

# FOCUS

## Improving Transition to Anchorage Park School for Priority Learners

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### Sabbatical Report Term 3 2015

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  - Mary Benjamin who did such a great job as Acting Principal

#### **PURPOSE:**

To review and improve our transition to school programme through

- Identifying the contributing factors / indicators of a successful transition for priority learners
- Using stakeholder input (teachers, parents and students) to identify what practices we need to stop doing, continue, improve or change to ensure priority learners are well prepared to meet the challenges of transitioning to school.
- Using information gathered from research, stakeholders and other schools to compare, review & further develop our transition to school practices for priority learners

The analysis of the information gathered will enable us to identify issues and plan and implement ongoing measures to further develop and improve our transition to school programme.

## **Current Transition Programme at Anchorage Park School**

Anchorage Park School is a small, urban, multicultural decile 3 school in Auckland (25% Maori, 25% Pasifika). The transition programme involves 5+ fortnightly visits (more if necessary for identified priority learners or special needs students). Most of these students come with a teacher and 1 – 2 parents if they attend the adjacent Anchorage Park Kindergarten, along with 1 – 2 students (+ parents) who do not attend the kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher and parents provide supervision for their students whose parents have difficulty in getting time off from work to accompany their child on any of these visits.

The students participate in the classroom programme with the new entrants from 9.20 – 10.25 am and then meet up with their buddy reader from the Year 4 / 5 class to read together for approx. 10 minutes. After this they eat their morning tea with the new entrant class and then play on the adventure playground with other students and are supervised by the parents and kindergarten teacher\*. After morning tea they participate in the Perceptual Motor Programme that is set up in the school hall before returning to the kindergarten.

On the week in between the school visits the Year 4 / 5 Buddy Reader students visit the kindergarten to read with their kindergarten buddy.

Once a term, evening meetings\* are now held. Parents meet with the kindergarten and school teachers at the kindergarten then move across to the new entrant classroom. This enables working parents to be included, meet the principal and teacher, ask questions etc. Having both kindergarten and school staff run these sessions together helps to support parents and strengthen connections between all involved.

### **\*Notes**

As a result of the feedback from the surveys, the kindergarten students now stay to eat morning tea with the new entrant class and then play on the adventure playground with everyone else; and evening meetings for parents have been implemented.

In 2015 the Anchorage Park Kindergarten and Anchorage Park School Transition to School Programme was runner up in the Prime Minister's Education Excellence Awards - Education Focus Prize (Takatu) for 'Collaboration that creates learner-led pathways from early childhood to schooling'.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

### **Teachers**

1. Interviews / questionnaires with our new entrant teachers, kindergarten teachers and teachers from other schools to determine their perceptions of transition to school in terms of:
  - What are the indicators of a successful transition to school?
  - Are there other / different indicators specific to priority learners?
  - What specific practices, if any, are in place to support students and their families?

- What are some of the things that make the transition from preschool to school difficult for your students?
- In terms of school readiness, what (if any) are some of the learning and social skills needs of your new entrant students?

### **Parents / Caregivers**

1. Interviews / questionnaires with parents / caregivers of our kindergarten and new entrant students to determine their perceptions of transition to school in terms of:
  - What were the indicators of a successful transition to school for their child?
  - How did the transition programme support their family?
  - What were the challenges / positives of the programme?
  - What else could have been part of the transition programme and what could be changed?

### **Interviews with Kindergarten and Year 1 Students who have participated in the Transition to School Programme**

- Can you tell us about visiting the school / what do you / did you like doing when you visited the classroom?
- What do you / did you learn from the visits to school?
- What do you think is different at school?
- How does / did going to the school for visits help you?
- How ready do you / did you feel for school? (1 being lowest, 5 being highest)
- What else could we do to help other children get ready for school?

### **RESEARCH – Key Points**

- Transition is a process not an event and can often take up to a year. It is more than just visits in the time leading up to children starting school.
- Successful transitions to school involve the whole family. They recognise and celebrate the key role parents and whanau play in their child's ongoing learning.
- Genuine partnerships and two-way communication helps the child's family and school leaders, teachers and other staff work together to support the child's learning.

- Getting to know each child - including finding out about their strengths, interests, culture and capabilities, and their parents' aspirations for them is essential.
- Maori and Pacific children need to be supported in developing their sense of belonging in the new environment by making their language and culture part of the curriculum and the school environment.
- Friendships, tuakana teina relationships and their relationships with the teacher are critical factors for students in a successful transition
- Information about support needed for children with special education needs should be shared and applications for funding started early so that support is continuous or in place once the child moves to school.
- Seeing children in their familiar early childhood environment can help new entrant teachers add to the information provided through portfolio books or other records of learning.
- Two-way visits between an early childhood service and a school can help children connect with older children already at school and get used to the school environment.
- Reciprocal relationships between teachers help them understand what the teaching and learning looks like in each place and how they can connect these experiences for children starting school.
- A supportive, successful transition:
  - Fosters a child's relationships with teachers and other children and affirms their identity
  - Builds on the learning experiences that the child brings with them
  - Considers the child's whole experience of school
  - Is welcoming of family and whanau

ERO (May 2015)

- There has been a shift of emphasis in recent years from *the child being ready for school* to the need for *the school to be ready for the child* Noel, (2011)

## **PERCEPTIONS OF THE TRANSITION TO SCHOOL PROGRAMME**

### **Key Responses from Teachers Surveys (Schools & Kindergarten)**

#### **What are the indicators of a successful transition to school?**

##### **Students:**

- are confident on arrival and feel part of the school family
- have a positive attitude towards school and learning.

- are familiar with the classroom and school environment, the teachers, class routines and expectations
- are settled
- are not anxious about being left
- are socially able, e.g. take turns and share.

Parents:

- parents are positive / happy - they know the other parents and the teacher and are developing / have developed positive relationships
- are not anxious about leaving their children

**Are there any different indicators specific to priority learners?**

- Students and parents are confident and early on they display a sense of belonging.
- ESOL students (especially Pasifika) when encouraged are willing to share and use their own language with others.

**What specific practices, if any, are in place to support priority learners and their families/whanau?**

- Teacher / Teacher Aide / Principal seek opportunities to interact with students and parents /caregivers before and after school.
- Regular visits by the New Entrant Teacher and the Principal to the kindergarten
- Being culturally aware, responsive and sensitive to student's backgrounds and individual needs identified from conversations with teachers, parents and students themselves on school visits.
- Being familiar with and aware of information shared in the kindergarten transitional books and using this information to further develop and enhance student / teacher / family relationships.

**What are some of the things that make the transition to school difficult for students?**

- Students who have had no preschool experience or transition visits prior to starting and especially for some of these students parents who 'drop and run' on the first few days
- Parents who struggle to cope with the transition of their child to school (both with and without having attended transition visits) and won't leave their children
- 'Helicopter' / over protective parents who have done or continue to do everything for their child
- Parents withholding important information that will help the school plan how to best meet their child's needs eg custody arrangements / medical or special needs information prior to starting school

**In terms of school readiness, what (if any) are some of the learning and social skills needs of your new entrant students?**

- Early literacy and numeracy skills – don't know alphabet letters / cant recognise or write some letters of own name / unable to recognise numbers, count to 5 or 10
- Unable to hold a pencil
- Poor fine motor / gross motor skills

- Oral language –delayed development & at 1 – 2 words stage
- Limited knowledge of books eg front & back, turning pages
- Lack of basic hygiene skills
- Unable to share or take turns

*Note:* the number of new entrants presenting with these needs is decreasing

*In addition the Anchorage Park Kindergarten and school teaching staff were asked:*

**How has the relationship between the kindergarten and school impacted on children’s readiness for school?**

- The reciprocal relationship between the kindergarten and school has had a positive and continuous impact on students learning in their first year at school. The regular 5 – 8 visits prior to enrolment have enabled students to confidently develop their knowledge base and make learning and social connections.
- Regular visits by the New Entrant Teacher and the Principal to the kindergarten has strengthened relationships between the students, their parents and the school
- School and kindergarten have a valuable relationship and are able to share, celebrate, and enjoy cultural experiences together, e.g.: Art exhibitions, Chinese Dragon Dance, School Productions, School Performances, Prize Giving, Kapa-Haka performances.
- The relationship has enabled ongoing sharing of information throughout the transition process and in the first 3 years at school.
- Programmes such as the ‘Reading Together’ Parent Programme and Buddy Reading support both parents and students and have reiterated the importance of literacy for our young learners.
- Implementing the Perceptual Motor Programme (PMP) with the kindergarten children on their transition visits before they come to school not only helps develop their fine and gross motor skills but also provides the children with a prior knowledge of the activities they will participate in at school.

**Key Responses from Parent Surveys (Kindergarten & those with children now at School)**

***What were the indicators of a successful transition to school for their child?***

- Excited, happy, prepared and enthusiastic about going to school and not nervous or scared, overwhelmed etc
- Confident to speak up and ask questions
- Becoming more independent
- Building new friendships
- Loves telling us about what he is doing at school

### ***How did the transition programme support their family?***

- We both work so it was great that we didn't have to take time off to do the visits ourselves
- Keeping us informed and also initiating the visits – it's good that the kindergarten has the connection and ability to have the visits – it makes me as a parent feel a great sense of relief
- Providing the link, sharing and caring between the school and kindergarten, and working together to support our children
- Giving us the confidence that he'll be alright
- Getting to know the new entrant teacher and having time to know the school environment and what to expect etc
- Regular visits meant she was confident about going to school without any signs of nervousness. As parents, being asked to be a helper on visits let us see more of what her school was like
- It removed the anxiety associated with change and normalised the school day for all of us
- She was familiar with the classroom and had already built a relationship with the teacher
- We felt more at ease knowing she knew what to expect and she felt comfortable in her new environment
- Mum and Dad - not worried and stressed over our daughter being at school and feeling alone and scared. She loves school which makes doing homework and getting ready for school a lot less stressful and more enjoyable for all!

### ***What were the challenges / positives of the programme?***

#### ***Positives***

- Going from being the oldest in a group to being the youngest – a challenge and a positive as he was outgrowing kindy
- We could be excited with him as he learned new things. It was a good way to let him get used to being in the classroom with and without mum
- She was able to meet her teacher and classmates before she started
- It saved a lot of time for me and for parents that don't know what to do and where to start
- It provided a stepping stone from one environment to the next – a natural progression
- The buddy reading especially when the school students visit the kindergarten to read with their buddy
- She will be so ready to start school and I won't have to worry
- My child was excited to go and asked each day if it was a visit day
- He didn't get nervous at all and he knew what to do when he got to school
- Consistency and children understanding when it was their turn to start school visits. Having parent involvement
- Made the whole process of starting school so easy for our son and for us
- He was excited to be a 'school boy' before officially starting school
- Gradually being introduced to the new environment was very positive for my boy
- My child started school very happy = very happy parents
- The biggest positive was the structure – having a staff member go with the children was fantastic and really made a difference.

#### ***Challenges***

- Being on the school visit as a helper and my child not wanting to join in with the class, wanting to stay with me but this got much better after the first visit
- Managing 'change' is a challenge so settling into a new environment is / can be upsetting
- The transition to a different level of expectations but this was alleviated by the regularity of the programme and the association with the other children
- Challenge was for us seeing him move up but it did reassure me that he'd be alright and would be in good hands

***What else could have been part of the transition programme and what could be changed?***

- Holding an evening meeting as well so parents can come and see the classroom, meet the teacher before their child starts school (now being implemented)
- Having a transition to school report that details the child's literacy and numeracy development as well as social behaviours to allow any school to understand that not all children are at the same basic level
- Only addition maybe would be to emphasise that they don't need to know how to read and spell etc before starting school – seeing the other kids being able to do that was a little intimidating
- Staying at the school for a morning tea break to show the children (and us) the expectations, what to eat and do etc (now being implemented)

**Responses from Kindergarten and Year 1 School Students who had participated in the Transition to School Programme**

***Can you tell us about visiting the school / what do you / did you like doing when you visited the classroom?***

- I have friends in the classroom and I do work
- It was great
- It was feeling warm and comfy. I missed my kindy friends but I could see them again
- I liked Mum coming with me
- I was excited and I liked doing what the other kids were doing
- I liked coming with the other kids and I could be with my friends already at school, it's fun and you make things
- I really liked it because I know where all the things are – I like the classroom - it is very special to me
- Mummies and Daddies can come too and I can play with the other children
- I liked singing and looking at the books
- I can see my brother and my friends at school
- I like the games we play and listening to the teacher

***What do you think is different at school?***

- The classroom is. It has a big step. Bags go on the hooks out the back
- I play with someone else – that is different. My clothes are different. The class is smaller at school.

- More cooler and I like the big kids. I have my own book and getting to be the special helper
- Different clothes, and the playground too. The slide is bigger
- They have no swings like at Kindy but they have a ginormous slide and there are 2 poles that are red and go all the way (flying fox)
- We wear a uniform everyday
- The teachers are different. The playground is too and there is not 1 thing the same there
- The toys are different but the teachers are the same when you go there
- More classes, more people, more work
- The whole school is bigger than our kindy
- It has different toilets and it has steps

***What did you learn from the visits to school?***

- I have learnt what to do and what it is like in the classroom
- I have learnt to be a schoolgirl
- I am learning to write and dancing too
- Big words are really hard to write
- I learnt how to be a schoolboy and grow fast
- I learnt where things go and what to do
- I have learnt counting and new letters and games
- To write more words and sing songs
- I know where the toilets are and what to do in the classroom
- I have to listen to the teacher
- We learnt maths like 4 - 3
- It was fun
- I learnt how to climb up the top of the playground
- I learnt painting and writing stories with a picture – I already know how to do it but I hadn't done it at school

***How did going to the school for visits help you?***

- I am happy to go to school because I have been heaps
- It makes me big, it feels better
- I have been going heaps of times without my Mum and Dad
- I know what to do so I am ready for school
- I was ready cause I had had lots of learning first
- It made me a school boy. I knew what to do and where to go. It was good to be a big boy
- I 'feeled' a little bit scared but not a lot. It was fun. It helped me feel like a school girl
- I got used to school

***How ready did you feel for school (1 being lowest, 5 being highest)***

- Of the 14 students surveyed 2 chose 4 and 12 chose 5
- I am nearly ready – I am not quite fully ready
- I was really ready

***What else could we do to help other children get ready for school?***

- Go more times
- Take our bags sometimes

- Eat morning tea at school
- Have more lego at school like at kindy
- Stay at playtime and stay longer
- I want to come for lunch time

**New Entrant Students at Anchorage Park School who have participated in the Transition to School Programme are generally ....**

- Well on the way to becoming independent
- Very settled in class
- Confident and aware of learning and behaviour expectations / routines
- On beginning school, have already developed positive relationships with the teacher and other students in the class

**How can Anchorage Park School & Anchorage Park Kindergarten further develop and improve the transition programme for students and their families?**

- During the transition visits / first year at school continue to give students opportunities and encouragement to:
  - make appropriate choices
  - develop their independence
  - interact socially and responsibly with other students in the new entrant class and with their Year 4 / 5 reading buddies
  - manage their own behavior - being responsible for their own actions and awareness of consequences
  - develop self-motivation, organisational skills, initiative and the confidence to take risks
- Continue to incorporate developmental activities into the transition / new entrant programme to help students make connections between kindergarten and school
- Use the 'Ready for School' booklets developed by the New Entrant Teacher and the Kindergarten teachers to assist parents with suggestions, skills and strategies that will help them to help their child to cope with the more formal structure, curriculum, & organisation of school
- Continue to regularly discuss student achievement, social & emotional needs etc with the Kindergarten teachers
- As part of the transition programme continue to make opportunities for teachers and families to meet with each other through formal and informal meetings, 1 to 1 conversations etc.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Continue to meet regularly with the Kindergarten teachers throughout each term to exchange information about achievement, behaviour, social skills, family background etc of the students who are transitioning / have transitioned to Anchorage Park School.

- Each year, survey parents of our New Entrant students to identify issues, trends etc. Share this information with our staff and the Kindergarten & use to inform our teaching & learning programmes.
- Introduce a Maths Buddy programme as appropriate to individual student needs to complement the current Reading Buddy programme
- Continue to include the Kindergarten teachers in curriculum reviews especially Numeracy & Literacy so that stronger links / connections can be made between Te Whāriki and the NZ Curriculum to inform our learning programmes
- Offer the ‘Reading Together’ programme every 2 years for parents of preschool students and especially for those with children transitioning to school.
- Build on the home partnership relationships established at the kindergarten through the ‘Story Park’ app by using ‘Seesaw’ learning blog app here at school.

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