

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

**Organisation:** Northcott Disability Services

**Date received:** 12/08/2011

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The Director  
Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000

12<sup>th</sup> August 2011

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

Thank you for providing Northcott Disability Services with the opportunity to provide a submission for the inquiry into transition support for students with additional and/or complex needs and their families.

### **About Northcott**

Northcott Disability Services was established as The NSW Society for Crippled Children in 1929 by the Rotary Club of Sydney. Northcott's purpose is to build an inclusive society. This is achieved by assisting people with disabilities to develop their skills and achieve their goals - including their potential for independence and ability to participate in their community. Northcott supports over 10,000 people with disabilities and their families across NSW and the ACT. Northcott employs over 500 staff state-wide, providing more than 100 services from more than 20 sites and offices across NSW and the ACT. Northcott provides services to people with a broad range of disabilities including physical, intellectual, sensory, acquired and degenerative disabilities.

Many of Northcott's programs provide services to children and young people with additional and/or complex needs, and their families, specifically during transitions into and through different stages of education. Northcott also works closely with the Department of Education & Training (DET), as well as early childhood education providers, Independent and Catholic primary and secondary schooling systems, and post-school employment, education and day program providers.

Some of Northcott's specialist services providing services to support students' transition through the different stages of education include: Paediatric Spinal Outreach Service, Early Childhood Support Services, Metropolitan and Regional Family Support Services, Therapy Teams and Projects throughout the state (including transition specific services such as Bankstown, Fairfield, Liverpool Therapy Transition Program and South West Sydney Therapy Transition Program), Case Management, Computer Assistive Technology Service, Northcott Early Childhood Autism Service. Northcott is also a provider of post-school education, employment and day program services to young people with additional or complex needs, including Transition to Work and Community Participation programs, and Disability Employment Services (Jobmatch)

### **Introduction**

Transitioning into education, or between different educational stages, can be a challenging time for any student. For children and young people with additional or complex needs, this period of change can produce even higher levels of stress, anxiety and confusion. Well supported transitions for these

students require careful planning, adequate resourcing, and timely provision of supports. There are many teachers and staff within the education sector who work hard alongside families and other service providers, such as Northcott, to ensure a child’s transition into/between education is seamless, streamlined and successful. However, there are often broad systemic issues which impede the transition process and make it harder for staff to support positive and successful transitions for students with additional and complex needs. In particular, there are systemic issues regarding coordination between and within education providers; variations in the types and availability of transition supports provided at different stages of education, for different types of education providers and in different geographical areas; short-term approaches to transition and inadequate resourcing to enable provision of timely transition planning and supports; inconsistent communication and information about transition supports; and limited availability of and inconsistent approaches to accessing funding for transition supports. These issues are further explored below in Northcott’s submission.

In making this submission, Northcott draws on its experience as a provider of services to children and young people with disabilities, and their families. Our understanding of supporting students ‘with additional and complex needs’ relates directly to these experiences; as such, throughout our submission we refer to children/students with a disability, based on the assumption that this group signifies children and young people with additional and/or complex needs.

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## TERMS OF REFERENCE

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

#### *a. General Issues*

##### i. Issues with/between support services

For a student with a disability, there are some general issues regarding the adequacy and accessibility of services available to support their transition into and/or between stages of education. In the context in which Northcott operates, much of the transition support services for children with additional needs are provided by allied health therapy professionals (occupational therapists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, social workers). On the whole, Northcott's experience is that accessibility and adequacy of therapy services (and resources available to support therapists) during transition is not always sufficient to meet needs of a child. Northcott believes this is predominantly due to the fact that there are insufficient therapy services to meet the demand. Lengthy waitlists for therapy services, and specific eligibility and service delivery criteria for these services means that children with a disability do not always have access to the transition supports they require. The other main issue here is the time-frame for transition. Northcott's experience is that due to lengthy waitlists for services, some children are not able to access transition support within the time-frame before they start school (or move into a different stage of education). Even if families can access these supports prior to transition, the service is often not able to start early enough to ensure the child's transition is appropriately planned and the child's transition needs are fully supported. The other issue with the time-frame for transitions is that services need to provide longer service duration to ensure that the transition is successful, including 6 months post transition period. Currently transition supports are only able to maintain involvement with a child prior to and during the transition period, only providing short-term supports for children and their families.

Ineffective communication and information sharing also impacts on the adequacy and appropriateness of support for children and their families transitioning into/between education. Northcott experience is that communication between education providers (for example, the Department of Education (DET) and Catholic Education Office) is often limited, making

transitions between public and catholic schools difficult and complicated. Communication between education providers and transition support services (such as therapy staff) is also not always adequate; some schools may be unwilling to fully engage with therapists supporting a child's transition and/or unable to implement the therapist's recommended transition support plan within the school setting. Communication within the education setting and knowledge of supports available to families is also a barrier to children being able to access the transition support services they require. Working across many different educational settings, Northcott's experience is that school staff may not be aware of the services available in the community to support students with additional needs and their families such as respite, recreation, family support services, or aware of how to refer families to these existing services.

#### ii. Issues for families

For any child, making a transition into school or between education stages can be a difficult and uncertain time. With additional barriers and stressors for families with a child with a disability, making these same transitions can then become a time of particularly high stress and anxiety. Changes in routines, activities, and the logistical arrangements for getting their child to and from school, as well as ensuring their child's needs are met while at school, can be significant concerns and stressors for families; it is therefore a time that more integrated support is required. Northcott's experience is that families are often unaware of the support that is available to help their child transition into/between schools. As they are often not informed about the types of support available, Families can be unaware of the need to start the process early, and the need for a lengthy process of transition to ensure all their child's needs can be met; for example, if building modifications are required to meet the needs of a student with a physical disability, this process should be started at least 2 years prior to that child starting school.

### ***b. Transition into early childhood education***

#### i. Finding a Centre

The challenge in finding an appropriate child care or preschool centre is a concern for all families accessing early childhood education. The anxiety around finding a centre is increased for families whose child has a disability, as there are additional support needs for their child which they must consider. Families experience difficulties finding an appropriate centre who will accept a child with additional needs as it can involve a substantial cost to the centre for modifications, staffing levels etc. Northcott has experienced significant difficulties with assisting families to navigate through the initial 'finding an appropriate centre' phase, which can be very time consuming and frustrating for parents and staff; there are very few services or supports available to assist families with this difficult process and support the child's transition into the centre.

#### ii. Waitlists

In all areas around the state, child care and preschool places are in short supply and long waitlists exist. For children with a disability, long waiting lists can add a different level of complexity and ambiguity to transitioning into these services; if the time-frame for placement availability is not clearly known, planning for transition and preparing both the child and the centre for the transition is much more difficult. Long waiting lists and large caseloads can also mean that staff are not necessarily able to provide adequate support for families particularly in the early stages of transition when it is most needed.

#### iii. Access to appropriate staffing and resources

Child care and preschool providers vary in their capacity and willingness to accommodate children with disabilities. On the whole, there is limited availability of staff that have the level of expertise in this area to assist families, support a child's transition and ensure ongoing needs are met. Northcott's experience is that in some areas, child care centres and preschools have trouble recruiting support workers to work with the children with additional needs. In situations when centres are able to recruit appropriate support staff, at times this staffing may not cover the whole duration of the child's attendance and/or be specific to that child.

There are some avenues of funding available to support children with a disability accessing early childhood education services; however, there isn't a clearly defined and streamlined process for centres to apply for available funding support to provide them with the staffing and/or resources required to support the transition of a child into their centre. More readily accessible information for centres and families about funding and resources for transition and inclusion support would be beneficial.

iv. Differences between Centre types

Northcott's experience is that there can be vast differences with the process for accessing funding and equipment support for a child pending the type of centre and how it is funded (e.g. private, council run, DET centre etc.). Specifically, Northcott therapy staff working on a child's transition experience difficulties providing advice and assisting centres with processing funding and equipment support applications as these change pending on who the centre is funded by.

**c. Transition into primary school**

For children with a disability, the transition into primary school shares many of the same issues as outlined in the next section in relation to the transition from primary into secondary school. Thus the issues further explored below, while addressed in relation to the transition into primary school, may also apply to the transition from primary into secondary school.

i. Information for families

In Northcott's experience, the transition from preschool to primary school is often a daunting one for parents with a child with a disability as they are unsure of what services are available. They are often unsure of whether their child is ready to attend school in the coming year, whether more time in early intervention will yield greater improvements, or whether sending the child to school early will facilitate more gains in development. If a child is accessing more than one service (e.g. funded and/or private therapy services and pre-school), the parents may seek opinions from all different service providers involved, the professional advice from which may be conflicting, resulting in more confusion for families.

There is currently no coordinated approach to information provision for families about transition support options for their child. The transition to a DET primary school is relatively well set out and documented; however, it can be difficult for Northcott's professionally trained staff, let alone a parent, to navigate through. Information that may be available is not necessarily accessible for families and communicated in a way that is easily understood. In addition, the level of information and communication differs greatly across the different areas depending on the type of school and the DET (or other) staff involved.

Northcott is aware of DET and Catholic Education Office (CEO) jointly provided information sessions for parents in certain areas / for certain schools, which appear to have been very helpful for families who have the capacity to process the information. However, this is not widespread or available across all primary schools in NSW. Without adequate information made available and accessible for *all* parents with a child with a disability (regardless of the type of school they are accessing), families are often not informed about the types of support available, and can be unaware of the need to start the process early. This can result in a poorly timed/anticipated transition, which can lead to transition activities happening after the beginning of the school experience.

ii. Funding

Northcott's experience is that there are varying levels of knowledge regarding available funding and resources for students with disabilities transitioning into primary school: the teachers, schools and regions have varying levels of understanding on what is available, and how to access it. Often teachers and support staff are unaware of a particular funding avenue or support because the information has not gotten through to them. At other times school staff

have been informed by their region that there is no funding, or that funds are limited and are therefore not available to the student (which may or may not be the case).

The system also designed in such a way that the different education providers (e.g. DET and CEO) then bid and compete for funding support for children with disabilities. Often the resulting transition supports are inadequate or highly variable from school to school and region to region. In addition, our experience with Independent schools' access to funding to support the transition of a child with a disability is similarly variable and unclear. Northcott's experience is that although a school may be welcoming and supportive of students with a disability enrolling, they often cite the "unjustifiable hardship" provision under the *Disability Standards for Education (DEEWR, 2005)*, in terms of the financial costs of making the adjustments required for a particular student. The rationale and justification for making some adjustments and not others, and the varying responses between schools, is not always clear or transparent under the "unjustifiable hardship" provision. Northcott supports the development of clearer guidelines around defining and determining an "unjustifiable hardship" for a school, particularly as to at what level the financial cost of making a reasonable adjustment becomes an "unjustifiable hardship".

In addition to issues with the funding system, the funding criteria to access support for transition into school are often specific and narrow; in particular, they don't adequately consider issues around communication problems, dyspraxia and sensory disorders. For example children Northcott supports with physical disabilities often also have sensory and other issues; our experience is that often only the physical issues tick the boxes for funding support. Inadequate funding available to support the full range of transition support needs for a child leads to ongoing problems for children throughout their lives.

#### iii. Access to therapy services

Transition support programs for children with a disability are on the most part provided through therapy services, which are extremely limited, fragmented and poorly coordinated. These therapy services are provided by government (NSW Ageing Disability & Home Care (ADHC) and NSW Health), non-government organisations including Northcott; and through private therapists, who work on a fee for service basis. Waiting lists are lengthy, to the point where children who are referred for a service when they are under six years of age frequently wait for up to two to three years to receive a therapy service. If referred when four years old, by the time they receive a service, often they have already started primary school. Many of the issues where help was needed will not have been addressed, meaning that the child's ability to access their school curriculum and environment will have been significantly impacted and their successful transition into school is compromised. Inadequate availability of therapy services is a major barrier to adequate and accessible support for children with a disability to transition into primary school settings.

#### iv. Planning and consultation process

The necessary planning and consultation process to plan for a child with a disability entering primary school, irrespective of the type of school, is haphazard. When this consultation occurs it appears to depend on the commitment of the therapists, the family and on the culture of the school and not necessarily upon DET policy that this occurs, and occurs in a timely fashion. In Northcott's experience, if the planning meetings do occur the purpose of the meeting is usually to gather information about the student and to determine the level of integration support (aide time) that a student will be provided. Outside reports from professionals involved with the child and family may be tabled, if they exist. The process to determine the level of integration support is not transparent; usually the forms to be filled in are closely guarded by DET staff so the student, their family and the support personnel attending the meeting have no access to the criteria that is currently used to determine support levels. The criteria currently used are based on a student's disability and not on their capacity to function and perform in the school environment.

As the planning and consultation process for transition into primary school is poorly coordinated, it is often left to families or service providers (such as Northcott) to drive the transition process and ensure that funding is secured and supports are accessed and implemented. Although relying on the ability of families to drive the transition planning process, the system doesn't have the capacity to provide adequate support or information for families with additional cultural, linguistic or social barriers to their communication and are thus not able to comprehensively express their child's needs. Moreover, communication between schools and families, and schools and other support services, is not adequate, and information is unclear, making coordination of transition supports even more challenging. For example, Northcott therapy staff have experienced difficulties in just trying to find out who to contact regarding specifications and approvals for building modifications for a child, let alone getting the process underway.

v. Transition to school groups

Service providers, like Northcott, provide school-starters groups for children to attend prior to starting school which focus on classroom behaviours, how to make friends, classroom vocabulary and pre-literacy skills. Through focussing on supporting the child to develop core school-readiness skills and behaviours, Northcott believes that transition to school groups are a very sound way to positively support a child's transition into primary school. However, for some specific therapy services, such as Northcott's Western Sydney Therapy Team, ADHC currently holds the waitlist for these therapy services, making it difficult to identify children who will be starting school in the following year from the list and put them into such a group. To help overcome this access issue, Northcott supports a system of identifying children on the therapy waitlist who are due to start school the following year and a referral path for entry into transition to school groups.

Transition to school groups are not universally available to all children with a disability who may benefit from this type of transition support, and Northcott believes more funding for such programs is needed. In addition, for some children who are not accessing formal early childhood education, or for those who do not meet criteria to access therapy services (and thereby transition to school groups), there are even less opportunities for them to develop the core skills to enable them to be ready to start school. For example, Northcott provides a supported playgroup for Aboriginal families in South Western Sydney; for some children, participation in this playgroup is the only opportunity they have for developing core school-readiness skills and starting the transition into primary school. As such, Northcott believes in the importance of supported playgroups for learning basic school readiness and supports further expansion of the services to provide universal access for all families.

**d. Transition from primary into secondary school**

For children with a disability, the transition from primary into secondary school shares many of the same issues as outlined above in relation to the transition into primary school (particularly, the same information, funding, communication, planning and access to therapy services issues apply). Similarly, many of the issues further discussed below are also present during the transition into primary school (particularly, the same challenges with choosing a school and the issues related to timeliness and suitability of supports and modifications). Thus the issues further explored below, while addressed in relation to the transition from primary into secondary school, may also apply to the initial transition into primary school.

i. Choosing a school

All families face challenges in choosing the secondary school which will be right for their child and their individual family circumstances. This process is even more challenging when considering a child with a disability. For families, choosing a secondary school is also then dependent upon that school's willingness (and capability) to provide the support required to meet that child's needs. As highlighted in above section *c. ii. Funding*, the funding available to a school to provide supports or make adjustments (and/or the level of "financial hardship"



making such supports/adjustments may bring), further complicate the situation when trying to decide whether a school will be able to support a child with a disability.

When considering all the additional support needs of their child, some families may not be able to access their nearest secondary school. Northcott's experience is that families then need support in locating and exploring other possible secondary school options, including support to visit schools and to discuss the support available and access issues at each school. While at times this support may be provided by Itinerant Support Teachers-Integration (DET staff), most often it is provided by services such as Northcott's Metropolitan Family Support Service. Support for families to help them choose the most appropriate secondary school is a crucial aspect of transition support for children with a disability and should be more widely available to families.

ii. Modifications

Even though a secondary school may have disability access, the school may not be able to meet the specific needs of a range of students with physical disabilities. Modifications to school environments rely on other external service providers like Northcott to provide the expertise and recommendations to meet the individual child's needs (i.e. occupational therapy assessments and reports). Schools also often need the recommendations of occupational therapists to plan for a student with a physical disability to be fully included in practical subjects, such as science, woodwork, food technology etc. As there are inadequate therapy services, students can sit on wait-list waiting for a therapy service to make recommendations about their transition to a new school environment. Due to these long waiting lists for therapy support, these assessments and reports need to be planned well in advance, and may be overlooked if school staff or parents have not anticipated the need for this type of therapy support. All this serves to further delay the preparation time available for school to make any required modifications to their school environment and classroom activities, and impedes a child's seamless transition into the secondary school setting.

iii. Timeliness and suitability of supports

Northcott supports universal design principles in all schools rather than individual modifications according to students' needs. However, the students we see often require modifications to the school environment to allow them to access the classrooms and different areas of the school. There may be a commitment from the education provider to do these modifications, but there are many instances of the modifications not being finished as the child enters the school. When schools need building modifications it is essential for the process to be started in a timely manner. 18 months prior to the child starting school gives time for assessment of the building, a report to be completed and then the school to carry out work. If building work and suitable equipment such as hoists and slings are not completed / purchased before school starts, the child cannot begin at the same time as his or her peers - which unfortunately happens at times. Another example which highlights the importance of timeliness of supports is a Northcott client with a physical disability who required assistance with toileting and moving within the classroom and the school; this student was allocated an aide for nine hours per week, however this only started in second term. Examples such as this have been concerning for families during the transition period.

Associated with the timeliness of supports is the issue of timely review of supports that may have been assessed and provided during the transition period. Limited support is often provided to students once they have started secondary school; however, their support needs and their access to the curriculum needs to be reviewed regularly. In particular, the support needs of students who have degenerative conditions need regular review as the support established on entering the school will not be appropriate throughout all their secondary school years.

In order to support successful and streamlined transition from primary into secondary education, the modifications, equipment and supports for a student with a disability need to be

provided in a timely manner and in a form that is suitable to meet the needs of an individual student.

iv. Transitions between schooling systems (public/independent/catholic)

Students transitioning from a DET Primary School Support Unit to a DET Secondary School Support Unit usually receive well-coordinated transition support which includes the support from the School Therapy teams linked to the Support Unit. However, students who are transitioning to other mainstream secondary school settings do not have the same level of coordinated support and may be entering a school that has limited experience of meeting their additional support needs. For example, if the school has not had previous students with disabilities, the school staff are often unaware of DET support services or the procedures for accessing these services (e.g. school transport, technology assessment, requirement for students to be included in all areas of the curriculum, including school sport, excursions, school camps). In order to support the successful transition between different schooling systems, more consistent information must be provided to all secondary schools about the options available to support students with a disability.

**e. *Transitions from secondary school to employment, further education or other post-school options***

Northcott is a provider of ADHC funding post school programs (Community Participation (CPP) and Transition to Work (TTW)) and is a Disability Employment Service provider under the Federal government's employment system. Based on these experiences, and on our experience providing therapy and family support services to individual and families making the transition out of school, we highlight the following issues.

i. Awareness of options

Secondary schools often have little or limited understanding of the range of post school options for students with disabilities and the process of applying for funding. This includes ADHC post school funding programs, Educational Access Scheme, and federally funded disability employment services. School staff with limited experience of advising about post school options may give inappropriate advice and refer students to inappropriate options. This is often a greater issue for Independent and Catholic schools who may have had very limited experience of negotiating the transition from secondary school for students with disabilities.

In addition to schools, students and families often have limited awareness of the options available to them. Students and their families may be given post school options information by the school and advised to attend Post School Expos. However, our experience is that many families find this very confusing and need support to work out the most appropriate options for their child prior to attending Expos.

ii. Access to post-school options

The current ADHC funded post school options programs for students with a disability have eligibility criteria and access requirements which at times impede access to these services for those students who require this type of support.

The majority of mainstream youth services have eligibility criteria for young people up to age 25. However, for young people who want to access ADHC funded post school programs, they only have a 2 year period post school to apply for this funding. Similarly extending the age limit for accessing these post-school programs to age 25 would enable some young people who leave school and have additional barriers to employment (such as disability or mental health issues) additional time to mature before engaging in a program like TTW. Educators and Disability Employment Services have advised that some young people with disabilities have delayed engaging in employment or a post school program such as TTW. By the time they have either decided to accept the TTW funding previously offered or been deemed not ready for work by a Disability Employment Service provider, they are ineligible for ADHC's post

school options funding due to their age. The extension of the timeframe for eligibility would enable more young people to transition to employment rather than remain on welfare.

Another example of issues with access to post-school options is the requirement that individuals are only eligible to access ADHC's TTW or CPP if they attend school until Year 12. While this works to serve as an incentive for people to remain in school, there is a need for flexibility with granting funding for students who are unable to complete year 12. There should be greater flexibility in the eligibility for day program funding, to enable all young people access to services which will assist them to develop their strengths and skill set for employment or appropriate further education. In addition, the funding for TTW and CPP commences at the beginning of each calendar year. Most school leavers in mainstream school settings leave school at the end of Term 3; unable to access TTW or CPP services until January of the following year, these young people have no regular daytime activities and support from October through to the beginning of the following year. A more positive outcome would be for them to be able commence in a service immediately on leaving school.

iii. Young people with mental health needs

Many young people with mental health needs become disengaged with school. Continuing in the full time school system can often see them leaving school completely or there is a noticeable decline in their mental health. Educators are seeking alternatives for young people to continue on a part time basis in the education system and yet able to access appropriate support services. Many of these young people are either unable to access TAFE or work experience placements or require additional staff support which can't be provided by the education system. Part time access to post school options programs (such as TTW or CPP) would utilise current services to provide the necessary support for these young people whilst remaining in the education system on a part time basis. Earlier access to the current funding (payment based on the part time attendance proportion) for these services would provide additional support for these young people.

## **2. Best practice approaches to ensure seamless and streamlined assistance during transitions:**

Based on the issues already highlighted throughout this submission regarding the adequacy and accessibility of appropriate support for children with disability transitioning through different stages of education, Northcott believes the following are best practice approaches to ensure seamless and streamlined assistance during transitions.

### ***a. Support for Families***

i. Flexible approach

Families require a flexible and family centred approach to their child's transition, which can support the very specific needs of each individual child; there needs to be flexibility in the initial transition which accommodates both the child's and the parents' needs and anxieties.

ii. Information and Education

Families need access to appropriate information about the possible support options to assist them with transitions at different stages of education; this should include consistent information about funding options and provide clear pathways to accessing services and funding. Families also need education and support in understanding their child's abilities and disability, and what their needs may be at future transition points. There needs to be a collaborative approach, sharing information with/between families, education providers and all involved professionals / services, so the everyone has access to the same information and can thus work together to adequately support the child's transition.

iii. Case-management

Availability of case management services is an essential support for families during transitions. Case management can help families look at a range of issues, guiding them into

other services and supports, to ensure their wellbeing during a period of time which is often characterised by high levels of stress, anxiety and confusion.

## **b. Role of DET and Schools**

### **i. Information Provision**

Northcott's experience is that each school has its own approach to transition and how to access and funding the resources required to support a child's transition. There is an inconsistent approach to transition support and staff within DET and schools are often unsure of funding processes and how to access transition support for a child. There needs to be consistent and clear information provided to all DET, Catholic and Independent schools regarding accessing and applying for transition supports. This information then needs to be consistently provided to families and other service providers, like Northcott, who work to support a child's transition into education.

### **ii. Planning and consultation process**

Planning for a child's transition should include consultation with external parties (such as allied health therapists) where their expertise directly relates to the assessment of and/or recommendations for supporting a student with a disability in a new educational setting. For example, modifications to an education provider's physical facilities/space relies on other external agencies to provide the expertise and recommendations to meet the student's needs (i.e. occupational therapy assessments and reports). Policy and procedures for all schools should reflect and make reference to inclusion of external parties in the consultation regarding a child's transition. In addition, The *Disability Standards for Education (DEEWR, 2005)* should include external parties in the consultation provision, to ensure that any modification and adjustment for the student is also made in line with the recommendations of a suitably qualified professional.

### **iii. Itinerant Support Teachers**

The role of the Itinerant Support Teacher-Integration, and Itinerant Support Teacher-Transition, are crucial to the successful transition to secondary schools, for successful support during secondary school years and for transition to appropriate post school options. These teachers have disability specific knowledge, an understanding of the services and supports available, and the knowledge about how to access these supports. These teachers are also aware of many of the mainstream and disability specific supports available in the community and can make appropriate referrals as needed. Increased numbers of Itinerant Support Teachers across the state would enable better education transitions for all students.

### **iv. Orientation programs**

Single visit orientation programs for Year 6 students are often not extensive enough to meet the complex needs of students with disabilities. A more tailored and flexible orientation program which includes a series of orientation visits to the school would support a more seamless transition into secondary education for some students.

### **v. Implementation of strategies**

Strategies recommended by therapists to support a child's transition into a new educational setting require immediate implementation to have the maximum benefit. Ensuring the required modifications, resources and equipment are also available at the time of transition into the new setting, also ensures a better outcome, and more successful transition, for the child.

### **vi. Ongoing and re-assessment of needs**

While transition support works to ensure the child's need will be met moving from one education setting to another, ongoing and re-assessment of these needs are crucial. Ongoing monitoring of a student's capacity to function in the education provider's environment and participate in the educational activities, and any changes or additional support required, will work to ensure these students are able to continue to be active participants in their education.

### **c. Therapy Services**

#### **i. Transition teams**

Northcott believes that educational transitions could be better supported with the use of specific Transition Teams – these teams should consist of therapists (Speech, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy) and Social Workers, working with children with a disability that may be making a transition in the next 12 months. The focus of these teams would be to provide a timely support service resulting in higher preparedness for the child, family and school, for the transition into/between education. Northcott supports these that these Transition Teams should hold multidisciplinary team meetings, consisting of all people involved with the child, to meet with a DET case worker or Itinerant Support Teacher 6-12 months prior to the child considering starting school, to openly discuss school readiness and start transition planning. If these Transition Teams and therapist staff are located within schools (i.e. at the site of transition), they would be better placed to assist the children and families in terms of transition planning, as well as the monitoring of the child's progress with the transition into the start the school year and their initial 6-12months in the new educational setting.

#### **ii. Transition to school programs and resources**

Northcott has found that transition to school groups (including school starter groups and supported playgroups which focus on school readiness) are useful to support seamless and streamlined transitions into education for children with a disability. Further expansion and increased funding available for these groups would enable more families access to this support and see more children with a disability having more successful transitions into school.

Aside from transition to school groups and specific transition programs, practical resources for parents about the transition to school (what to expect and what to do) is also a valuable way to support positive and seamless transitions. An example of a useful transition to school parent resource is Northcott's "GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL: A parent's guide to transition" (included as 'Appendix A' to this submission). Developed by therapists who support children with transitions to school, such resources are practical, easy and accessible ways to inform and educate parents about the transition process. Further development of these types of resources, including DET producing clear, consistent, specific information about the processes to access transitions supports and funding, would better support transitions for a wider group of families with a child with a disability or additional needs.

#### **iii. Length and timeliness of transition supports**

As highlighted earlier in this submission, a crucial factor to successful transition is the provision of *timely* transition supports, including having enough time prior to school to ensure appropriate supports can be planned and implemented in time for when the child starts school. Best practice would be for therapists to be able to start intervention 12-18 months before the child is due to start school, to ensure that the children can start to focus on school-readiness skills and support the family and the school with the transition. The existence of a Social Worker position in all therapy transition teams would further support both therapists and families with what is often characterised as a highly emotive, stressful and confusing time. Another reason why a 12-18 month pre-transition therapy service would be ideal is so that Occupational Therapists can start funding applications for equipment that may be necessary for starting school, such as a hoist, standing frame etc. (as currently these applications through Enable NSW can take months to be processed and approved).

Transition supports are currently usually only provided on a short-term basis, focusing on planning for the transition into school, and limited support is provided to students once they have actually started school. Best practice for children with a disability would be to allow greater time-frames for service involvement by therapy staff post-transition. In particular, allowing 6 months post transition for support will mean that the success of the transition supports provided can be reviewed and amended as required. In addition, a student's access

to their school environment and the curriculum needs to be reviewed regularly, particularly for students with degenerative conditions, as the support established on entering the school will not be appropriate throughout the continuing school years. Yearly review of educational supports would be ideal to ensure a student's needs remain supported in the school environment.

#### ***d. Specialist 'life stage' transition services***

Students with a disability can experience variations in the services available to them, waitlist times and the quality of services provided as they move through different life-stages. Many carers and families of a person with a disability find the transition from childhood into young adulthood, and the change in the system and level and type of services available, as an anxious time and the process difficult to navigate. When people should be exiting services due to age limits, they often have nowhere to go to receive the support they need – for example, some families still access children's respite services because the adult support available insufficient to meet the family's needs. Increased flexibility around exiting services, better transition planning and increased capacity in the system would assist with this. Specialist services that support the transitions between 'life change' points (and systems) would also improve outcomes for people with a disability and help facilitate communication between services and systems. These 'life-stage' transition services would work to help families navigate the change in the education system when their child reaches adulthood.

Northcott's Spina Bifida Adult Resource Team (although not an education but a health rather focussed service) is an example of such a specialist service that supports transition from children's services to adult services: Funded by NSW Health, this outreach service provides clinical consultation, education, support and preventative health strategies to adults with spina bifida, to support their transition from specialist spina bifida paediatric services to mainstream adult health services. This service not only provides people with spina bifida the information and support they need to understand and navigate through a new health and support system, but it also helps facilitate communication across paediatric and adult services, and mainstream health and disability service systems. Similar specialist services that provide targeted support at key points of transition (paediatric to adult and adult to aged care systems) would be beneficial for people with all disability types and would support more seamless and streamlined transitions in the education setting as well.

### **3. Any other related matters:**

#### ***a. Education and training for staff***

In order to ensure successful transitions into and between educational settings, Northcott believes that all staff members within the transition setting need to be suitably educated and well supported with how to implement programs into the new setting. That is, not only do the specific school staff involved in the transition for a child need to have adequate education and training, but all staff in the school setting should have broad training in relation to best practice in supporting students with a disability. Additionally, all staff need education regarding the process and options for transition support, so that all the workforce in the education system have access to consistent information, and work to support and implement the relevant policies, procedures and processes which uphold a best practice approach to transition support for children with a disability.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the issues outlined in this submission, and the best practice approaches proposed to support seamless and streamlined educational transitions, Northcott makes the following recommendations in relation to transition support for children with a disability:

### a. Funding:

- i. Increased funding available for transition supports (especially therapy services and transition to school programs and resources).
- ii. Broader assessment criteria to include active consideration of a student's communication and curriculum adaptation needs, as well as their physical access requirements.
- iii. Consistent process for accessing funding for transitions supports regardless of the type of education provider (public, private, Catholic, Independent etc.).

### b. Therapy services:

- i. Increased therapy services (including funding for more transition to school groups and supported playgroups).
- ii. Development and funding of specific Transition Teams – multidisciplinary (therapy and social work) teams to work with families around educational transitions and which are located at the site of transitions.
- iii. Transition support services be provided earlier and for longer periods, including:
  - i. 12-18 months prior to commencing school
  - ii. Continuation of transition support services for at least 6 months post-transition
- iv. Mechanisms for children on therapy waitlists to be identified 12 months prior to starting school and priority of access to therapy services for transition support be provided to these children.

### c. Changes to the *Disability Standards for Education* (DEEWR, 2005), to include the following:

- i. The development of clearer guidelines around defining and determining an “unjustifiable hardship” for an education provider, particularly as to at what level the financial cost of making a reasonable adjustment for a student with a disability becomes an “unjustifiable hardship”.
- ii. The “consultation provision” should reflect and make reference to inclusion of external parties in the required consultation process (such as allied health therapists) where their expertise directly relates to the assessment of and/or recommendations for reasonable adjustments for a student with a disability.

### d. Increase flexibility in ADHC funded post-school programs, including:

- i. Extend eligibility to apply to access post-school programs until age 25
- ii. Earlier availability of access funding to enable program to start as soon as student finishes school (not waiting until next calendar year)
- iii. Ability to access these programs on a part-time basis while remaining in the education system

### e. Information and communication for education providers:

- i. Better communication mechanisms between education systems and within education providers.
- ii. Consistent information provided to all education providers regarding:

- i. Types of transition support available
- ii. Process for accessing funding

**f. Information and support for families:**

- i. Consistent information about transition support options, and the process for obtaining funding, provided to all parents for each different education stage transition – the same information provided in DET, Catholic and Independent school settings.
- ii. Development and funding of services which specifically provide support for families in choosing an education provider (child care, pre-school, school or post-school).

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**Appendix A - GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL:** A parent's guide to transition is included as part of Northcott's submission.

This submission has been prepared by Liz Forsyth (Sector & Business Development Manager) and has been endorsed by Northcott's CEO Kerry Stubbs.

Should you require any clarification or further information on this submission please contact Liz Forsyth on (02) 9890 0153 or [liz.forsyth@northcott.com.au](mailto:liz.forsyth@northcott.com.au). Northcott would also welcome the opportunity to appear at a hearing to present before the Standing Committee on Social Issues.





## GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL: A Parent's Guide to Transition



northcott  
disability services

Northcott Disability Services provides support to over 6000 people with disabilities and their families across NSW and the ACT by offering a range of quality services which promote a genuinely inclusive society.

## Northcott Contact Details:

Northcott - Central Office  
1 Fennell Street, North Parramatta 2151  
P.O. BOX 4055  
Parramatta 2124  
Ph. 9890 0100 or 1800 818 286

### *Acknowledgements*

*Past and present Early Childhood Support Service team members*  
*The Spastic Centre publications*  
*Department of Education & Training publications*

## Stages of Transition to School

Starting school is a big change for you and your child. Choosing a school for your child and making preparations for their future can be stressful. However, extra planning and support will ensure that your child has a positive and successful transition to school.

Children are required to start school by their 6th birthday. As parents you will need to begin the process of selecting a school around two years before your child needs to attend school. This booklet is divided into three main sections and shows when the different steps should happen along the way.

### CHOOSING A SCHOOL (18-24 months before your child starts school)

Your child's team  
What are the options?  
Where to find information on schools  
Choosing a school  
Choosing a school checklist

### PREPARING FOR SCHOOL (18 months before your child starts school)

Assessment of the school environment  
Finalising enrolment procedures (12 months before your child starts school)  
Preparing your child for school  
Sharing information, reports and transition meetings  
Orientation and transition

### STARTING SCHOOL

Tips for starting school  
Publications about starting school and / or inclusion  
Publications for children about starting school and / or having a disability  
If you are dissatisfied - making a complaint

## Choosing a school

(18 -24 months before your child starts school)

You are probably wondering why you need to decide on a school while your child is still so young. It will take time for you to make this important decision, as well as time for the school and support services to make the preparations that will ensure that the school environment and resources are available for your child to succeed at school. This section is all about choosing a school and includes information about who can help you make decisions, type of schools and a school checklist.

### YOUR CHILD'S TEAM

The lead-up to the first year of school can be an exciting and emotional experience for the whole family. It is important to have a team of people who will support you in this process and share information with you and the other people involved.

It can help to know who is to assist you during this time. Establish a support team of people you think can best help you to make decisions about your child's education. Within education circles, this is called an early learning support team. The people you might like to include in your child's team might include:

- Family members, a close friend or relative
- A member or member of your child's early intervention team, such as a social worker, therapist or educator
- An early childhood or preschool teacher or child care worker
- An advocate, family support worker and/or an interpreter
- School staff such as special needs coordinator or disability consultant

It is important for you to choose people that you feel comfortable talking to about the different options and choices available, as this will help you to make decisions about your child's schooling.

### YOUR CHILD'S SUPPORT TEAM FOR TRANSITION TO SCHOOL:

|  | Name, Title | Phone, Address, Email |
|--|-------------|-----------------------|
| Principal of school                            |             |                       |
| Early intervention team member – social worker |             |                       |
| Occupational therapist                         |             |                       |
| Physiotherapist                                |             |                       |
| Speech therapist                               |             |                       |
| Early childhood or preschool teacher           |             |                       |
| Advocate                                       |             |                       |
| Family support worker                          |             |                       |
| Interpreter                                    |             |                       |
| Consultants to school                          |             |                       |
|  |             |                       |
|  |             |                       |

*(Use this table to record details of people who are helping you during your child's transition to school. You may not need all these people on your child's team.)*

## CHOOSING A SCHOOL: WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

Choosing a school for your child is a very important decision and finding out more about the schools in your area will help with this decision. It may be difficult to find a school that does or has everything the way you would like it, but this may happen over time as you become involved with the school. All parents go through this process, but as a parent of a child with a physical disability, this may be more complex with planning starting earlier in your child's life.

Regardless of the type of school, children with disabilities have a right to the same educational opportunities as all other children. This right is protected by law and schools cannot refuse entry because of a child's disability unless they have reasonable grounds. A school may refuse enrolment if they cannot meet your child's needs because of the severe financial burden it would involve.

Some schools may not be very accessible for a child with a physical disability, so the school environment may need to be modified (for example ramps or a lift may need to be built if your child uses a wheelchair). This process takes time to organise, so the transition process needs to start 18 months to 2 years before your child will start school.

As a parent you will need to make choices about what sort of school you want your child to attend. Depending on where you live, there may be a number of different types of schools available.

According to your preference and with your team's assistance, make contact with the Department of Education, Catholic Education Association or local Diocesan Office and/or the Independent Schools Association to request information about the range of school options available for your child and the people available to help with the transition.

## Department of Education and Training (public schools)

### *Mainstream classes*

All children have the right to attend their local public school. Attending their local school will help your child meet other children within their community and reduces their need to travel. Within this educational setting, children with disabilities spend their day included with children without disabilities. Support that helps your child learn in school can take the form of teacher's aide time, specific teaching time from a specialist teacher in the school, provision of special classroom equipment or changing the school environment (e.g. rails or ramps). Sometimes your local school may not be accessible or able to be adapted, but there may be other accessible schools nearby.

### *Support classes*

Children with physical disabilities and/or higher support needs may be eligible for enrolment in a support class. These classes are within selected public schools and have smaller class sizes. Children benefit from the individualised classroom work and the social aspects of still being part of a mainstream school. These classes each cater specifically to different learning needs, for example, physical disability, early intervention, intellectual disability, hearing impairment, vision impairment, language, reading and emotional disturbance.

### *Special schools*

The Department of Education also have special schools which are also known as schools for specific purposes (SSPs). These schools provide individualised and intensive support and cater for children with physical disability, intellectual disability or multiple disabilities. Classes are small and there is a higher ratio of teacher's aide time to assist with routines. Specialised playground equipment may also be available. Children at a special school may not be included with children without disabilities.

### Catholic Schools (*systemic or independent*)

Catholic schools teach according to the Catholic faith, and may be linked to the local diocese or parish or may be independent from this system. The majority of children with disabilities in the Catholic system are in mainstream schools, although there are a limited number of special schools. Some schools in the Catholic system have a designated special education teacher that is able to work with small groups of children or with classroom teachers to adapt programs to meet children's needs. Similar to Department of Education schools, Catholic schools are also able to apply for funding to assist with your child's integration. Enrolment at a Catholic school is best discussed with the school principal.

### Independent schools

Independent schools vary in their policies, guidelines, locations, and particular perspective (such as religious, or non-religious). The services and type of programs available varies between schools, and if you are interested in sending your child to an independent school, you should contact the principal of the school directly. Independent schools are also able to apply for funding to assist with resources and support staff.

### CHOOSING A SCHOOL: WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION ON SCHOOLS?

#### Association of Independent Schools

To find out independent schools in your area  
Phone: (02) 9299 2845  
Website: <http://www.aisnsw.edu.au/Main/>

#### Catholic Education Commission New South Wales

Phone: (02) 9287 1555  
Website: <http://www.cecnsw.catholic.edu.au>

#### Diocesan Offices

For advice about Catholic schools  
Armidale Catholic Schools Office: (02) 6772 7388  
Bathurst Catholic Education Office: (02) 6332 3077  
Broken Bay Catholic Schools Office: (02) 9847 2600  
Canberra Goulburn Catholic Schools Office: (02) 6234 5455

Lismore Catholic Education Office: (02) 6622 0422  
Maitland Newcastle Catholic Schools Office: (02) 4979 1200  
Parramatta Catholic Education Office: (02) 9830 5600  
Sydney Catholic Schools Office: (02) 9569 6111  
Wagga Wagga Catholic Schools Office: (02) 6921 1200  
Wilcannia Catholic Education Office: (02) 6853 9300  
Wollongong Catholic Education Office: (02) 4253 0800

#### Department of Education and Training (DET)

For information on enrolment and support staff

- Phone 131 536
- Website: <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/index.php>

#### To find your local school

Phone: 131 536

Website: <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/schoolfind/locator/>

For information about government schools, call your regional office and ask for the Disability Consultant.

#### Regional contacts for DET

Hunter / Central Coast: (02) 4924 9999  
Illawarra and South Coast: (02) 4222 2929  
New England: (02) 6755 5934  
North Coast: (02) 6652 0500  
Northern Sydney: (02) 9886 7690  
Riverina: (02) 6937 3871  
Sydney South West: (02) 9756 5446  
Western: (02) 6841 2110  
Western Sydney: (02) 9208 9359

## CHOOSING A SCHOOL: WHAT TO CONSIDER?

Regardless of which education system you are interested in, you should try to determine which schools you would like to visit and either arrange a meeting with the principal or attend open days. Meeting with the principal allows you to find out more about the school, their programs and philosophy and how they can work with you to support your child. By looking at the school newsletter or other ways they communicate with parents, you may get a sense of what the school community is like. Talk to members of your team if you would like support in these initial stages.

When choosing a school for your child, think about what your priorities are and what is really important to you in your child's school experiences. Trust your own judgement and feelings about the schools that you are looking at. You might like to talk to your team members and discuss your hopes and what you are most concerned about in your child's transition to school.

A checklist follows this section and can help you think about what to consider in selecting an appropriate school for your child. It may help to highlight the items that reflect your needs and situation.

Once you have chosen a school, you will need to let the school principal and disability consultant or other support staff know. You will need to fill out any paperwork such as enrolment forms, and give consent for information about your child (such as reports) to be shared with other professionals. Check with the principal what paperwork is required and when it is due.

For places in special classes or special schools, the completed enrolment forms are sent to a panel external to the school who decide on these placements. The disability consultant or school can provide more information about this process.

## CHOOSING A SCHOOL: CHECKLIST

### Information

Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Fees: \_\_\_\_\_ Waiting list? \_\_\_\_\_

### Type of school

DET

Catholic

Independent

### Enrolment criteria

In catchment area

Out of area placement

Religious \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Number of students at school \_\_\_\_\_

Distance from home (or travel time) \_\_\_\_\_

How will your child get to school? \_\_\_\_\_

### Is transport available to

and from school?

Yes

No

N/A or Not important

### Is there before and

after school care?

Yes

No

N/A or Not important

Do other children in the family attend this school?

- Yes
- No
- N/A or Not important

What do you consider important in your child's school?

Important contact people \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

### Supporting my child's needs

Does the school have experience with children with disabilities?

---

What support can the school offer my child?  
(teachers, aides, parent contacts etc.)

---

---

How will the school support my child's extra medical or self care needs?

---

---

Is funding available for equipment and / or modifications if required?

---

---

If aides are employed to assist my child, can I assist in the selection process? \_\_\_\_\_

---

Will there be extra supervision for my child at recess and lunch?

---

What are the class sizes and how are children grouped?

---

---

How does the school encourage parents to be involved?

---

---

Will a support team be established for my child? \_\_\_\_\_

Does the teacher have time available to talk or who do I talk to if I have concerns? \_\_\_\_\_

---

What are the formal orientation / transition to school processes within the school? \_\_\_\_\_

---

Can the school extend the orientation process if my child needs it?

---

Is there a buddy system and when will my child meet their buddy?

---

What other programs happen in the school that my child can be involved in? \_\_\_\_\_

---

How accessible is the school?

General access (stairs, ramps, rails, slopes etc)

---

---

Going in and out of the school

---

---

Parking (easy drop off / pick up, disabled parking space)

---

---

Fences and gates at the school

---

---

Rooms my child will use

(classrooms, library, computer room, hall, sick bay)

---

---

Playground (steps, uneven surfaces, ramps)

---

---

Access to toilets, taps and bubblers

---

---

Lunch & recess (suitable seating for eating lunch, canteen)

---

---

If the school environment needs changes, is the school willing to do these?

---

---



## Preparing for School

(Minimum 18 months before your child starts school)

You and your team will be involved in a number of tasks over the next 18 months which will include:- assessment of the school environment, finalising enrolment, preparing your child for school and attending transition meetings.

### ASSESSMENT OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

What does the assessment of the school involve?

For children who use mobility aids or need improved access to the school, an assessment of the school environment is required. This generally involves a meeting with you and your child, your occupational therapist, school principal, support teacher, and a school properties representative. It is important that your child's occupational therapist attends this meeting.

You will take a walk around the school site and look at all the places that your child will need to go to in the school, including the library, canteen, computer rooms, classroom and playground, to see what changes are necessary to improve access.

The occupational therapist will prepare an Access Report based on the visit and you will be asked to look at the report and discuss your ideas, before it is sent to the relevant people.

### FINALISING ENROLMENT PROCEDURES

*(12 months or so before your child starts school)*

Depending on the system and school, you will need to complete enrolment forms as required by the school. This may include giving the school copies of your child's birth certificate and immunisation records. You or your occupational therapist can seek updates from the Principal to see if work has commenced on any modifications and whether time frames for completion have been set.

Preparing your child for school

You can start to prepare your child for school, by talking about going to school, visiting the school and walking around the playground. If it is the

same school that other children in the family attend, it can help to visit the classroom or any open days, fairs or other community events.

There are also a number of books that show children going to school that you can read to your child. A list of some of these books is at the end of this booklet.

You can also start to introduce your child (if you haven't already) to doing things that will assist them to be independent at school. Teach your child things like taking their jumper and shoes on and off, taking care of their own things, packing away and following instructions. You can also try out different lunch boxes school bags and drink bottles to see which ones your child can use easily. If your child is having difficulties, the occupational therapist can suggest some options or strategies. It is also a good time to practise mobility skills that might be needed in the school environment.

### WORKING WITH THE SCHOOL TO PREPARE FOR TRANSITION

*(Term 2 or 3, the year before your child starts school)*

During this part of the transition process, the focus is on sharing information with the school and you may need to submit doctors' and therapists' reports to the school. With any report that the school asks for, it is always worthwhile checking exactly what the school needs and when.

There are sometimes meetings that happen at this time. A common meeting that parents need to attend is a transition to school meeting.

Transition meetings: What to expect

*Who might attend the meeting?*

A meeting (often called a transition meeting), is often held at the school with the school counsellor or guidance officer, integration teacher and school principal, as well as yourself and your supporters, to plan for what your child will need at school.

*What is a transition meeting about?*

The purpose of this meeting may be to apply for funding support, as well as discuss and plan for your child's needs. It is important for the school to know what your child needs help with and if they arrange this help early,

it can be ready for when your child starts school. Your child may need specific equipment or extra assistance from a teacher's aide or other staff during the school day. Remember, starting school will be a busy time for your child and they may require more assistance than in childcare or at home as they will be required to do more for themselves. It is a busier environment and often has a timetable to keep to, so children need to keep up. Your child may require more assistance initially as they get used to school.

Before the meeting, ask to see a copy of any forms the school needs your input on, or an agenda for the meeting, so that you can prepare. Think about the areas in which you feel your child will need extra support, and discuss these with your child's therapists, early educator or support person. Don't be afraid to ask any questions.

Some parents find this meeting difficult as the focus is on your child's support needs and decisions within the meeting may be used to determine what assistance your child requires from others (for example, a teacher's aide). The school may need to fill out some forms to ensure they receive funding or services. This may require the use of unfamiliar formats or numbers and scales set by government department guidelines for different levels of funding. The school will usually aim to get as much help as they can to ensure your child is well supported at school.

#### *What should I take to the meeting?*

You may need to bring your child's current therapy and preschool reports. It is worth checking with the school if there is anything they need you to bring for this meeting. You may find it helpful to write a list of questions to refer to at the meeting.

#### *Things to think about for a transition meeting:*

- Things my child needs help with
- Things my child is good at
- Questions I want to ask

#### What might be discussed?

*(Not all of these areas will apply to your child or your child's school. You may like to work out with your support team which are the most relevant areas for your child. Some of these questions may be answered by you, your child, therapists, or other team members.)*

#### *Modification of the environment:*

- Get an update on the modification process.
- If modifications to the school have not been completed, ask what arrangements will be put in place to assist transition.
- Is the equipment identified in the access report ordered / funding arranged?

#### *Getting to school*

- If I require transport to and from school for my child, can my child access the Special Transport Scheme and how do I apply?
- If I am walking to school, will the closest gate that has the easiest access be open?
- Is there a specially marked car space with good access to the school?
- How far is it from car space to classroom?

#### *Who will help my child?*

- What services or consultants will my child need to be referred to?
- If there is funding for a teacher's aide, how will the school use the aide time once it is allocated?
- Do I have any role in selecting the teacher's aide, and what training will the school and my child's current services provide?
- Are other children at the school currently supported by teacher's aide time?
- What are the emergency procedures and contact people?
- How will the school cope with fire drills or an emergency with my child?

#### *My child's abilities and difficulties*

#### *Managing health needs*

- My child's weight and height is \_\_\_\_\_
- My child is able to communicate with staff about a medical problem and know what they need to happen? Yes / No

- My child has specific health care needs which the school are not aware of Yes / No
- A meeting should be arranged for a healthcare plan to be developed Yes/ No
- Are there other professionals who need to provide information to the school such as the medical team? Yes / No

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*Moving around the school and classroom*

- My child moves around the school by \_\_\_\_\_
- The type (how much and what sort) of assistance my child needs is \_\_\_\_\_

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- My child is independent in moving around the school and classroom Yes / No
- My child can get in and out of their wheelchair, fasten the seat belt, operate the brakes, keep to a certain speed and drive safely and courteously Yes / No
- My child is safe moving around in busy places with many obstacles (e.g. school playground) Yes / No
- My child can transfer independently (move from sitting in a chair to sitting on the floor, etc.) Yes / No

*Going to the toilet*

- My child needs assistance with going to the toilet Yes / No
- The type of assistance my child needs is \_\_\_\_\_

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- My child indicates their need for the toilet by \_\_\_\_\_

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- The toilet area my child will use has adequate privacy Yes / No
- My child can use the bathroom at school by themselves Yes / No
- My child needs height adjustable changing facilities Yes / No
- My child needs to be catheterised or toileted according to a timetable Yes / No
- Who will be trained to catheterise my child?

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*Playing in the playground*

- My child requires assistance in the playground Yes / No
- My child needs adult supervision to ensure safety Yes / No
- My child can get safely in and out of school buildings by themselves Yes / No
- My child can look after their own belongings - bag, hat, jumper Yes / No
- My child has special medical considerations when playing in the playground Yes / No
- Do other children need to be made aware of my child's needs? Yes / No
- My child is able to make friends and respond appropriately to other children Yes / No

*Eating food at school*

- My child needs assistance with eating Yes / No
- The type of assistance my child needs is \_\_\_\_\_

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- My child can open their own lunch box or drink bottle Yes / No
- My child can make appropriate choices about what food to eat and when Yes / No
- My child can use the canteen and water bubbler Yes / No
- My child can use the water bubbler Yes / No

*In the classroom*

- My child needs special equipment in the classroom (e.g. special pencils or scissors, height adjustable table, particular type of chair)  
Yes / No  
\_\_\_\_\_
- If your child uses equipment, do the staff need training on how to use the equipment? Yes / No
- Where will the equipment for my child be stored when not in use?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Would my child benefit from the use of a keyboard rather than writing?  
Yes / No
- My child can work in a group and doesn't get too distracted Yes / No
- My child will need assistance for sport or PE Yes / No  
\_\_\_\_\_
- My child will need assistance for excursions Yes/ No  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How will the school deal with any emergencies?  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Notes:*

ORIENTATION

*(Term 4 prior to attending school)*

Many schools have organised orientation or transition days for all children starting Kindergarten in the following year. It is good for your child to attend these days as it gives you and your child the opportunity to get to know the school environment before they start and to meet parents and other children who will be starting school the next year. This will also give you the chance to talk to your child about going to school and how much they will enjoy it. Do make use of any preschool or child care orientation activities that are organised to prepare children for school as well.

Once you buy your child's uniform, your child can practise wearing it. This is a good time to make any alterations to your child's uniform to accommodate their needs, such as taking up the uniform.

When your child puts on their uniform, get them to look at themselves in the mirror. Talk to them about how big and grown up they are. Take a photo and put it up so your child can see it and look forward to going to school. It will be another prompt to encourage talking about what school is like.

## Starting School

This is a special and exciting time for parents and children. It can also be stressful as parents hand over their child's care to the class teacher in a much bigger environment. It is important to acknowledge how you are feeling and to remember to tell your child how proud you are of them going to big school and how grown up they look in their uniform.

### SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER FOR THE FIRST DAY:

- Ensure you say good bye to your child and let them know their pick up arrangements, particularly if they are using transport to school.
- Talk to staff about how your child will start in the classroom. For some children with specific difficulties, the class teacher may need to help children in the class understand how your child is different. Sometimes staff will use photos, pictures or story books to reinforce how your child will be included in the classroom and any particular needs they might have. For other children this will not be necessary, but it is important for you to feel comfortable about how staff will approach this.
- Plan to do something for yourself on your child's first day. Who do you need to talk to, is there someone to meet with for a coffee?

### SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER FOR FIRST TERM:

- Talk with the teacher about how they would like to communicate with you. Some teachers are willing to chat before and after school, others may wish to establish a system such as a communication book. Clarify this early, so that you feel that you have a way to keep in touch and be fully informed.
- Find out if the teacher has all the information that they feel is necessary, or consider planning a review meeting with the teacher and support team to discuss how school is going in the first few weeks. Realise that there may need to be regular contact with the school in the early days of first term.

- Check how the school communicates information to parents (e.g. assembly, notes, weekly newsletter).
- Becoming involved in your child's school is one way to keep in touch with what is going on at school. Some parents volunteer to help out in the classroom, or other classes within the school, or assist with canteen or fundraising, join the P&C or other school groups.

## PUBLICATIONS

Who will teach my child? A guide for parents of children with special learning needs (2008)

This publication details resources and processes available from Department of Education (DET). A hard copy can be requested from DET or downloaded from their website: <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/studentsupport/programs/lrngdifficulties/whoteach.pdf>

One of the kids (1998)

This is an older publication so there may be some changes in regard to funding. It does provide an overview to different school systems and has a focus on inclusion and how to get support and advocacy services. Available from: <http://www.disabilitycouncil.nsw.gov.au/archive/98/stroeve.html>

Transition to school for young children with special learning needs (2000)

This booklet outlines the steps used by DET in the transition to school process for children with special learning needs. This guide does not include specific information on physical disability. Available from: [https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student\\_admin/general/transition/pd02\\_29\\_transition\\_to\\_school.pdf](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student_admin/general/transition/pd02_29_transition_to_school.pdf)

Time to start school - Family guide to starting Kindergarten

This DET publication details some of the key ideas relating to transition to school for all children, with tips that will assist parents. It also has a ready for school checklist. It is updated each year. <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/gotoschool/primary/parentbook.pdf>

I'm starting school

This is a poster that a child can add their own drawings or photographs of themselves and their new school. <http://www.transitiontoschool.com.au/pdf/kids/I'm%20Starting%20School!%20-%20Poster.pdf>

## PUBLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN

A special place

This children's picture book is written by the NSW Department of Education and Training. It is for you to read with your child starting Kindergarten. You can request a copy from your child's school or download from: [http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/gotoschool/primary/a\\_special\\_place.pdf](http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/gotoschool/primary/a_special_place.pdf)

Children's books incorporating disabilities and starting school

| Title                 | Author/s  | Publisher                          | Year of Publication | Comments   |
|-----------------------|---|------------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Jason's First Day     | OI Foundation                                   | Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation | 2004                | This colourful picture book shares Jason's first day at school and introduces his aide and mobility equipment. The teacher's straightforward discussion with the class on O.I. offers a wonderful example for introducing disability awareness into a classroom.   |
| Friends at School     | Rochelle Burnett<br>(Photographs by Matt Brown) | Star Bright Books,<br>New York     | 1995                | Shows preschool children of mixed ability playing and working together.  |
| Best Friend on Wheels | Debra Shirley & Judy Stead                      | Albert Whitman                     | 2008                | A new 2nd grade girl starts school. She uses a wheelchair and makes a new friend.  |
| Nicholas Nigel Norris | Susan McLevie,<br>Ann Cutler,<br>Rachel Norris  | Cerebral Palsy Assoc of WA         | 2000                | Nicholas Nigel Norris is an Australian book about Nicholas, a 6 year old boy who has cerebral palsy. Nicholas loves doing heaps of things including going to school. He is, however, beginning to notice that he is a little different from his friends at school and is becoming curious about that difference. |

## Making A Complaint

Sometimes things don't go according to plan. If you do not receive a fair and reasonable response from school personnel or other services, you have a right to complain. It is important in the first instance to talk or put your concern in writing to the person or organisation involved. If this approach is not successful, ask to speak to the supervisor or next level of management. You can choose to have someone such as a friend or advocate to support you in making a complaint. This process allows for your concerns to be raised and a solution worked out. Staff are not permitted to treat you unfairly because you have complained. Northcott social workers can help you to work out how best to resolve the problem you are experiencing.

If you are not satisfied with any aspect of the Northcott team or service, you have a right to complain. Staff from Northcott can provide you with information about how to make a complaint or give feedback to our service.

There are also outside agencies that can help or support you if you feel that you have not been treated fairly or that the response you receive is unreasonable.

## MAKING A COMPLAINT: AGENCIES WHO CAN HELP

### Family Advocacy

Phone: (02) 9869 0866 or 1800 620 588

Email: [familyadvocacy@family-advocacy.com](mailto:familyadvocacy@family-advocacy.com)

### People with Disability

Phone: (02) 9370 3100 or 1800 422 015

Email: [pwd@pwd.org.au](mailto:pwd@pwd.org.au)

### NSW Ombudsman

Phone: (02) 9286 100 or 1800 451 524

Email: [nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au](mailto:nswombo@ombo.nsw.gov.au)

### Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW (ADB)

Phone: (02) 9268 5544 or 1800 670 812

Email: [adbcontact@agd.nsw.gov.au](mailto:adbcontact@agd.nsw.gov.au)

### Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)

Phone: (02) 9284 9600 or 1300 656 419 (local call cost)

Email: [complaintinfo@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:complaintinfo@humanrights.gov.au)

