

Transition to school at Boambee Public School

Case study

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



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

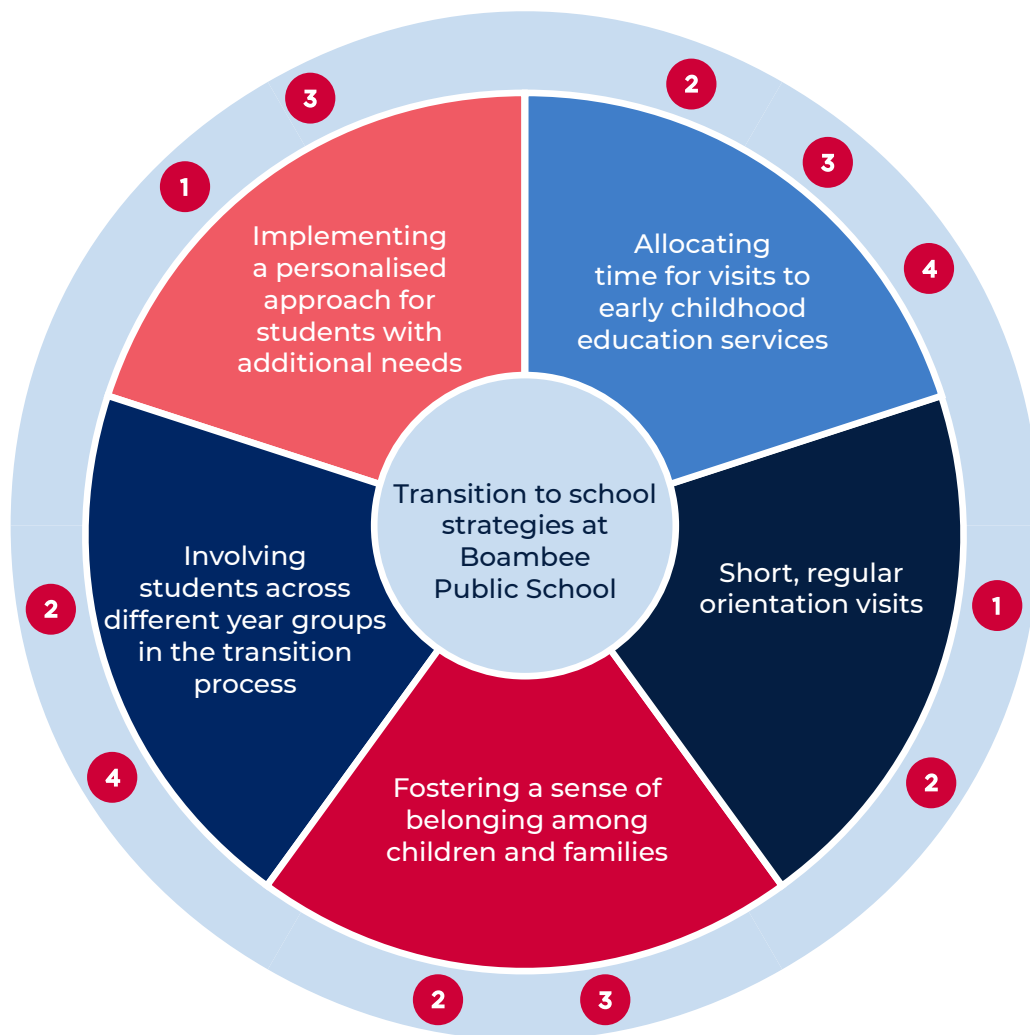
For more information about how the NSW Department of Education is supporting a strong and successful transition to school, visit the NSW Department of Education [Early Learning and Early Childhood Education](#) web pages. For an overview of the key findings from literature on the transition to school,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



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

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

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



Principles and practices of the Transition to school guidelines:

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

School context

Boambee Public School is a primary school located seven kilometres south of Coffs Harbour on the NSW North Coast. The school sits on four hectares of picturesque, rural grounds and it serves as the social and cultural hub of the local community. Boambee Public School has a current enrolment of 429 students, of whom 12% are Aboriginal and 6% are from a language background other than English. The school has a FOEI¹ of 94. Boambee Public School was externally validated in 2018 as Excelling in the 'Transitions and continuity of learning' theme of the School Excellence Framework (SEF). In 2020, the school self-assessed that they were Excelling in 13 of 14 SEF elements.

Boambee Public School welcomed a new principal in 2020 who has dedicated support and resources to enhancing the school's transition program and encouraging whole-school improvement. The school has a strong focus on creating a positive and welcoming environment, and all staff take collective responsibility for improving teaching and learning. Boambee Public School reports high levels of student, staff and community engagement.



Transition to school at Boambee Public School: an overview

Approximately 95% of children start Kindergarten at Boambee Public School having attended an early childhood education (ECE) service. In 2020, Kindergarten students came from 18 different ECE services, and school staff visited as many of these services as possible to support the transition process. During their visits to 14 different ECE services, school staff met new children and their families, observed the children in their current learning environment, and collected information from ECE staff that they used to plan for the incoming Kindergarten cohort.

Boambee Public School has refined its transition practices in recent years to ensure that all children are given the best opportunity to make a strong and successful transition to school. In addition to visiting more ECE services, the school has restructured its orientation program so that it involves shorter, more regular school visits. Each incoming child participates in four short orientation sessions and an extended session, 'Kinder-Go Day'. Short, regular orientation sessions allow students to develop familiarity with the physical school environment and build relationships with school staff and other students. The school also involves students across different year groups in the transition process and makes a conscious effort to get to know each child and their family on an individual level. This ensures that incoming Kindergarten children and their families feel a strong sense of belonging in the school community from early on in the transition process.

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

Boambee Public School: transition to school strategies

Allocating time for visits to early childhood education services

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

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

Boambee Public School allocates time and resources for visits to local ECE services to ensure the school is ready for incoming Kindergarten children. School leaders use flexible funding to release the Kindergarten coordinator and a Kindergarten learning support teacher for one day per week in Term 3 to conduct the ECE visits and plan the school's orientation program. The school reports that local ECE services are very receptive and willing to facilitate visits to support the transition process. The ECE services informed parents of upcoming visits and report they were glad the school was invested in getting to know their children. The visits consist of informal observation of children in the preschool environment, gathering information from ECE staff, and meeting families.

“It's an informal observation – our staff are making connections with staff and students. They observe the students engaging in their learning and play and are also having discussions with the preschool teachers about each individual student's needs. They're gathering as much information as they can in that time. As we continue to improve our processes this will include more targeted and specific observations where appropriate.”

Phil Maunder, Principal

Boambee Public School has created its own template that staff use during the visits to ensure that they maximise their time at the ECE services and collect the type of data they need to inform their transition planning. For example, the template includes sections on each child's interests, strengths and weaknesses, individual learning plans already in place, and whether or not ECE staff believe the child is ready for school. The template also includes a section for any relevant information ECE staff can share about their discussions with parents. Boambee Public School staff use the information from the templates to create a profile for each child on the school's Google Drive, which is shared with the other Kindergarten teachers before the orientation sessions to inform differentiated lesson planning and student allocations. The profiles are also used to plan support for students with additional needs.





Short, regular orientation visits

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 1 High expectations and equity
- 2 Collaboration and partnerships

Short, regular orientation visits are an important part of the transition program at Boambee Public School. Children attend four 1-hour sessions in Term 4, followed by an extended 3-hour session in Week 8. Incoming Kindergarten children are placed in groups of 10 for the orientation visits and join students in the current Kindergarten cohort for a carefully planned sequence of sessions. Incoming children participate in reading, activity stations such as drawing, Lego and technology, and outdoor play with current Kindergarten students. These sessions are led by current Kindergarten teachers and scheduled as part of the regular timetable so staff do not need to be released from their regular duties to lead the orientation sessions. Incorporating the orientation groups with the existing Kindergarten classes reduces burden on teachers and allows current students to be included in the transition program.

“[It’s] a nice, short enough time to be immersed in school life, to see what the expectation is, to see that part of the day is sitting, listening, doing and playing. It’s being able to experience that without being overwhelmed.”

Natalee Lang, Kindergarten Coordinator

In previous years, all incoming children attended three orientation visits in one large group. Since changing the orientation program, the school has found that implementing short, regular visits reduces children’s anxiety and the stress of separation from their parents. They have also found that having smaller group sizes allows for more one-on-one time with the children, creating a positive transition experience. The school uses flexible funding to hire an additional school learning support officer (SLSO) during orientation visits to provide assistance for children with additional needs. Shifting to shorter, more regular orientation visits has been so successful that the school plans to expand the program to 10-12 short visits for future intakes of Kindergarten students.

Fostering a sense of belonging among children and families

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 2 Collaboration and partnerships
- 3 Wellbeing and secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

Boambee Public School recognises that fostering a strong sense of belonging is important for both students and their families during the transition process. The school makes a deliberate effort to ensure that children and their families feel connected to the school from early in the transition process. Staff get to know children and families on an individual level and the school focuses on building strong, trusting relationships. This starts during the preschool visits where staff first meet the incoming children and families, and continues during the orientation visits. The principal, staff and current students greet new children arriving for orientation visits at the gate and make an effort to learn each child's name to ensure that every child feels known and valued. The principal also makes time to take parents to a local café during orientation visits to get to know them and make sure that they feel comfortable about their child's transition to school.

“I've really tried to make sure that I'm deeply involved and available ... I made myself available to them [parents and carers] at the café during their child's first visit. Also, every time they come in for their orientation visits now ... I go out, I greet them, I make sure I let them know I'm there if they have questions and I'm available to them. And I then meet them at the end of the session as well.”

Phil Maunder, Principal

Kindergarten parents explain that the school makes a conscious effort of connecting with them throughout the transition process. Once children are enrolled, parents are shown how to use Seesaw to communicate with their child's teacher and they receive regular updates, including photos of student work. This has resulted in parents feeling well informed, connected, supported and comfortable to approach staff. Boambee Public School also works hard to ensure that incoming Kindergarten children feel connected to their new school as quickly as possible. One of the ways the school achieves this is by running nine clubs that provide up to 30 activities throughout the year (for example, citizenship, environmental, gardening, dance, passive play clubs) for students across all year groups. The clubs provide opportunities for Kindergarten children to participate in a variety of activities during school hours with students who share similar interests. The clubs help to create a strong sense of unity at the school and also boost children's sense of belonging.





Involving students across different year groups in the transition process

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

- 2 Collaboration and partnerships
- 4 Use of data to inform practice and ongoing learning and reflective practice

Students across different year groups at Boambee Public School play an important role in supporting incoming Kindergarten children to make a strong and successful transition to school. Current Kindergarten students act as role models during the orientation visits, leading new children through planned activity stations. Staff use this time to observe and write notes on how each child engages with activities and interacts socially with other students. This information is added to the child's profile and is used to plan Kindergarten class allocations.

Students in Years 3-6 have the opportunity to be involved in the school's transition program through a letter writing buddy program. Information collected by staff during the preschool visits is passed on to the buddies to tailor letters that welcome new students to Boambee Public School. Students use the letters to explain to incoming Kindergarten children what activities they might like at school based on their interests.

Prior to the orientation visits, each incoming Kindergarten child receives a handwritten letter and photos of the school and their buddy. Kindergarten parents explain that receiving the letter helped to create excitement about starting school and also provided familiarity for their child during orientation visits when greeted by their buddy.

“We get our letter writers to come and meet them [incoming Kindergarten students] at the gate and have a chat so they get to meet them in person. And they walk them around to the classroom. So, all this interaction and familiarity has been amazing.”

Sue Grant, Learning Support Teacher

Once formal classes begin, each Kindergarten child is partnered with a Year 6 buddy. Year 6 buddies participate in activities in Kindergarten classes once a week, including craft, reading and technology activities. The Year 6 students also deliver short lessons on a highlighted positive behaviour for learning each fortnight, to teach younger students what a positive, safe and supportive learning culture looks like at Boambee Public School.

Implementing a personalised approach for students with additional needs

Links to Transition to school guidelines:

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

Boambee Public School identifies students with additional needs early so they can implement a personalised transition to school approach. Providing a high level of individualised support ensures the school is ready for the child and the child is comfortable and prepared for school. The school first identifies additional needs through information listed on enrolment forms and collates this on the child's profile. The school then contacts parents and carers of children with additional needs to inform them of the date they will be visiting their child's preschool and provide an opportunity to talk about the school's transition program. The Learning Support Teacher also meets with families in person to discuss their child's needs in depth, develop a personal learning and support plan, and arrange necessary funding and support. Children are also given multiple opportunities to meet with their Kindergarten teacher before the first day of school to build familiarity.

“I have been contacting parents ... they've come in for a meeting and we've sat down together, and we've worked out what goals the parents want their child to achieve at school. And that gives us a way better idea of how we can accommodate for them in the classroom.”

Sue Grant, Learning Support Teacher

Boambee Public School works closely with families to make any necessary adjustments to support children with additional needs to adapt to their new learning environment and prepare for orientation visits. This includes providing opportunities for pre-orientation visits to familiarise children with the school grounds and teachers, strategically placing children with peers from their ECE service for orientation visits, and funding additional SLSOs to provide targeted support during orientation visits, which continues once the child starts school. Children with additional needs are also given a personalised social story to help them visualise a typical school day, build familiarity with their teacher, classroom and school grounds, and to normalise the feelings associated with going to school.



Where to from here

While Boambee Public School has experienced great success with their transition practices, the school is committed to continuous improvement and has identified some of the ways they will refine their practice to ensure students continue making a strong and successful transition to school. These include:

- increasing the number of orientation visits to include 10-12 sessions across Term 3 and 4
- surveying Kindergarten families to get feedback about the school's transition practices and using this data to inform and reflect on their practice and plan accordingly
- conducting preschool visits earlier in the year so the orientation visits can start in Term 3
- increasing the number of staff that take part in the preschool visits
- developing a memorandum of understanding between local ECE services and the school that outlines what all stakeholders hope to achieve during the transition to school process.

Acknowledgements

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Case study schools were selected using a combination of School Excellence Framework data, Value Added² data and Kindergarten attendance data.

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

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