

What the families may want to tell the school

Families are experts about their child. They are invaluable in supporting the child's smooth transition. Gaining trust is a vital process (as it is with all families). Families often share sensitive information when trust has been established. Therefore, it is important that relationships can form as early as possible with future school staff. Parents/guardians must consent to written and verbal information about their child and family being shared – early childhood educators can support families in recognising the importance of the information for schools and encouraging families to build trusting relationships early on.

Transition to school is successful when families feel that teachers and schools have the best interests of their child at heart and their knowledge of the child is valued. Families of children with disabilities and developmental delays may wish to tell the school about:

- their child's strengths as well as challenges
- goals for their child
- what to do in an emergency (e.g. if the child is having an epileptic seizure)
- sharing practical skills and tips with school aides in their child's day-to-day self-care (e.g. how to help their child get changed for physical education)
- approaches that help settle their child (e.g. soothing movements and sounds, ‘time out’, etc.)
- how to assist their child be as independent as possible (e.g. at lunch time)
- types of instructions to which the child responds well (or not)
- cues and prompts that help engage their child (e.g. picture exchange cards)
- behaviour management ideas that work at home (e.g. types of praise and rewards)
- assessment reports that they may like to share with the school or Prep teacher about their child’s medical background and early intervention history.

Part 1A of the Transition Learning and Development Statement gives families of children with a disability or developmental delay the opportunity to provide further information. The whole Statement is included in the Sharing Our Journey kit.
What other services may want to tell the school

Children with disabilities and developmental delays may have had extra support within the kindergarten setting from a preschool field officer (PSFO), KISS, or from community-based therapists and special education teachers in Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS).

Each professional involved has a different role to play in supporting the child and family and preparing for transition to school. Some services are required to finish when a child starts school. Therefore it is important that (with families’ consent) information specific to each child is shared with the school in time to assist with planning and organisation.

This information may be about many things. For example:

- how to maintain the child’s safety and wellbeing at school
- a child’s level of development
- preferred approaches to learning new things
- specific skills they have achieved and other skills they are working on
- how independent they are
- what equipment or aids are helpful with their vision, hearing, mobility, play, recording their school work, or self-care
- types of support (e.g. assistance to hold objects, or supervision in the playground)
- potential modifications required within the school environment.

As previously noted, incorporating this information will require early childhood educators to work with other professionals in contact with the child when completing the Transition Learning and Development Statement.

What the school may want to know

Some children may require support and special learning programs at school so that they can participate fully in the range of activities. Schools may want additional information that helps them understand a child; the impact of a child’s disability or developmental delay on learning; and how the disability or developmental delay may affect their participation in life at school and the school environment. They will also want to know if there are any key strategies they should be aware of to help children settle into the school environment and support their learning and development.

Recognising that schools need time to plan for any outsourced assessment, and adaptations or supports the child may need, it is important to ensure a timely referral to the school (Term 2 or 3 of the child’s kindergarten year).

In some circumstances, children with a disability or developmental delays may benefit from a second year of kindergarten prior to school entry (refer to Section 2: Second year of funded four-year-old kindergarten). This needs to be a planned process and, if the child

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A four-week transition playgroup for children with intellectual disabilities in a special school was run on a weekly basis in the latter part of Term 4. Teachers were released from school to run the groups and families had the opportunity to meet them and discuss their child’s transition to school in a supportive environment. In Terms of the following year, the school invited these families to join a Parent Support Group, organised by its parent liaison officer, to support and pass on information to other parents on student support groups, individual learning plans, behaviour management, communication, and allied health services to the school.
will turn six years of age during the kindergarten year, an application for school exemption needs to be made. Further information on this is outlined below.

In school support for children with disabilities or developmental delay

There are a number of programs aimed at supporting children with significant disabilities and developmental delays within schools.

Children with disabilities and developmental delays attending government schools

DEECD is committed to delivering an inclusive education system that ensures all students have access to a quality education to meet their diverse needs. The Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) provides additional support within the Student Resource Package for eligible children with disabilities in government mainstream and specialist schools. Guidelines are available from [www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/default.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/default.htm)

Children with a disability or a developmental delay enrolled in a Victorian government school are eligible for PSD, provided they meet the eligibility criteria for one of seven categories. These criteria are based on guidelines set by the World Health Organisation and are designed to identify that group of children with moderate to severe disabilities. The seven categories within PSD are:

- physical disability
- visual impairment
- severe behaviour disorder
- hearing impairment
- intellectual disability
- autism spectrum disorder
- severe language disorder with critical educational needs.

DEECD provides an outsourced assessment service for potential applications on behalf of children in the categories of 'Intellectual Disability' and 'Severe Language Disorder with Critical Educational Needs'. The assessment and application processes will be coordinated by the school the child is to attend.

A Student Support Group (SSG) is central to making an application under PSD and is a cooperative partnership between the parent/guardian/carer(s), school representatives and relevant early childhood professionals (such as allied health professionals) to ensure coordinated support for the child's educational needs. This is achieved through the development of specific educational goals and a tailored educational program. The SSG is mandatory for students in PSD, and strongly encouraged for any student with additional needs.


**Children with disabilities and developmental delays attending non-government schools**

Children starting at a catholic school, part of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne (CEOM), should contact the Student Support Service for advice on how to support the learning needs of a child with a disability or developmental delay, their family and Prep teachers. For more information visit [www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au)

If the child is enrolling in an independent school, there will be similar processes for planning a child's school program. A program support group may be established as part of this consultation. For further information visit [www.ais.vic.edu.au](http://www.ais.vic.edu.au)

**Children with learning and developmental challenges**

There are some children who may still require a higher than average level of support for their learning and development, as despite their many strengths and qualities, they find some aspects of life challenging. They may require a small degree of additional support and understanding to assist them with their learning and development, and are not suitable for programs for children with more complex difficulties. Early childhood educators, together with the child, families and Prep teachers should discuss their ideas for supporting the child’s transition in the year before school starts to ensure the school is prepared. Advice may be sought from other early childhood professionals if necessary. This information is useful to include in the child's Transition Learning and Development Statement to inform planning to support the child.
8. Children with additional health needs

Children often attend school with either medical or health needs that, for most of the time, do not impact on their ability to participate in school life. It is important, however, that accurate information is provided to the school, with the parents’ or legal guardian’s consent. This information may indicate issues about what to do in emergency procedures (e.g. if a child requires an Epipen®) or what medications a child takes (e.g. if a child has asthma).

In cases where a child has a chronic condition, for instance one that impacts on their movements and energy levels, it is recommended that schools be advised early to review their school program to ensure it meets the needs of all children from the first day at school.

The process for sharing this information is the same as for other children. Where appropriate other reports should be submitted with the Transition Learning and Development Statement to support the Prep teacher to plan for the coming year. Information about a child’s health is also captured through the school’s enrolment form and the School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ).

**Student Health Support Plan**

Government schools are required to have a Student Health Support Plan (or in the case of Anaphylaxis an Anaphylaxis Management Plan) for a child with an identified health need, guided by medical advice received by the child’s medical/health practitioner and developed in consultation with the child and their family.

It is useful for schools to fill out the Student Health Support Plan as part of the transition program. Where this is relevant for an individual child, it should be completed with the family, who need to give direct consent for the release of this information to the school.


For more information about supporting children with additional health needs who attend catholic schools visit [www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au) and for those who attend independent schools visit [www.ais.vic.edu.au](http://www.ais.vic.edu.au)
9. Children in vulnerable circumstances

Every child has the right to live a full and productive life in an environment that builds confidence, friendship, security and happiness, irrespective of their family circumstances and background.35

Some children may experience vulnerability due to circumstances outside their control. Vulnerability can come in many forms. Children may be protected by receiving support from child protection services and/or living in out of home care:

All children and families rely on community support – relatives, friends, neighbours and informal networks. They also rely on services such as maternal and child health services, child care services, medical services, dental services and [early childhood settings and] school education services.36

For further advice on child protection issues, and information sharing responsibilities, visit www.cyf.vic.gov.au/every-child-every-chance

Children in out of home care (OoHC)

Children and young people in out of home care (OoHC) are a diverse group who have been removed from their family home (via a protective intervention process) after experiencing abuse or neglect. The Victorian Government, through the Department of Human Services (DHS), and community service organisations (CSOs), in partnership with the Government, are responsible for looking after these children and young people by providing a range of placement options that are:

- foster care: a foster carer who has been trained and approved to look after children (in the foster carer’s home)
- kinship care: a child is placed with a relative or family friend

• permanent care: a child is placed into the permanent care of an existing foster carer or kinship carer through the Children's Court

• residential care: rostered workers employed by a CSO care for up to four young people in residential unit.

**Partnering Agreement**

In recognition of the importance of school participation and educational achievement in the lives of children and young people, and acknowledging that the background and circumstances of children and young people in care means that they require particular assistance to access educational opportunities, the DEECD and DHS have established the Partnering Agreement: School Attendance and Engagement of Children and Young People in OoHC. The aim of the Partnering Agreement is to ensure that both systems work together to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of children and young people placed in OoHC.

The Partnering Agreement sets out the roles and responsibilities of all those involved with the young person in care to ensure his/her educational development. A key process for which schools have accountability is the setting up of a SSG for every child/young person in care to identify and provide additional support for the young person to be successful at school.

The SSG consists of the parent, guardian or caregiver of the child, the DHS Protective Services case manager, a teacher or year level coordinator, the principal or nominee to act as chairperson, the school's Student Welfare Coordinator and, where appropriate, the child or young person. An IEP should also be developed for each child or young person living in care who attends a school or education program. The IEP should be reviewed regularly to ensure its relevance for the child or young person.

**Transition to school – who should be informed?**

The DHS case manager (who has the legal responsibility for the child), the child's CSO case manager, and the child's carer should be informed of the transition-to-school process.

**Supporting the education of children in OoHC**

A range of strategies and best practice guidelines for supporting the education of children and young people in OoHC are outlined in the following documents:


For more information about supporting children in OoHC who attend catholic schools visit [www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au) and for those who attend independent schools visit [www.ais.vic.edu.au](http://www.ais.vic.edu.au)
10. Supporting families who have difficulties with literacy

Families who have difficulties with literacy speak a language that has a written form, but have not developed the same level of skills as others to read or write it. This does not imply that families have no skills in this area, rather that they will require additional support to help them to participate in transition processes and programs.

Families who have difficulties with literacy often have little or no experience with formal learning environments and may therefore have little knowledge of transition processes and programs, or school systems and procedures. Some of these families may also have had difficult, traumatising life experiences.

Supporting families who have difficulties with literacy

This section is relevant for those families from English speaking backgrounds who have difficulties with the written aspects of literacy. For families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, see Section 6: Supporting diversity.

Some non-literate people or people with low literacy skills learn to keep it a secret, and it may not be obvious to early childhood services and schools that a family is having problems. Non-literate people will often have developed their own ways to engage with printed materials and complete written tasks.

There are a number of ways to improving communication with families who have difficulties with literacy, and many of these strategies can be useful to engage all families. Suggestions include:

- conveying messages as a sequences of illustrations or pictures that clearly depict the activities involved without the use of words
- holding family information nights about transition, where information is provided verbally to all families
• incorporating visual cues in information provided to families about transition-to-school processes and programs
• talking with families about transition processes, and seeking their advice on how they would like to be involved
• make use of multimedia tools, to provide information about transition processes, and programs
• providing information about opportunities for families to improve their literacy skills, such as the Council for Adult Education’s courses www.cae.edu.au.

Families who have difficulties with literacy or families with low literacy skills may have particular difficulties engaging with and completing the Transition Learning and Development Statement. Early childhood services and schools can play a critical role in helping families understand why it is important to contribute to the Statement for their child.

By providing opportunities for all families to meet in person to discuss and complete the Transition Learning and Development Statement together, families who have difficulties with literacy can be encouraged to participate without having to identify themselves as non-literate.

It is also important to acknowledge that some families who have difficulties with literacy may prefer to have a friend or relative complete the Statement for them.

Working with families who have literacy issues can be challenging, and may require educators to provide alternative models of support (should this be appropriate). In considering the transition planning process for these children, early childhood educators and Prep teachers should allow additional time to meet and speak with these families.
11. Children and families not participating in early childhood services

A challenge for many early childhood services, schools and transition programs is engagement with children and families who do not participate in an early childhood services prior to starting at school.

In some communities, there are a large number of children and families who do not access either early childhood services or transition-to-school programs, and arrive at school on the first day straight from home. This can be for a variety of reasons, including families who have newly arrived in the local area. It is important to acknowledge as part of this process that there are many families across Victoria providing rich home-learning environments and opportunities for their children without attending early childhood services.

Tailoring transition-to-school programs to meet the needs of families who have not been in contact with early childhood education services may produce greater family involvement during their child’s first year of school. This, in turn, contributes to successful child outcomes, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Strategies for engaging children and families not engaged in early childhood services

Many of the strategies and approaches noted in the other sections of this kit remain relevant for connecting with families who do not readily access early childhood and school services. Ensuring that families can easily access information about local transition programs and opportunities to participate is central to their engagement.

Connections between families who do not readily engage with early childhood services and schools can only be built in the context of good communication and trusting and respectful relationships, where the strengths of individuals and families are recognised, despite challenges and other difficulties. This process relies on families identifying the need for them to be involved in providing a positive start to school for their child.
For children who do not have any or limited experience of early childhood services when they arrive at school, schools have a valuable role in linking families to relevant services. Children and families whose children have not attended an early childhood service with early childhood services will most commonly first become known when a child is enrolled at school. Therefore, it is appropriate for the school to develop processes and programs to support those children and families.

Resources provided in this kit can assist school staff to complete a Transition Learning and Development Statement for a child. Schools can assist families not participating in early childhood services to complete Part 1: the family of the Transition Learning and Development Statement. Please refer to the Guidelines for completing the Transition Learning and Development Statement provided in this kit, and the strategies outlined. This information can assist schools identify where transition programs can be developed for children and their families.

It is essential to work in close collaboration with a broad range of other support services already involved with the children and family, especially where they have already gained the trust and confidence of the families involved. Consequently, the involvement of local support, health and welfare agencies as collaborators in the design and development of transition programs and processes is most important. This helps prevent families, especially vulnerable ones, from slipping through the gap.

Early childhood services and schools may like to consider how to make:

- information easily accessible and relevant, focusing on the importance of early childhood to children's futures and why families should consider being involved in transition-to-school programs, which also lists available services and how these can help
- services and information more visible in the wider community
- services more accessible by investigating what helps families engage (for example, help with communication, timing of conversations to allow for working family demands, transport, etc.).
13. Website links

These websites were live at publication, it is suggested you check them regularly for updates.


Association for Children with a Disability: www.acd.org.au

Association of Independent Schools Victoria: www.ais.vic.edu.au


Australian Commonwealth Government Entry Point: www.australia.gov.au


Australian Association of Special Education Inc. (AASE) : www.aase.edu.au

Aunty Wendy’s Mob: www.auntywendysmob.com

Autism Victoria: www.autismvictoria.org.au


Catholic Education Office Melbourne: www.ceomelb.catholic.edu.au

Centre for Community Child Health: www.rch.org.au/ccch/index.cfm?doc_id=10556

Community Builders. NSW: www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au

Community Building – Communities Growing Together: www.communitybuilding.vic.gov.au

Community Child Care, Victoria; www.cccvic.org.au

Council for Adult Education: www.cae.edu.au


Dare to Lead: www.daretolead.edu.au

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: www.education.vic.gov.au


Department of Sustainability and Environment and Department of Primary Industries –

Department of Victorian Communities – Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria:


Encyclopaedia on Early Childhood Development – school transition:

Early Childhood Australia Inc.: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)


Early Childhood Intervention Services:

Early Years Learning Framework: [www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx)


Gowrie Victoria: [www.gowrievictoria.org.au](http://www.gowrievictoria.org.au)


Indigenous Australia: [www.indigenousaustralia.info](http://www.indigenousaustralia.info)


Koorie Heritage Trust Inc.: [www.koorieheritagetrust.com](http://www.koorieheritagetrust.com)


National Children’s Bureau (UK): [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

NSW Public Schools – Transition to Primary School:
Ontario Ministry of Education Planning Entry to School Kit:
www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/planningentry.html


Parents Victoria: www.parentsvic.org.au

Privacy Victoria: www.privacy.vic.gov.au

Program Development and Evaluation: www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande

Raising Children Network: http://raisingchildren.net.au/

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc. (SNAICC): www.snaicc.asn.au

Queensland Government Department of Education and Training Set for Prep:


Society for Prevention Research: www.preventionresearch.org

The Asset-based Community Development Institute:
www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd/abcdtopics.html

The Community Portal: www.community.gov.au


The Social Audit Cookbook: Recipes for Auditing the Way We Connect:


Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc (VAEAI): www.vaeai.org.au

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF):

Victorian Kindergarten Policy, Procedures and Funding Criteria Update 2009:

Wannik (Learning Together – Journey to Our Future) Education Strategy for Koorie Students:


Yarn Sista Strong: www.yarnstrongsista.com
14. Glossary

- **Aboriginal**: used in this kit represents people from all Indigenous Australian groups (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders). See also Koorie.

- **Assessment**: is a way to understand each child better, reflect on one’s present practice and the Transition Learning and Development Statement for that child and for the group as a whole.

- **Childcare services**: services primarily for children aged 0–5 years. They generally open at least eight hours a day, five days a week, excluding public holidays.

- **Council of Australian Governments (COAG)**: COAG is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). The role of COAG is to initiate, develop and monitor the implementation of policy reforms that are of national significance and which require cooperative action by Australian governments.

- **Community-centred approaches**: approaches to an issue or problem that meet a particular community’s specific needs. For example, two schools within the same suburb or region may approach children's transition to school very differently, each reflecting the particular needs of children in its community.

- **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CALD)**: children and families with diverse cultural backgrounds who may speak languages other than English (often used in Australia to refer to groups of people whose culture and/or language is other than the dominant ‘Anglo’ culture and/or English language).

- **Day care**: means centre-based childcare services.

- **Early childhood**: the period between birth and eight years of age.

- **Early childhood educators**: early childhood practitioners who work directly with children in early childhood services, including unqualified, certificate qualified, diploma qualified and degree qualified (teacher) educators working across all forms of early childhood services.

- **Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS)**: services that provide support to children with a disability or developmental delay and to their families, from birth to school entry. Such services include special education, therapy, counselling, service planning and coordination, assistance and support to prior to schooling settings, such as kindergartens and child care services.

- **Early childhood services**: care and education services for children and their families, including childcare, long day care, family day care services, Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) and kindergartens.

- **Educators**: people who work with children between birth to age eight in a service of care and/or education, such as an early childhood service or the early years of compulsory schooling.
• **Kindergarten**: A government-funded educational service provided for children in the year preceding school enrolment. Some kindergartens offer full-day programs; others operate on a sessional basis.

• **Koorie**: refers to specific groups of Australian Aboriginals.

• **Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group**: there are 31 LAECGs across Victoria that can support partnerships between Aboriginal families and educational settings.

• **Orientation to the school**: a process/program in which a school presents itself, its operations and its characteristics to families and their children who will be starting at the school. It can include touring the school, receiving copies of school policies, meeting school staff (especially the principal and the early childhood educators) and participating in school activities.

• **Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)**: care of school-aged children before and/or after the school day. In Australia, a school usually provide out of school hours care on its premises.

• **Policy/ies**: planned actions and procedures of governments, education services and other organisations and institutions.

• **Practice**: a way of doing things and carrying out ideas and action plans.

• **Prep year**: the first year of their compulsory years of formal schooling; children in this first year can be between four-and-a-half and six years of age.

• **Promising practices**: strategies, programs, approaches or techniques designed to support positive transition to school for children, families, educators and communities that are typically based on educator-focused wisdom and research, but which are often not yet empirically ‘validated’ through systematic research and evaluation.

• **Readiness**: state of being prepared for an imminent particular task or event.

• **Schooling (compulsory)**: the age at which children can start and complete school. In Victoria, all children between six and sixteen years of age must attend school.
15. Common abbreviations

AEDI: Australian Early Development Index
CALD: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
COAG: Council of Australian Governments
CSO: Community Service Organisation
DEECED: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DHS: Department of Human Services
ECIS: Early Childhood Intervention Services
ESL: English as a Second Language
IEP: Individual Education Plan
KECFO: Koorie Early Childhood Field Officer
KESO: Koorie Education Support Officer
KISS: Kindergarten Inclusion Support Service
OoHC: Out of Home Care
OSHC: Outside School Hours Care
PEDS: Parents Evaluation of Developmental Status
PSD: Program for Students with Disabilities (in Victorian government schools)
PSFO: Preschool field officers
SEHQ: School Entrant Health Questionnaire
SSG: Student Support Group
VELS: Victorian Essential Learning Standards
16. Local resources and services

This section is provided for services to include their own local resources and information relevant to transition to school.