

Transition to school at Oakhill Drive Public School

Case study

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



Under the School Success Model, the NSW Department of Education is committed to ensuring that every student, teacher, leader and school improves every year. This case study forms part of a series to support the NSW Department of Education's strategic goal of 'All children make a strong start in life and learning and make a successful transition to school'. A successful transition to school is about laying strong foundations for year-on-year improvement by ensuring that our students are engaged and ready for challenge. The case studies refer to and draw on the department's new Strong and successful start to school transition guidelines.

For more information about how the NSW Department of Education is supporting a strong and successful transition to school, visit the NSW Department of Education [Early Learning](#) and [Early Childhood Education](#) web pages. For an overview of the key findings from literature on the transition to school, see CESE's [Transition to school literature review](#).

Note. Fieldwork for the case studies was undertaken after the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak, but before the 2021 Delta outbreak.



What works to support a strong and successful transition to school at Oakhill Drive Public School

The five strategies in the diagram below outline some of the ways Oakhill Drive Public School supports a strong and successful transition to school. The strategies overlap and connect with each other, and there is strong alignment between these strategies, the School Excellence Framework and the NSW Department of Education's Strong and successful start to school transition guidelines.



Principles and practices of the Transition to school guidelines:

- 1 High expectations and equity
- 2 Collaboration and partnerships
- 3 Wellbeing and secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- 4 Use of data to inform practice and ongoing learning and reflective practice
- 5 Continuity of learning
- 6 Assessment
- 7 Wellbeing and respect for diversity
- 8 Explicit teaching

School context

Oakhill Drive Public School is a primary school located in the Castle Hill area of north-west Sydney. It has a FOEI¹ of 8 and a current enrolment of 778 students, 62% of whom are from a language background other than English (LBOTE). Oakhill Drive Public School was externally validated in 2019 as Excelling in 13 of the 14 elements of the School Excellence Framework, including the 'Transitions and continuity of learning' theme. Oakhill Drive Public School has seen an upward trend in their Value Added data since 2016. The school community at Oakhill Drive Public School is aspirational, resourceful and highly educated. With a high proportion of LBOTE students, families often have little experience of the NSW public school system. Students at Oakhill Drive Public School often come from families that have multiple generations living in the same household, and the school has a strong focus on connecting with the whole family.



Transition to school at Oakhill Drive Public School: an overview

Oakhill Drive Public School has a transition to school approach which it describes as an 'all, some, few' approach. As part of this approach, all children and their families meet with school executive, attend two orientation sessions in Term 4, and receive a social story book about starting school featuring two characters in the Oakhill Drive Public School environment. The school also runs a Kindergarten and Year 6 buddy program for all children, and parent information sessions for all families. For some families, extra conversations occur when families express specific concerns about their children. For a few, the school also provides extra support for children with additional needs and their families to support the transition process.

“The impact is that the children are connected, they’re happy, and therefore in a position to begin learning.”

Betty Ploeg, Principal

Oakhill Drive Public School focuses on finding out as much information as possible so that the school can get to know each child and their family. They also focus on keeping families informed about the transition process and building strong relationships. Oakhill Drive Public School uses data from a variety of sources to monitor the progress of each child throughout their transition to school to ensure it is as smooth as possible. This includes using student and parent surveys, wellbeing data, attendance data, and student assessment data that focuses on growth in learning.

¹ Family Occupation and Education Index – a school-level index of educational disadvantage with a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 50. Higher values indicate greater levels of need.

Oakhill Drive Public School: transition to school strategies

Collaborating with early childhood services

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 2 Collaboration and partnerships
- 3 Wellbeing and secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- 5 Continuity of learning

Most children start Kindergarten at Oakhill Drive Public School having attended an early childhood setting. The school works directly with 12 early childhood education (ECE) services as part of the transition to school process. Oakhill Drive Public School maintains relationships with all the ECE services that feed into their school through a range of practices. This includes having regular communication with each centre, attending the centres for observations of children, sharing videos developed by the school to build familiarity, and providing parent information sessions for all families at the ECE service.

“... it's about connecting both ways. So for us, sharing information with the services, but also having the services share information with us in order to support the family.”

Natalie Mesiti,
Assistant Principal for Kindergarten

Oakhill Drive Public School has the strongest collaborative relationship with Appletree Preschool. This service is closely located to Oakhill Drive Public School and the majority of Appletree Preschool children attend Oakhill Drive Public School. The school describes its relationship with Appletree Preschool as strong and reciprocal. The school and the service communicate regularly throughout the year to prepare for the transition to school. Children at Appletree attend Oakhill Drive Public School for visits, including library lessons, playground time, and assemblies to build familiarity with the school setting. The school also shares resources with the service to assist with the transition process, including the school's social story, uniforms, and school videos introducing the teachers, and the school and showing what a day in the life of Kindergarten is like.

Getting to know children individually

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 1 High expectations and equity
- 2 Collaboration and partnerships
- 3 Wellbeing and secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- 4 Use of data to inform practice and ongoing learning and reflective practice

Oakhill Drive Public School gets to know each child before they start Kindergarten on an individual level. This assists the school with ensuring the learning environment is ready for all children. All incoming Kindergarten children and their families have a one-on-one meeting before Kindergarten orientation sessions with the deputy principal, or the assistant principal for Kindergarten. The meetings provide the school with in-depth information about each child, as a questionnaire is completed by families. The questionnaire includes what families see as their children's strengths, their aspirational goals for their children, as well as any concerns they may have.

“Our primary aim is to make connections with every child, and their family, so when they begin the transition process – and during the transition process – they feel a sense of belonging.”

Betty Ploeg, Principal

In 2020, the meeting was adapted to include a school tour for the children and their families to help build familiarity with the school environment. This change was made due to COVID-19 restrictions which meant that larger school tours which are usually run could not go ahead. The school also involves their learning and support team in the transition process for children who have additional needs. For example, conversations with families start early in the year prior to school, the school conducts observations in the ECE context to understand the child's needs, additional orientation days are provided, and custom social stories are developed for each child.

Supporting children to adapt to their new learning context

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 5 Continuity of learning
- 8 Explicit teaching

The first three weeks of Term 1 at Oakhill Drive Public School focus on wellbeing, helping Kindergarten children establish strong relationships with their teachers and peers, and adjust to their new environment, expectations and routines. During this time of continuity, children are explicitly taught how to join play, how to leave play, and provided support in how to negotiate roles in their new environment.

“Our biggest focus is throughout term one that we’re still continuing that transition process. So the first few weeks are dedicated around wellbeing and establishing connections and relationships with the students and their families.”

Caitlin Rawnsley, Teacher

Children are provided with a ‘soft start’ to school to support continuity for the first few weeks. This includes beginning their day with unstructured play, having early starts to breaks, and having their own section of the playground accompanied by their Year 6 buddies to strengthen connections and build familiarity. By giving children planned, dedicated time to adjust to their new environment, the school believes children feel a sense of belonging, and are more ready to learn. The school also sees positive behaviour and relationship outcomes flow on from this practice throughout the year.



Connecting with and supporting families

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 1 High expectations and equity
- 2 Collaboration and partnerships
- 3 Wellbeing and secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

Oakhill Drive Public School recognises that a successful transition to school involves families, as well as the students. As such, the school strongly invests in multiple methods to connect with families to provide them with information about the transition, and support them and their children in the transition process. For example, the school holds two to three information sessions for families from July onwards. The information sessions cover topics such as school readiness, the school’s strategic directions, Kindergarten orientation session activities, school systems, routines, and communication tools.

“... we believe that the more efficient our transition process is for parents and students, it’s a healthier beginning to their formal education in our school.”

Betty Ploeg, Principal

Oakhill Drive Public School also creates a virtual classroom for incoming children and their families using Seesaw. Content is uploaded to help children and their families become familiar with the school, including teacher introduction videos, a ‘day in the life of kindy’ video, and a school readiness presentation. The virtual Seesaw classroom is also useful for families who enrol their children later in the year as they can access all transition information in the one place. Members of the school executive also actively engage families to support their children’s learning by delivering parent workshops which focus on upskilling parents in how to help their children with their learning, and include topics such as reading and mathematics.



Targeted professional learning for Kindergarten teachers

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 1 High expectations and equity
- 2 Collaboration and partnerships

The Kindergarten teachers at Oakhill Drive Public School receive targeted professional learning to support the transition process. This supports Kindergarten teachers in preparing for the incoming cohort of children. Professional learning is delivered by the Kindergarten assistant principal in Early Stage 1 staff meetings, and varies depending on the needs of the team. For example, the school supports Kindergarten teachers to work together across curriculums by providing professional learning on the Early Years Learning Framework. It assists the team to gain a shared understanding of the Early Years Learning Framework and translate the content of the Transition to School statements².

Professional learning is also provided on the Best Start Kindergarten assessment³. In addition, when teachers in the team are new to Kindergarten, the professional learning may cover what to expect socially, emotionally and academically from children coming in to Kindergarten and how teachers should approach the first few weeks. Where possible, the assistant principal for Kindergarten takes the Kindergarten team on one of the visits to a local ECE service. This allows the team to observe the ECE setting, and to get an idea of what the day-to-day looks like so they can take this into account as part of the transition to school.

“We upskill our Kindergarten teachers in understanding what the Early Years Learning Framework is talking about so they can understand those [Transition to School statements].”

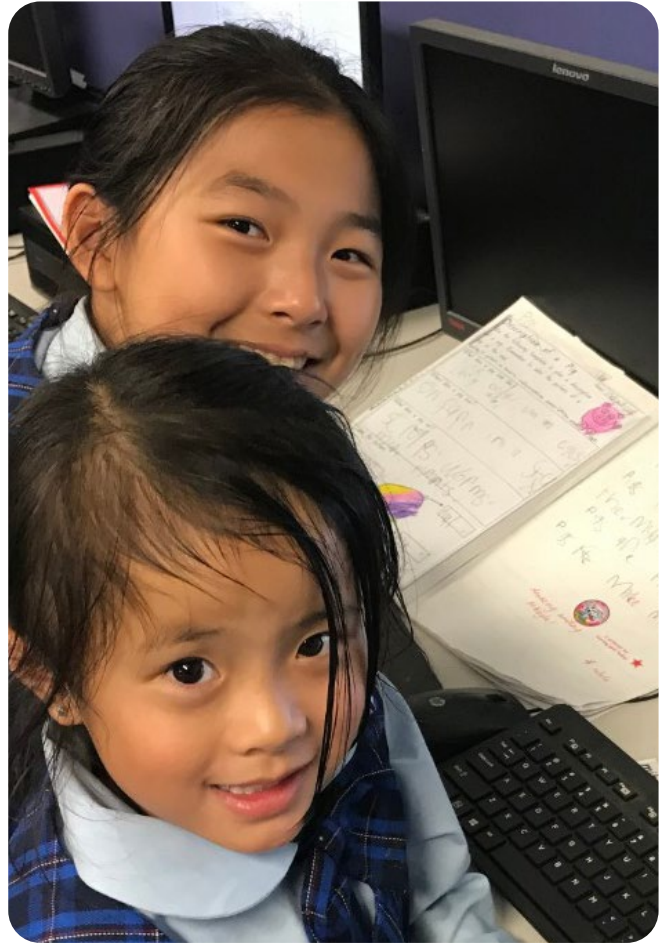
Natalie Mesiti,
Assistant Principal for Kindergarten

- 2 The Transition to School Statement is completed by a child’s early childhood educator and is sent to their new school. It summarises a child’s strengths, interests and approaches to learning.
- 3 Best Start Kindergarten is a one-on-one student assessment held in the first few weeks of Kindergarten to gain an understanding of each child’s literacy and numeracy knowledge.

Where to from here

Oakhill Drive Public School has identified some of the ways they will ensure students continue making a strong and successful transition to school. These include continuing the:

- use of a virtual Seesaw classroom as an effective and efficient communication tool for incoming Kindergarten students and their families
- one-on-one meeting prior to Kindergarten orientation sessions with children, families, and the deputy principal or the assistant principal for Kindergarten including a tour of the school
- practice of focusing on wellbeing and establishing relationships in the first few weeks of the school year, ensuring children are adapting to the new environment
- use of data to ensure the transition to school is smooth, including using student and parent surveys, and wellbeing, attendance and student assessment data.



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Case study schools were selected using a combination of School Excellence Framework data, Value Added⁴ data and Kindergarten attendance data.

4 Value Added (VA) is a measure which indicates the progress students have made in their learning over a period of time.

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