

**INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS
WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR
FAMILIES**

Organisation: KU Children's Services

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NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into transition support for students with additional and/or complex needs and their families

Introduction

KU Children's services is the leading not for profit provider of children's services in Australia and the second largest provider overall. KU was the first provider of early childhood education and care in Australia and has operated continuously since 1895.

Our vision is: *Every family is able to access affordable, high quality early childhood education and care for their children.*

KU operates over 150 children's services nationally including preschools, long day care, out of school hours care, vacation care, occasional care, family programs and other early childhood education and care services.

We support families and children with additional and complex needs in accessing and participating in quality early childhood education and care which includes providing support for transitions

- into early childhood education for the first time
- from early childhood education to primary school

The adequacy and accessibility of appropriate support for children and their families.

Impacts that have been identified in this area include:

- There is concern regarding parent awareness and understanding of available support and ongoing processes for transition
- There appears to be conflicting information about availability of financial provision for schools to visit children in the early childhood service environment to support children in the transition process.
- There appears to be conflicting information for parents with regard to responsibility for the process of the transition
- New families enrolling children in formal schooling for the first time are overwhelmed and often become distressed when they don't know their local school.

- A process whereby familiar support people from the previous service are involved in the transition would assist in alleviating angst and concern.
- Parents are told they will need to wait until all the enrolments are complete and reviewed by a regional committee to allocate places throughout the region. When parents ask for a review of the placement, they may not receive notification until late December, therefore missing out on an opportunity for their child to participate in a transition to school program specifically for the school they will be attending.
- There are limited places in support classes and children are not being offered a place until they are very close to turning 6 years old. In turn, these children continue to attend a mainstream Early Childhood Service until they are 6, which is not always the most developmentally appropriate environment.

Best practise approaches to ensure seamless and streamlined assistance during transitions

- **Early notification of places for children entering formal schooling.**
Parents would value a shorter waiting period to find out about their child's acceptance/placement at school. Early notification allows the child and family to maximise their participation in the transition to school process.

Parents are more relaxed and children are considerably more settled in their transition to school when they have had the opportunity to get to know the processes and expectation of the school through an informative and extensive transition process.

Early notification allows time for the family and members of the school community to develop a relationship, further building on the support networks for the family.

- **Collaborative Approach to Transition**
Transition to school for the child and family is planned carefully and collaboratively between families, support services and schools.

A collaborative approach to planning for transitions provides an opportunity for a clear understanding of shared information. This in turn allows families to feel empowered to make informed decisions in conjunction with the school staff.

- **Transition / Orientation Programs**
There is great variability in what individual schools offer in a transition program, however the offer of a general transition to school program usually consisting of between 4 and 6 visits is appreciated by most families.

An individualised transition program, over and above the 4 to 6 visits is often needed for children with complex needs. An individualised transition plan is developed prior to children beginning the transition to school process.

Families can be assisted through the management of the transition process with the support of a dedicated person. Children and families experience high levels of emotion during the transition from one service to another. A dedicated person helps families work through their emotions at each step of the transition process.

- **Greater flexibility in the use of funding**

Teachers are better able to include children with additional and/or complex needs when they have received training in the use of support resources and materials. Financial support for these programs would be beneficial over and above the support funding available.

- **Flexibility with assessments required by schools**

Schools require a current Griffiths or other specific assessment, which cannot be more than 12 months old, before assessing a placement application, which is then linked to a Disability Reference Number. In certain cases children are already undergoing a number of assessments prior to entering school and the aim would be to streamline these assessments:

Any other related matters

- **Information Sessions**

Information Sessions offered at a local level would provide important information to families, early childhood education staff and support services. A collaborative approach is then begun from the beginning of the process.

- **Smaller class sizes**

For children with additional and complex needs smaller class sizes are the preferred environment. This approach is supported through research based evidence.

KU welcomes and values the opportunity provided to respond to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry

Christine Legg
Chief Executive Officer