

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

Inquiry into transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families

RESPONSE TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS FOR WITNESSES FROM

Dr Trevor Clark, Director, Education & Research, Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)

Dr Debra Costley, General Manager, Education Development & Research, Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)

1. In your view, what are the key elements of successful transitions between stages of education for students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Staff in Aspect schools begin the process of transition planning twelve months in advance of when a child is assessed as ready to move to a more inclusive setting. Some of the key elements to a successful transition are outlined below.

Transition Planning

- A psychometric assessment is completed to determine the student's functioning level, if needed.
- The decision about the type of future placement most suitable for the student (regular class, support class or generic special school) is made in collaboration with the parents or guardians.
- The most suitable school will be identified in collaboration with the parents, guardians and the other school authorities. The Aspect school will provide educational assessments, the IEP profile and program to the receiving school.
- Negotiations will commence with the receiving school and Aspect will develop a transition program. The transition program will include orientation visits to the receiving school.
- Aspect will monitor and review the student's progress. The transition program will be adjusted as necessary.
- The student is then enrolled in the receiving school. Aspect staff provide on-going transition support for twelve months after the child has exited an Aspect school.

There will also be a number of considerations for the receiving school as they prepare to take on a student transitioning from Aspect. These may include:

- Resourcing issues or requirements, such as funding for extra support, communication programs, specialised equipment.
- Evaluation of the knowledge base of staff with regard to autism – staff may require specific ASD training.
- Discussion of how existing students are to be informed about the incoming Aspect student – The Sixth Sense II Program by Carol Gray is often implemented in receiving schools to support understanding.

- Plans for how the student's progress will be monitored.
- The availability of further support options – if more intensive support is needed after transition, the Aspect Educational Outreach service may be required.
- Discussion and planning for any necessary adjustments or modifications to the physical environment or curriculum.
- Extra supervision requirements for the student at break times.

Aspect staff have developed and documented two case studies that will help to illustrate the importance of the issues outlined in response to this question. There is a series of case studies documenting the different needs of a group of children moving from Aspect Early Intervention programs to school and a detailed case study of the process and planning for the transition of one child from an Aspect school into a mainstream setting. In addition, there are examples of the types of document that Aspect staff will provide for the student and the receiving school. These are attached for your information.

2. What do you think can be done to better assist students with an ASD with the transition from school to post-school?

The transition planning process is the same for school to post-school transitions as that described above and in the school-aged case study provided. Essentially the process needs to:

- Start early
- Collaborate with staff in the post-school environment
- Modify requirements of the receiving service, education or employment provider
- Liaise with service based transition support officer/case manager
- Adopt a person centred approach to including the young person and their family in decision making
- Familiarisation/orientation visits to post-school setting to take-place for the transitioning student
- Link student & family to adolescent/adult social clubs or programs
- Provide for transition support for at least 12 months post-transition to the new setting

3. The NSW Government submission states that 'transition could be strengthened if processes were established to enable the sharing of relevant information for all children and young people across educational settings' (p 7). How do processes for sharing information currently work? What are the barriers to improving these processes?

We can only provide evidence about Aspect transition processes and we do have processes in place to work with representatives from the DEC, CEO, and Independent sectors. We find it is important to:

- Have regular regional consultation meetings
- Talk about specific students that both services have in common
- Share data bases/information
- Begin discussions 12 months in advance. This includes notification to the DEC for a special education place (as outlined in the school aged case study).

There are some barriers to improving the processes in some areas. These include education sectors, regions or specific schools that are unwilling to partner other agencies who are transitioning students into services. The other issue is receiving staff/schools that fail to make necessary adjustments and accommodations for children with autism, despite being given specific advice about the child's needs. An example of this reluctance of schools to make accommodations is that of a teenage boy who found it very difficult every time he had to go to his locker. He would get very upset and the teachers did not know how to support him. An Aspect staff member observed the boy and found that his locker was on the bottom of a wall of lockers. He found it very difficult to have to bend down to his locker with other boys leaning over

him to reach their lockers in the rows above. A recommendation was made that the boy should be given a locker higher up. Six months later the Aspect staff member was called back because the boy was not complying and becoming upset between lessons. It was discovered that he still had the same locker on the bottom row that he found very confronting to use. In this case the teacher thought that the recommendations of the Aspect staff member appeared trivial and therefore decided not to follow them.

4. How soon before a child moves from one setting to another do you think transition planning should start, and how long do you think it should continue after they have moved? Are there any barriers to this?

As described in the case studies provided, we believe that successful transitions begin 12 months in advance of when it is anticipated a child will be ready to move and that support should continue with a 12 month follow-up process.

The main barriers are that receiving services need to be receptive to offers of support. Importantly, if recommended autism specific strategies are not implemented in classroom programs this can result in the breakdown of a placement.

5. What recommendations do you think the Committee could make to improve transition support for students with additional or complex needs and their families?

Recommendations to all education sectors to implement/adopt fully 'Disability Standards for Education' and ensure these are supported through accountability measures.

Foster collaborative relationships/partnerships with all education providers government/non-government. If necessary formalise through formal agreements.

Case study: Process of a student transitioning from Aspect South East Sydney School (SES) Kareela satellite unit to Department of Education and Communities (DEC) IM support unit

Background information:

Abigail was enrolled in Aspect South East Sydney School in 2007. Abigail initially attended the Kirrawee base unit and after 12 months was transitioned into the Kareela Satellite unit. Abigail remained in the Kareela Satellite unit for two years where she completed years one and two. As the Kareela unit caters for K-2 students and Abigail had moved through the Aspect program it was essential to consider future planning and transition for Abigail so that her long term educational needs could be met.

The transition process outlined below is the same process for any Aspect student across base and satellite units transitioning to a support unit (IM or IO) or special school (SSP).

Transition Process:

- Discussion about transition with Abigail's family at the beginning of each year (term one) in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. These discussions were formally documented in meeting minutes. Discussions included the skills development necessary for placement and internal transition to the Kareela Satellite unit from the Kirrawee base unit as well as planning for a transition to an alternative setting outside of an Aspect school once at the Kareela satellite unit. To assist in the decision making about Abigail's placement beyond Aspect the family consented and signed a referral to the school counsellor to administer an IQ assessment/ psychometric assessment.
- Towards the end of term two the IQ assessment had been completed. The family, teacher and coordinator were invited to the feedback session with the family counsellor. This meeting highlighted particular areas where Abigail had strengths as well as areas where more support or adjustments were required. The opportunity for feedback after the assessment also allowed the information gathered to be shared and discussed in a way productive and functional to all parties involved. The family counsellor provided an overall score of subtests placing Abigail in the range of having a mild intellectual disability. At the end of the IQ assessment feedback meeting the coordinator then discussed what the overall score means for future planning and transition options. The parents were told that a student with a mild intellectual disability qualifies for an IM unit within a mainstream school. This is a special education unit with up to 18 students all with a mild intellectual disability. There are usually 1-2 teacher aides in the classroom to assist the teacher deliver the curriculum. The curriculum is delivered at a modified pace and may include modified learning experiences to assist students in meeting educational outcomes. The option of accessing a mainstream program if desired was also mentioned, however the support of an IM unit was recommended. It was advised that the family take some time to digest the information and contact the coordinator when they would like to further discuss or pursue their transition option.
- The family did contact the coordinator, however at times it is necessary for contact to be initiated by the coordinator to ensure adequate time is left for future planning and paper work to be submitted to the DEC if necessary. The family informed the coordinator they would like to pursue an IM unit. The following process below was explained to the family so they were aware of what would be happening for the remainder of the year in regards to Abigail's transition.
- The coordinator completed an Access Request Form from the DEC. This form outlines general information including the type of service being accessed. Supporting documentation included the psychometric assessment proving Abigail meets the IQ requirements for an IM class. IEP, student profiles and reports are also included in the application. Once completed the Access Request Form must include signatures from the principal and parent/s. This paper work was collated and signed early in term three.

- A phone call was then made to the relevant DEC District Guidance Officer (DGO) in the region to alert them there is an application being sent to them. Some general conversation about the student occurred. Confirmation they have received paper work is then sort within a short time frame.
- It is optional, however best practice, for the coordinator to make contact with the family informing them paper work has been received by the DGO. The contact number and name of the DGO can be shared with parents so they have a contact and can check the progress of the application as desired.
- On some occasions once the DGO's have received the paper work they may make an appointment to see the student in their current Aspect setting. This did occur for Abigail where the DGO confirmed that an IM class would be the best placement. Before any observations occur Aspect will seek permission from the family.
- DGO's take the paper work to a DEC meeting which occurs each term around week 6-7. At this meeting a panel decides what placement is going to be offered to the family. Aspect staff or families cannot attend this meeting. Abigail's paper work was discussed in the term three panel meeting.
- When a decision has been made by the panel the family receives a letter of offer via mail. The family who are aware of this process are previously asked to let the school know when they receive this offer. It is at this point the parent can request to visit the school offered. No school visits can be made until a letter off offer has been provided. Abigail's family requested to see the IM unit at Simpson Public School which was the offer provided.
- If the family request the coordinator or school staff member to go along on the visit this is accommodated. The coordinator visited the IM unit with Abigail's family.
- The family felt comfortable with the placement offer for Abigail and it was very close to where they reside. Abigail's family accepted the offer from the DEC.
- Once accepted and the DGO has informed the receiving school, Simpson Public School, the coordinator can contact the school to discuss transition visits and provide them with information on the student. Liaising with the school is best done at the beginning of term four. A Transition Plan is developed at this point (see document 2).
- Simpson Public School requested a meeting with the family and the Aspect current teacher and coordinator. It is at this meeting Abigail's specific strengths and areas of need could be highlighted. The school also provided Abigail's family some paper work for enrolment. A meeting is usually requested by the receiving school or by Aspect. At this meeting photos are taken to make a social story for the student before their first transition visit (see document 3).
- Dates were set for five transition visits. The student has a Transition Work Book to complete during their visits to help them gather information on how the new school operates (see document 5). The first three visits were supported with the Aspect class teacher or teacher aide and ranged from a two hour visit to full day visits. Visit four was discussed as an independent visit with the Aspect class teacher phoning half way through the day to check Abigail was managing without support. The final visit was again independent however for the last hour the Aspect teacher went to the school to observe Abigail's progress. Abigail was happy and settled in her new environment. In some cases it is necessary to request more transition visits from the school. The advantage of the Aspect teacher returning after an independent visit is also valuable as the receiving school may have further questions about how best to support the student or they may wish to discuss some of their observations. The receiving school is provided with information on the specific support strategies that will help the child function in their new environment (see document 4).
- An updated social story with some additional important information and people was sent home to assist Abigail over the holiday period preparing her for the change of school placement. It was also recommended to the family they take a walk around the school to continue making Abigail feel comfortable with her new environment. See document 6 for an example of the type of support Aspect provides tailored for individual students.
- Abigail has been successfully enrolled in Simpson Public school for nearly two years now and has made great progress.



TRANSITION PLAN SCHEDULE

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 48%;"> <p>Name: John</p> <p>D.O.B: 4/8/98</p> <p>School: Aspect, South East Sydney satellite unit</p> <p>Teacher/s: Aspect Teachers Mrs. N and Mrs. J</p> <p>Principal: Aspect School Principal</p> <p>Plan Coordinator: Aspect School Coordinator</p> </div> <div style="width: 48%;"> <p>Transition Setting: St. Patricks, Mainstream School Class: Year 6</p> <p>Address:</p> <p>Phone:</p> <p>Teacher/s: John Smith</p> <p>Co-ordinator: Jane Jones</p> </div> </div>		
Time Frame & Dates	Support During & Post Transition	Documentation/Curriculum Modifications
<p>Week 4, Visit 1: Thursday 4th November (9.20am-10.57 pm)</p> <p>Week 5, Visit 2: Tuesday 9th November (9.20am-3.15pm)</p> <p>Week 6, Visit 3: Monday 15th November (8.25-3.05pm)</p>	<p>Orientation visit with Mrs. N and time in classroom and playground.</p> <p>Teacher aide to meet John and his mother at St. Patricks office at 8.45. Aide to support John till morning tea. School Coordinator will support the rest of the visit and meet John's mother for pick up in afternoon at St. Patricks office at 2.30pm.</p> <p>Aide to meet John's mother at St Patricks 8.25am and to support John for full day including waiting at bus stop for his brother Andrew to join him.</p>	<p>Mrs. N to write social story and provide any other relevant supports to school including copies of break cards and IEP. Mrs N to collect sex ed booklet to cover this material before school next year.</p>

<p>Week 6, Visit 4: Friday 19th November (8.25-3.05pm)</p> <p>Week 7, Visit 5: Wednesday 24th November (8.25-3.05pm)</p>	<p>John to arrive at school with his brother Andrew and go to lines. Aspect teacher to meet John and stay till after morning tea. If all going well John to spend last half day by himself. John to wait at bus stop with his brother and go home with him.</p> <p>If all went well for the last visit, John to arrive at school with his brother and do the first half of the day by himself. Aspect teacher to support John for second half of day and meet with teacher if there are further questions. John to return home on bus with his brother.</p> <p>Aspect to provide 12 months transition follow-up support on a consultative basis.</p>	
--	---	--

Getting Help

Most of the time, it is important to try to do your work as best as you can by yourself. You are really great at this David and work hard to do it on your own.

But, sometimes we still need help from our teachers. You need help, the other kids need help, even Einstein needed help from his teacher. Smart people know that getting help means they learn faster, so if they can't do something on their own, they get help. Even your teachers get help.

When you get help you learn new things. You can't learn new things without someone showing them to you.

So, it is important to get help, and everybody does it. Have a look and you will notice lots of kids getting help. They're smart too, they are just learning something new.

Here's the right way to ask for help.

1. Try and do it by your self.
2. If you get stuck, "no problem".
3. Put your hand up and wait quietly.
4. Ask the teacher for help.

Sometimes we don't know we need help. We think we are doing the right thing but actually we are making a mistake. The teacher will come around and look at our work to make sure we are getting it right. It is important to let the teacher check your work.

If you do make a mistake the teacher will try and explain it in a new way to help you understand. The better you are at listening, the quicker you will learn and the teacher won't have to help you anymore. Here's how to listen.

1. Think "No worries. I'm learning something new"
2. Look at the teacher.
3. Listen to what they say.
4. Try again to do it correctly. The teacher will probably stay with you until you do it right. That's fine. They do it to everyone. It's their job.

Support for John – Information for Receiving School

Strengths	You can support this by
Diligent worker	Clearly state (and preferably demonstrate) what is expected.
Tries very hard to do the right thing.	Explain things in black and white terms. Use phrases like “the right thing to do is....”
Quirky sense of humour	Enjoy Give parameters for appropriate times for jokes and funny stories
Likes responsibility	Over time give jobs or responsibilities within the classroom.
Friendly	Buddy with kids with common interest for a while. (John is really into Yugi-oh, Asterix and Oblix, Harry Potter books and movies, other movies, museums, The Goodies, Mr Bean) It would be nice if he is allowed to play Yugi-oh cards a few lunch times a week (maybe on library days)
Likes order	Refer to timetable often. Stick a slide up on smartboard at beginning of day outlining day and a few words about each lesson. E.g. English – nouns, questions, Who wants to be a Millionaire?, Maths – subtraction activity, worksheet, game. It’s fine if there are gaps, but John likes knowing what’s coming up. Sometimes he may not retain this information if it’s only given verbally.
Generally good at keeping track of time and gear.	Have specific places to put things such as blue cap and black cap. Place to put things when he changes room. He would probably like to have a desk that’s his (don’t know if you do that for everyone or not)
Responds to rewards	John will respond to frequent rewards. It is important to attach them to specific comments about what he has done right. In order to be able to give frequent rewards you may add extra layers to your current system. Eg. 5 ticks you get a star, 5 stars you get a merit certificate. As John’s social awareness increases he will respond more and more to public recognition (merit awards or receiving things in class/assembly) then other tangible awards. John is not really into lollies so they won’t have much power as a reinforcer.
Working on	
Receiving help	I think John will be very self conscious about receiving help in this new setting. Some things that may help are: being subtle; refer him to his checklist (see “Getting Help”) before providing assistance; specific praise/reward for listening when a teacher has helped; every now and then point out the fact that all the kids need help sometime.
Listening and focusing	John will day dream if things are moving a bit too fast or if he’s a bit tired. You can say his name and wait for him to look before saying important information Use visual information in lesson – this can be written, pictures, videos, pointing, demonstrating. As he is a competent reader, written information is effective as “a visual” and use of the smartboard

Document 4: Transition information for receiving school from Aspect staff

	equally so.
Academic work	<p>Will probably need adjusting. This can be done through: different work, different amount of work he is expected to complete, different support given to complete the work.</p>
Managing stress and disappointment	<p>John is really pretty good at this now, but this is where things like the break cards can be useful. After seeing him there the other day and hearing reports of how he went I don't anticipate him using these. I think he will be pretty keen to do just what the other kids are doing.</p> <p>Situations where you can anticipate stress is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sudden cancellation of anticipated activity, • losing often (he can cope with it a bit but would get agitated with it happening a lot) • not keeping up with others • forgetting things from home that he needs that day (Eg. swimmers on swim day) <p>If you notice that he is stressed (cross look on face, speaks loud, flustered) you may write to him instead of talk. This often helps diffuse the emotion and slows things down. Writing positive or neutral thoughts down such as "Oh well", "Maybe next time" or something more relevant to the situation, will help stop him catastrophising. Assisting him to come up with solutions for solving a problem will also be effective and this is best done prior to an experience that you think may trigger stress.</p> <p>We have used a 5 step process known as "Take A Risk" for problem solving which involves asking the following questions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What's the best thing that could happen? 2. What's the worst thing that could happen? 3. What can I do to stop that happening? 4. What's the most likely thing to happen? 5. What can I say to myself to help me feel OK about that? <p>I noticed that he is worried about swimming class because he is not that great at swimming. Going through this process a week or so before his first class would probably be quite helpful.</p>

John Becomes a St. Patrick's student.

Name _____

Year _____

(Photo of John at new School)

First class visit. Day _____ Date _____

What is the name of your teacher? _____

What room are you in? _____

How will you remember how to find the room? _____

You will see and hear plenty of new things today. You are a little bit like a detective collecting evidence. The evidence will teach you what is the right thing to do at your new school.

Here are some tips to help you be a smart detective.

-
1. Look around and see what the other kids are doing. Most of the time, you will need to do the same thing as them.
 2. Check your timetable in your diary. It will tell you what you are meant to be doing.
 3. If you are still not sure, the right thing to do is to ask a teacher.
-



It's a good idea to write down the new things you learn. This will help you remember them.

Where did you go for morning tea? _____

What were the other kids doing? _____

What other teachers did you meet? _____

Can you remember some of the kids you met? _____

What was the best thing about your day? _____

Do you have any questions about your day? _____

Class visit 2. Day _____ Date _____

What did you do before the bell went in the morning? _____

Where did you meet the teacher? _____

Did you visit any other rooms today? If yes, where? _____

Did you meet some new people today? Who? _____

Sometimes at school, things don't go according to plan. I think you know this from St Michael's. A teacher might be away, your favourite subject might get cancelled. Sometimes this is fine. If you feel OK you don't need to do anything. Sometimes when things change it can be confusing or disappointing or make you feel frustrated. It's OK to feel these things but it is important that you do the right thing when this happens.

If you are confused or frustrated, the right thing to do is:



1. Stay Calm
2. If you think you need a break, ask the teacher if you can have one.
3. Find a quiet space close by to think. Try and do the thinking in your head.
4. Try and find out what will happen. You can ask the teacher to explain it.
5. Try and stay positive with thoughts like "Oh well!" or "Stay Cool". Remember to keep trying to do what the teacher says.

What was the best thing about your day? _____

Do you have any questions about your day? _____

Class visit 3. Day _____ Date _____

What were some new things from the day? _____

What are all the other kids wearing when they arrive at school? _____

Are they allowed to take off their hats and ties during the day? _____

Where do the other kids put their bags? _____

What equipment do they have with them? _____

What do the kids do when a teacher walks into the room? _____

How do the other kids ask the teacher questions? _____

Did you see any other kids make a mistake or get in trouble? What happened? _____

Sometimes when you are at a big school, all the teachers may not know who you are. You still need to listen to them and do what they ask you to do. Of course!

At St. Patricks there might be different things that are important like keeping your tie on, tucking your shirt in or wearing the school cap. Do your best to follow the rules. You are very good at this and should have no problem. Occasionally, a teacher might yell an instruction at you. This is fine. It happens to everyone sometimes. The right thing to do is to follow what the teacher has said. If you are very upset, stay calm and give the teacher a Mr Barton card.



I'm in Mr Barton's class.

Please talk with him.

Visit 4

Day _____ Date _____

Congratulations! Your 4th day at school. Did you get to spend some time by yourself at school?

What happened at school today?

What was your favourite part of the day?

What things are you looking forward to doing next year?

Did you meet any new teachers today? Who? What subject did they teach?

Teacher

Subject

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Where do you need to meet Andrew in the afternoons?

What bus will you catch together? _____

Any questions?

Visit 5

Day _____

Date _____

Well done John! You are almost a St Patrick's boy now.

You can use this page to write down anything else you can think of, or ask any questions.

It's up to you now!

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Staying Positive

When things don't go your way, staying positive is the right thing to do.

Staying positive means thinking smart thoughts and doing smart things.

Thinking:

A blue-outlined thought bubble with three small circles leading to it from the bottom left.

No Problem!

A blue-outlined thought bubble with three small circles leading to it from the bottom left.

I can ask for help

A blue-outlined thought bubble with three small circles leading to it from the bottom left.

Keep on trying.

Doing:

A green-outlined rounded rectangle.

Stay Calm

A yellow-outlined rounded rectangle.

Keep working

Aspect Transition to School Case Studies

Introduction

Supporting children to have a successful transition to school is important. Not only can it help set up children for many years of appropriate educational opportunities, but it can also help reduce anxiety and stress for the children, their families and the receiving school.

There are many ways that Aspect Building Blocks support children's transitions into school. Currently most of the transition support has been integrated into the child's therapy/home-based intervention. Transition issues are also covered in the parent component of centre-based programme. In most cases there are a number of people who support a child's transition into school, but often the support is not planned and there are often gaps in terms of support for both the child, family and educational personnel.

It is important to understand that the transition process is different for each child and family. Some factors that play a part are:

- The child – a profile should be available that details the child's strengths, needs, interests/motivators, successful strategies, and behavioral concerns.
- The family – it is important to understand the families preferences and priorities in relations to the education of their child and also their understanding of the education systems and schooling options.
- The contributing early childhood program (if there is one) – some centers have well developed transition processes in place and have an understanding of the issues for children with ASD as they transition.
- The receiving school –there is a need to ascertain the level of confidence, skill and experience in meeting the needs of learners with ASD across the school (principal and teachers).
- The education system – this is different in each state and across city and regional areas. There may be different processes in place in government and non-government schools.

The following case studies have been developed to highlight some of these factors and to illustrate how careful planning is needed to ensure the right level of support is available for children with autism spectrum disorders and families as they transition to school.

Transition to school is a process, and it is helpful to think more clearly about which parts of the process need support for each child. It can be helpful to look at transition as a 3 part process.

- **Presence** – the child being enrolled at a school that provides a safe and appropriate learning environment. Focusing on this area would involve helping parents understand the range of schooling options and how they match the learning needs of their child. It could involve supporting them to visit school, attend information evenings, meet with school personnel and develop a transition plan.
- **Participation** – the child being included in the school setting and the school being prepared to meet their needs. Focusing on this area would involve helping to identify and develop a range of support strategies that can make the transition process smooth and successful for child with autism spectrum disorder.
- **Learning** – the child being engaged in meaningful learning experiences at school. Focusing on this area is about the provision of useful information about the child and their learning style and challenges to ensure that the school is well-prepared to provide an appropriate program for the child.

The Children

Joshua – Joshua has autism and a range of other medical conditions which have impacted on his early childhood education opportunities. He is about to transition into a special school at 6 years of age. He has not been able to attend a preschool. He has some limited language (single words) and some significant issues with sensory-seeking behavior. Prior to Joshua's most recent illness, he had a short and unsuccessful start at Learning Support Unit at a local school. His mother is now very anxious about his upcoming transition.

Daniel – Daniel has a diagnosis of high functioning autism. He has had a range of early childhood experiences, including a placement at an autism specific early intervention unit (2 mornings) and a mainstream preschool program on the grounds of the mainstream school he will attend. Daniel is a fluent reader and has a range of strong interest areas. He is very anxious about change. He has difficulty with peer interactions and can withdraw from social situations or try to take control.

Edward – Edward started at an Independent School in a pre-kindergarten program. He has a diagnosis of autistic disorder. His expressive and receptive language is delayed. He has difficulty with interactions with peers and his mother is very anxious about his transition. Edward's older sister attends the same school.

Sally – Sally is to start at an Autism Unit at her local school. Her family moved to Australia in the last 2 years and she is the oldest child in the family. Currently Sally is receiving an intensive positive behavior support service as there are a number of significant behavioral concerns.

The Case Studies

Joshua

Because of the complex nature of Joshua's medical needs there have been many people involved in his transition. A social worker and advocate have worked with his mother to help identify the most appropriate schooling option. Outreach Nurses provided information about Joshua's medical condition and his need to have a very gradual transition to school.

In this case an exemption has been needed as Joshua will go to school across State boundaries.

Joshua has received limited early intervention, so the key area of transition support will be to develop a profile of Joshua's strengths and needs for his receiving school. Joshua's mother needs support regarding the transition as Joshua has never attended an educational setting without her.

Presence: Social worker and Advocate have supported the family with the enrolment process. The principal from the receiving school has worked with Joshua's mother to complete the necessary paperwork.

Participation: Key area for input

Specialist staff input will focus on the:

- Development of Joshua's learning profile. This will be jointly developed with his mother and take the form of a booklet about Joshua. It will provide important information about his functional communication level, his cognitive, social and behavioral and self-care needs. It will also contain important information about his medical condition and management.
- Support of his mother to understand the transition process and how she can be confident in the school's ability to provide a safe learning environment.
- Planning for a gradual transition. The school has also ensured that additional teacher time is available initially during the limited time that Joshua will attend school. They are happy for Joshua to attend a very limited number of hours per week to see how he copes.

Learning: Teachers from the receiving Special School are confident in planning a learning program to meet his needs.

Daniel

Daniel's parents were welcomed by his local school and the enrolment process went smoothly. Recent testing by a school counselor provided information about Daniel's cognitive level but did not provide any information about ways to help manage his anxiety or help develop appropriate social play.

Presence: The enrolment process has been smooth, with Daniel's parents feeling very confident in dealing with the school. They have attended information meetings provided by the school and there is a plan for a number of pre-school visits.

Participation: Key Area for input

A profile of Daniel has been developed by his mother with input from specialist staff. This has helped provide important information about Daniel's strengths and needs. It provides detailed information about warning signs when Daniel is not coping and ways to support him to self-calm and other strategies to use when he is anxious or not coping in the classroom. It also provides information about how to use schedules and other supports to help Daniel understand what is expected during the school day. Strategies to support his interactions with his peers are also included.

The Autism Unit developed a social story for Daniel about his new school and he regularly visited with his preschool group and they sometimes attended important school events as they shared the same site.

Learning: Key Area for input

Daniel is transitioning into a mainstream class and although his teacher is experienced, she is keen for support to ensure that she is meeting all of Daniel's needs and is extending his learning. A plan has been developed so that specialist staff can provide in-class support during the first term that Daniel attends. The additional support will be a mix of 1:1 support within the classroom and time with the teacher to fine-tune classroom management and develop learning goals and strategies. The specialist has worked with Daniel on an ongoing basis at home and has developed a good relationship with him. She will also provide support in the playground if this is needed. She will be able to provide Daniel's mother with reassurance about how Daniel is coping with the transition and discuss ways of providing him with support at home to help manage his anxiety about school which is displayed at the end of the day or in the morning before school.

Edward

Presence: Edward's parents had always planned for Edward to attend this school, so the enrolment process had begun years earlier. They had been keen to finalize the process before providing information to the school about Edward's additional learning needs. Once the school became aware that Edward has autism, they have been keen to get as much support as possible for him.

Participation: Key Area for Input

It became clear that the school required significant amounts of reassurance about their ability to meet Edward's needs. Information about Edward was provided (learning profile developed and shared) and information about ASD in general and specific strategies to support Edward was shared with the teaching team. Edward attended transition to school visits and was supported by the specialist who had worked with him during home-based therapy. The school suggested that information was developed which could be shared with other parents about Edward and this was written by the specialist and Edward's mother. Visual supports were produced as models for the teacher and a range of management strategies were discussed.

Edward's parents have offered to fund additional support for Edward in the classroom and playground, but the school have wanted specialist input and will look to see what other funding is available once Edward begins kindergarten.

Learning: Key Area for Input

During the first two terms specialist input was provided to help the teacher implement appropriate strategies to support Edward's learning. His expressive language was delayed and he needed supports to help him understand instructions as well. Edward's teacher needed support to understand how his high levels of anxiety were impacting on his learning. The specialist worked in the classroom and also provided support to Edward during outside play sessions as these unstructured times were the most difficult time for Edward.

Sally

Sally's parents have little understanding of the Australian education setting and have limited English. It has been important to provide them with information and time to process it. They have talked with friends and extended family members and have decided to send Sally to an Autism Unit as suggested by the school counselor. During some home visits, a friend who could help translate supported the family.

Presence: Key Area For Input

Sally's parents were not aware of the schooling options available to Sally. Information was provided to them on a number of home visits before they met with education department staff. Sally's parents need to find an option that can provide additional support for Sally after school and these options are still be investigated.

Participation: Key Area for Input

Sally currently has a behavior support plan in place. An intensive intervention has helped identify triggers and strategies to prevent behaviors of concern. This process has taken some time to put in place and it is has involved collecting information from a variety of sources and collating a plan that can work across home and preschool settings. This information has been useful in transition planning.

The environment in the Autism Unit has been modified to ensure that Sally has a range of safe spaces to work in throughout the day.

It has been identified there is a need to support the staff at the after-school care program learn about strategies to support Sally and the physical environment they currently use will need some adaptations made as Sally will need a fenced outside area.

Learning: Key Area for Input

The teacher at the Autism Unit is keen to continue to use strategies that are currently in place to help Sally's behavior. There is some concern about new problem behaviors may develop in the school setting. Sally's learning support needs are clearly identified in the behavior plan but this will need to be updated for her new setting.

The plan is for continued intervention with Sally in her new setting for at least 6 months following her start to school.