

Making *Connections*



*schools and child care
services, partners
for early learning.*

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Minister's message

Early childhood education, and support for families who have children in the years prior to school, are amongst my highest priorities as Minister. Making Connections has been written to promote and support partnerships between schools and child care services that support families and early learning for our youngest children. It has been developed through the Early Years Reference Group which brings together representatives from schools and childcare services. Making Connections provides practical advice, guidance and checklists that will be helpful in the development of new partnerships, and in supporting the many partnerships that already exist between schools and services. Through Launching into Learning we have been able to foster the partnerships we need. I am sure principals and directors will find Making Connections of great assistance as we continue our work together.



David Bartlett MHA
Minister for Education



Early Years development matters

Substantial evidence shows us that the early years of life are critical for all aspects of human development. A good start in the early years has a significant impact on children's future education and health, and on behavioural and social development.

Supporting families and children during this time helps all children to achieve their potential, and can improve quality of life for vulnerable children. Investment in the early years provides returns in economic prosperity and reduces the social and economic costs associated with crime, social welfare and health.

In Australia, there is increased interest in ensuring that young children and their families have access to high quality connected health, child care and education services. Government and non-government agencies are collaborating to strengthen the capacity of families and communities to support the early learning and development of young children¹.

B-4 school educational initiatives really help learning

Connecting early childhood care and education completes the picture of an education system which promotes lifelong learning², starting at birth. Through partnerships and connections between child care, parents and schools, learning in the early years is becoming an integral part of education.

From birth children enjoy learning. The benefits of providing rich experiences for children in the early years are uncontested. Research shows that these experiences shape brain development which strongly influences learning, behaviour and health throughout life.³

Helping families helps children. Parents and families are the first and most powerful influence on children's early development. A child's early intellectual and social development is more strongly influenced by the quality of their home learning environment than either parental education or occupation. In other words, what parents do is more important than who parents are.⁴

Research indicates that children who make a smooth transition to school and experience early success are likely to be socially competent and achieve better results throughout their schooling.

Schools can provide expertise, support and an excellent base for a range of early years services. Through collaborative partnerships, schools can also assist families and children to access other services such as health and family support.

Principals and teachers can help to ensure that families and community partners have a good understanding of how to make the best of early learning prior to school. High quality age-appropriate educational environments and programs provided by child care services are an integral part of lifelong learning.

Quality learning in child care

Many children spend significant time in child care and many teachers and child care professionals work with the same children and parents on a daily basis. Child care services share with schools the goals of meeting the needs of children and families, and promoting early learning.

¹ Whole of Government Early Years Framework for Action

² UNESCO Policy Briefs on Early Childhood No 3 May 2002

³ McCain, Mustard and Shanker, *Putting Science into Action: Early Years Study 2* 2007

⁴ Universities of London, Oxford & Nottingham, *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project* 2004

Child care services and schools are partners in early learning

High quality services make a major contribution to learning prior to school by providing education and development programs which strengthen young children's images of themselves as confident, capable learners.

By working together with consistent expectations and connected learning programs, teachers and child care professionals can ensure a smooth transition into kindergarten and better support families managing their sometimes complex work schedules.

Many child care professionals have training and qualifications equivalent with teachers in early childhood classes, and have much experience and knowledge to offer teachers working with younger children for the first time.

The partnership with Outside School Hours Care services

Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services are an integral part of the lives of many Australian school-aged children and their families. OSHC includes before and after school care and vacation care.

OSHC services support workforce participation by families. They provide safe play spaces and support social and emotional development through a varied and flexible program of activities. The environment used needs to suit the emotional, physical and developmental requirements of the age range of children attending. There should be easy movement between school and before and/or after school care.

Many OSHC services have strong links with their local school communities and other agencies which assist families to develop support networks. When services operate from a school there are many opportunities to work collaboratively with the school community to support a consistent child-centred approach to education, health and well being.

Current child care services in schools

73 government schools⁵ have one or more child care services on-site (63 OSHC, 22 long day care and 5 occasional care). These are provided by community-based, local government, private and corporate providers as well as school associations.

The information in ***Making Connections*** is relevant for schools without child care on their site, where:

- » students enrol in school from a child care setting;
- » students attend OSHC services;
- » families or teachers may consider the provision of child care in the future.

Establishing and building partnerships

The experiences of child care providers and schools indicate a number of areas are important to effective partnerships. Appendix 1 has checklists for each area and the Office, Early Years can provide further advice and assistance, contact details in Appendix 2.

Communication

Communication is vital to good relationships. While day-to-day conversations are important, experience shows that regular meetings held between representatives of the child care service and school are vital. Regular, scheduled communication ensures ongoing planning and improvements to the partnership and develops mutual respect and understanding.

Sharing information about students

Sharing information about students will enable schools and providers to deliver an improved service to children and their families. This information may be about the child's learning or behaviour; timetabling kindergarten and child care sessions, or the transition between services and schools. It is important and necessary to obtain parental permission for the exchange of confidential information.

Licensing and quality assurance

To meet licensing and quality assurance requirements, and to enable parents to access the Child Care Benefit, child care services must meet a number of standards relating to staffing, programming and facilities. These include provisions about space required, site documentation and what has to be displayed on the walls inside the service.

Managing the use of facilities

In deciding the best location for child care it is important for the school and the service to jointly consider the needs of children, the service and the school. Agreeing to protocols on the use of school facilities, particularly where they are shared on a daily basis, is critical to ensuring the best possible ongoing service.

Potential opportunities and directions

Once the relationship has been successfully established, there are a number of ways to develop and strengthen both the relationship and services to children and their families. A number of ideas are suggested here and there are many other directions which will suit your school, service and community.

Establishing a new child care service on a school site

Initial factors to consider

- » Consult with families to identify the level of need
- » Consider the broader context of service provision occurring within the community and the impact a new service might have
- » Consider the future enrolment numbers in the school and the impact of this on the space available
- » Determine whether the school can provide access to appropriate buildings and resources for a child care service for a number of years
- » Assess how the service could improve educational outcomes for students
- » Consult with the Child Care Unit on licensing requirements
- » Consider possible locations in the light of limited departmental funding available to support the provision of child care in schools
- » If there is no suitable location, talk to another school to see if joint provision is possible, or set up a strong connection with the nearest available child care service
- » Contact the Office, Early Years for support and advice

Next Steps

- » Contact possible service providers to gauge their interest and their ideas on the proposed venue and potential service viability
- » Enter into a tender process if required
- » Support any site works required to meet licensing standards
- » Negotiate the lease agreement including
 - » service and access times
 - » use of school equipment
 - » cleaning responsibilities
 - » meeting costs incurred by the school or service
 - » any alterations or additions that are needed to the location.
- » Finalise the lease in consultation with the Office, Early Years and Facilities Services

Appendix I – Checklists

Communication

It is often the “little things” that become the BIG things for people.

The following are ideas from schools and services to improve and support communication:

During the initial stages

- » Establish an advisory committee with representatives from parents, the school and service.
- » Know who is the director; person in charge, the principal, school executive officer; the teacher with whom space may be shared, and other key people such as the teacher aides and school attendants.
- » Encourage all staff to understand the value of the service and build mutual respect.
- » Develop a simple action plan to strengthen the partnership, which encourages interaction and provides practical assistance, and review this annually.
- » Provide each other with information about roles, rules, regulations and policies; share philosophies regarding child care and education. (This should include expectations and emergency procedures and lead to the development of shared rules or protocols.)
- » Develop, adopt and implement a common behaviour guide for joint activities.
- » Offer to share resources.
- » Develop safe pick up and delivery (or handover) arrangements which are clear for all staff, parents and children and meet duty of care responsibilities of both the school and the service.
- » Provide information meetings for parents to clarify any issues for families requiring both child care and kindergarten access.

Ongoing

- » Hold meetings regularly (suggest monthly). This will support liaison, foster links and partnership. It is important to involve the decision-makers from both sectors as well as those involved in daily service delivery.
- » Invite school/service staff to special events (open day, concerts, AGMs).
- » Develop and implement shared philosophy, curriculum goals and objectives, and pedagogical approaches to promote consistent practice.
- » Recognise that rules and protocols will never cover all possibilities, and that other solutions will need to be found.
- » Exchange newsletters and submit information to each other’s newsletters.
- » Send copy of service reports to the school and school reporting information to the service.
- » Plan ahead for student free days and how to deal with building or other site works such as spraying.

- » If low numbers cause viability issues, look at a joint strategy to address the issue.
- » Look for joint professional development opportunities and share learning documents.
- » Visit each others' facilities and consider any opportunities to exchange staff.
- » Offer joint activities to build reciprocal communication and connection with families.
- » Showcase successful linkages between the school and child care and with other relevant services.
- » Participate in professional learning which encourages collaboration for the benefit of children and families.
- » Have school enrolment processes for kindergarten which take account of those children needing child care, enabling child care services to provide parents with their required child care and sufficient time to fill remaining places.
- » Look at ways of jointly informing parents about any changes and improvements being made to the partnership as well as ways of jointly supporting parents to assist their children.

Sharing information about students

Supporting individual children

- » Ensure that parents have given approval for information about their child to be shared.
- » Arrange to bring together children's teachers and carers to discuss how to best meet the needs of the child.
- » Look at ways to screen or refer children and share knowledge about other early years services.

Supporting transitions

- » Schools should be aware which child care services their students have attended/are attending.
- » Child care services should be aware which schools their children will/attend.
- » If there needs to be an alteration to kindergarten hours or days, consult the relevant child care services to discuss the impact of changes on them and their families, and plan accordingly.
- » Develop shared expectations about the value of learning prior to school, and look at options for improving the transition process for children in child care, such as visits by teachers to the service, or children to the school, and
- » Consider strategies for the transfer of relevant, agreed information about the child from the child care service to the school.

Licensing and quality assurance

Child care providers must comply with standards in order to be licensed and be accredited under the national Child Care Quality Assurance System to enable families to access the Child Care Benefit (means tested by the Federal Government). A National Childcare Accreditation Council administers the Quality Assurance System for all child care services.

The Child Care Unit (Department of Education) is responsible for licensing under the Child Care Act 2001. To be licensed, services must comply with the Act and meet all relevant standards.

If schools understand these requirements they can greatly assist the service by:

- » Providing any requested documentation (eg glazing, fire safety equipment, soft fall, evacuation plans);
- » Enabling documents to be displayed to meet licensing or quality assurance requirements;
- » Ensuring that suitable storage can be provided, particularly for toxic substances;
- » Understanding how space, furniture and fittings impacts on the number of licensed places available;
- » Enabling modifications to space that may be required to meet licensing standards; and
- » Consulting in advance about any proposed changes to the site or any proposed move, so that any licensing or quality assurance problems can be avoided.

Quality Assurance: www.ncac.gov.au

Licensing: www.childcare.tas.gov.au

Managing the use of facilities

During the initial stages

- » Licensing and quality assurance issues need to be considered in deciding on possible locations. For example, if OSHC is placed in a less than desirable space, there may be greater costs associated with meeting requirements.
- » Information needs to be agreed and documented. This may include use of space, equipment and supplies, hours of operation, maintenance of facilities, the lease renewal process, and procedures in the event of an emergency school closure.
- » There needs to be suitable administration space and adequate display areas to showcase children's work.
- » If the venue and facilities are inadequate or inappropriate for the wide age range of the children attending, these programs become a difficult challenge. For example if programs operate from a Kindergarten room, the small size tables and chairs may not be appropriate for 10 or 11 year olds nor will kindergarten toilets located next to each other without any privacy.

Ongoing

- » Lease agreements may not contain some of the small but important details that ensure that things run smoothly, so these might need to be documented elsewhere.
- » Sometimes specific details of the lease may only be known by the service director and school senior staff, so it is important that some information is shared more widely to reduce misunderstandings.
- » When changes of staff occur (in either the school or the service) important information needs to be updated or passed on – such as the list of emergency contacts.

Where the space is shared

- » Agreement, based on mutual respect and joint responsibility, needs to be reached on the use of furniture, display space and equipment. A layout plan may be necessary if furniture needs to be repositioned ready for the next day.
- » In agreeing access times to the room, due consideration must be given to the needs of both the teacher and the service. One solution may be to have another licensed space for children to meet and begin activities, prior to moving to the main licensed venue.
- » Where a school has other after-school activities which might wish to use licensed OSHC space, contingency plans should be developed.
- » Consider joint use of other school space eg the library, to implement new common activities between the service and the school.

When changes are proposed

- » The school and service provider should work together to reduce the possible impact on the service whenever building or maintenance work is scheduled, especially over the school vacation periods.
- » There should be early joint discussion about the process if the school can no longer provide space and/or wants to terminate the contract – such as how the service provider will be informed and/or how much notice will be given. Similar processes should be in place if the service provider wishes to terminate the contract. In both cases, processes for informing parents need to be agreed.
- » Needs relating to current or future child care services should be considered whenever redevelopments are planned.

Potential opportunities and directions to further develop the partnership

- » Coordinate schedules and implement joint activities between schools and services to bring children, parent/caregivers and staff together
- » Offer child care during parent/teacher interview times or parent meetings
- » Share demographic and student data where possible
- » Share strategies to assist in earlier identification and additional support for children
- » Participate in case conferences or school meetings
- » Connect local child care services/family day carers with **Launching into Learning** activities
- » Offer knowledge and experience to teachers working in **Launching into Learning**
- » Look at the potential to move from co-existence to co-ordination, collaboration and towards integration. Where possible this would be inclusive of **Launching into Learning** and family support activities undertaken with other agencies.

Coexistence



- » Programs are located in the same building or neighbourhood but operate as separate and distinct services
- » Families need to make separate arrangement to participate

Coordination



- » Individual programs share information with each other such as program plans and behaviour guidance strategies
- » Share specific activities and provide joint events for families

Collaboration



- » Merge human resources, space and or materials
- » Regular joint story time/music group
- » Jointly prepared curriculum

Integration

- » Full integration of existing and expanded programs into an integrated early learning and care program delivery system within a defined neighbourhood or community
- » One curriculum and pedagogical approach
- » Common program, policies and practices
- » Seamless participation

Toronto First Duty Early - Learning and Care for Every Child- Indicators of Change

Joint activities

- » Share responsibility in planning and implementing joint activities
- » Undertake joint action research on the transition to kindergarten
- » Look for opportunities to combine approaches to monitoring children's development
- » Participate jointly in homework planning and support in OSHC services
- » Co-sponsor health initiatives or parenting workshops
- » Hold a joint function to recognise support and assistance for each other at the beginning/end of every year
- » Provide support for learning plans for children
- » Have a stall at school fairs or child care open days
- » Offer children's art work (undertaken during child care) for school display

Appendix 2 - Useful contacts and websites

Telephone contacts

Office, Early Years	☎ 6233 5099
Child Care Unit	☎ 6233 8812 or 1300 135 513
Facilities Services	☎ 6233 7283 or 1300 653 227
National Child Care Accreditation Council	☎ 1300 136 554
Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	☎ 1300 653 227

Sector websites

Early Childhood Australia	www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au
Family Day Care Australia	www.familydaycare.com.au
National Association of Community Based Children Services	www.cccinc.org.au/childrenfirst/
National Investment for the Early Years	www.niftey.cyh.com

Government Websites

Australian Government	www.australia.gov.au
Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	www.facs.gov.au
National Childcare Accreditation Council	www.ncac.gov.au
Raising Children	www.raisingchildren.net.au
Queensland Studies Authority	www.qsa.qld.edu.au/early/curriculum_guidelines/part3_partnerships.htm

Tasmanian Department of Education

Child Care Unit	www.childcare.tas.gov.au
Early Years	www.education.tas.gov.au/early-learning/early_years
Facilities Services	www.education.tas.gov.au/dept/about/contact/corporate_services/ffbs
Toronto First Duty	www.toronto.ca/firstduty/index.htm www.toronto.ca/firstduty/indicators_oct2005.pdf



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