

Re-thinking primary to secondary school transition – a critical time for students

Case study – Beach Road Partnership June 2018



Government
of South Australia

Department for Education



Increasing connectedness in the year 7 to 8 transition

The Beach Road Partnership set out to increase connectedness for all stakeholders when transitioning from year 7 to year 8. They trialled a supportive transition program into Christies Beach High School.

Moving from primary school to secondary school is a significant event in every child's education journey. For some students, however, it's more of a challenge to leave the comfort and familiarity of their primary school. We know they can lose their connection with school and learning at this time, which is why whole-school planning is vitally important for school staff to make the transition a positive experience for all students and their families.

Within the Beach Road Partnership high levels of vulnerability were highlighted in the Australian Early Development Census and Middle Years Development Instrument data. The partnership decided to focus on students transitioning from primary to high school, in the hope that providing targeted support at this time would help develop and strengthen positive relationships with peers and high school staff, as well as provide opportunities for students to familiarise themselves with the social dynamics.

"The move from primary to secondary school is a major milestone in each young person's life. This transition, although exciting, can be challenging for some students as they undergo a period of great change in a new educational environment and begin to form individual opinions, values and beliefs. Christies Beach High School is committed to working closely with primary schools to ensure that every child experiences a smooth and successful transition into high school and is provided with every opportunity to achieve success."

(Amanda Bennett, Assistant Principal Middle School)

What did we do?

Establishing a partnership planning and coordination group

A cross-partnership working group was established, which gathered baseline data, attendance and EDSAS behaviour data, consulted on project design, resources needed and how best to engage Aboriginal students and families, as well as appropriate outcome measures. The group met monthly to monitor and track how the initiative was being implemented.

Led by an external consultant, multiple evaluation methods were selected across stakeholder groups such as pre and post-survey (online and hand written,) focus groups, interviews, data comparison and review meetings.

Transition coordinator

A year 8 leader based at Christies Beach High School was appointed as the transition coordinator to lead the project. The assistant principal for the middle school was the key contact for primary school staff to refer families to. The transition coordinator was responsible for assisting students and their family during the transition process by providing continuity of support. The transition coordinator was a great resource for the students and their families when making transition decisions.

Guiding documents

The main documents that guided the implementation of the initiative included:

- **year 7 to 8 transition program outline** – this provided key transition dates and actions in each week of terms 3 and 4, including department support meetings and handover meetings for the future student information forms. Christies Beach High School held a transition day for feeder primary schools to

provide feedback on the program, which was then provided to partnership principals and out-of-zone schools with students identified as coming to Christies Beach High School

- **future student information form** – Christies Beach High School developed and used this tool to collect detailed information about each individual student transitioning to Christies Beach High School including personal information, support services, literacy and numeracy ability, engagement and wellbeing, student behaviour and relationships
- **year 7 transition information booklet** – an introduction for students and families to Christies Beach High School including the school daily structure, expectations around attendance, bookwork standards, school uniform, bullying and harassment, learning intervention and support, specialist programs and general expectations
- **transition project action plan** – this documented actions, person responsible and timelines.

Student, staff and family activities

Multiple activities were undertaken to promote positive interactions and relationships between transitioning students from several feeder primary schools, other students at Christies Beach High School, families and staff. Regular, new and enhanced transition activities offered included:

- year 7 information evenings for all families, principal tours and transition packs that included the transition guiding documents listed above
- student visits to Christies Beach High School and high school staff visiting primary schools helped students feel supported, so they understood how the school is run, expectations and where to go



- the high school Aboriginal education team connected with the Aboriginal community education officers across the partnership to identify those Aboriginal students transitioning who were disengaged from school
- identifying vulnerable cohorts of children and developing plans to better support their transition
- a year 8 youth worker and a school services officer level 3 who visited primary schools and conducted home visits during the holidays to support vulnerable students and keep them connected and engaged over the holiday period. At the home visits the youth worker had conversations with families about the camp
- a day at the Targeted Learning Centre for those students who needed learning and intervention support offered to identified students and their families transitioning. This also provided an opportunity for students and their families to observe how the centre works, and for students, families and staff to begin developing relationships

- a whole-of-partnership 3-day [camp](#) beginning term 4, for year 7 students transitioning to Christies Beach High School. High school staff commented that in the past, students at risk who felt particularly nervous and anxious when transitioning to high school became disengaged from school. Staff felt the camp was a proactive way to keep students engaged and coming to school, as it provided opportunities to build friendships and meet the high school teachers. Staff experienced the camp as a more effective way of connecting students to stay engaged, rather than being reactive trying to encourage disengaged students back to school.



Outcomes, what we learnt and keys to success

Christies Beach High School considered the transition initiative a success due to:

- a considered, whole-of-partnership, carefully planned process
- a strong local presence including at feeder primary schools and with students and families
- actively listening to and hearing students, families and staff voices and considering their feedback to improve the process
- increased enrolments from out of Christies Beach High School zone and feeder primary schools

Connectedness of students, families and staff

Evaluation focus groups identified that overall there was increased connectedness for students during the transition process, supported by keeping people involved along the journey.

Most students experienced positive interactions through transition activities. Some commented that ‘it wasn’t as hard to make friends’ as they’d thought, since they already knew people when they started at high school. Students said they felt supported by visiting the high school and by having visits from the high school to their primary school.

Bullying was identified as a factor contributing to the uneven experience of the transition process and connectedness to the school. This highlighted the need to review and enhance existing strategies to address bullying at the high school in collaboration with feeder primary schools.

Staff who participated in transition activities, including the camp, commented how they helped ease anxiety for the students and parents, and how the opportunity to develop and strengthen relationships helped relieve some students’ previous apprehension.

The evaluation identified the need to expand the role of the youth worker in the transition process. Two additional programs developed to further support transitioning year 7 students’ familiarity with the high school environment and relationships with Christies Beach High School staff and year 8 students are:

- Drumbeat – focused on social-emotional-relational challenges, offered once a week during term 4. Year 7s are identified from feeder schools and visit Christies Beach High School to work with year 8s and the youth worker

- Fitness – offered each Wednesday during term 4 to identified year 7 and 8 students and led by the year 8 youth worker.

“From a high school perspective, students were more engaged in the first weeks of high school as they had met and talked before. It made it a lot easier when they came as they already knew each other, so could catch up and reconnect. They were a bit more comfortable and could get stuck into learning. The year before, it was a complete chaos by week 2.”

(Staff member)

The evaluation revealed that in the early stages, on average students felt safer, had an improved sense of belonging and were positively connected to their new learning environment. Initial data analysis shows a decrease in behavioural incidents and non-attendance from the cohort that experienced the transition process.

It was recognised that some families may not be ready for the transition even if the student is ready, sometimes due to their own experience with high school, so it was important to recognise family wellbeing. Strong relationships between school staff and families build staff knowledge of the families to help smoothly integrate them into the transition process.

Some comments from stakeholders recognising the new transition process increased stakeholder connectedness included:

- parent comment – ‘settling just fine and really blossoming’
- student comments –
 - ‘opportunity to meet everyone and learn our way around’
 - ‘activities helped find friends with same qualities as you’
 - ‘camp helped learn teachers’ names to feel confident asking for help and they would tell me who to go to if I was feeling down’
 - ‘having friendly face stopped me feeling so lonely’
 - ‘making friends was not hard as I knew people from camp’
- staff comment –
 - ‘students more engaged in first few weeks of school, as had met and connected before and already knew each other and felt more comfortable so focussed on learning’.

Connectedness of schools

Links were strengthened between feeder primary schools and the high school and staff developed greater knowledge, skills and confidence working with each other to communicate information about school to the student and family.

Transition documents and information

Students were surveyed by Christies Beach High School after they started high school about whether they were prepared and knew what to expect before starting at the school. Most students commented that although the information was very comprehensive, it was too extensive and unnecessary to receive all at once. Suggestions to improve existing information included:

- streamlining and highlighting information applicable to each stakeholder
- re-ordering the curriculum handbook by year level rather than subject and provide more clarity on how to use it
- briefly outlining essential information at the beginning of the handbook
- providing further, more detailed information on things that are useful but not vital to know immediately.

The transition process identifying more detail about individual year 7 students was necessary to enable Christies Beach High School to put supports in place tailored to the individual student.

From partnership discussions it was decided that greater support was needed for primary schools to ensure students with disabilities and additional needs had the funding they needed in place to transition effectively. As a result, a new Christies Beach High School intervention support leader position has increased support for feeder primary schools and is working more closely with year 7 teachers in the second half of the school year.

In term 3, the assistant middle school principal sent the 'year 7 to 8 transition future student information form' to every year 7 teacher for them to complete. On receipt of the completed forms, they collated the individual information into the document 'Future student information analysis', which the intervention support leader will analyse in future years, and from this develop individual student transition plans.

Out-of-zone schools provided feedback that they needed more information and as a result Christies Beach High School planned a half-day visit for them in term 3, 2018. As an outcome of this visit, students were offered placements for 2019.

Camp

The camp provided opportunities to develop relationships and deeper connections. In the past, primary schools would visit at a specific time so there was little interaction between students from different primary schools.

Students suggested improvements for the year 7 camp that related mainly to the environment. Some mentioned feeling apprehensive on arriving at the camp as facilities were not as expected, e.g. there was limited WiFi and students did not expect the kind of facilities available. This could have been reduced had they been informed before the camp.



Considerations for planning transition activities

Reflecting on the evaluations and experience of conducting the transition program, the following considerations are suggested:

- plan well in advance of the start of the transition process and allow up to 6 months to scope, plan and design the approach to transition
- give students and parents enough time and information to make an informed choice about future schools and effective collaboration between transition schools that results in sharing of all relevant information
- consider, understand and acknowledge the developmental needs of students – transition to secondary school occurs at a time when students are also experiencing many physical and emotional developmental changes
- make opportunities for effective training/professional learning that has a positive impact on outcomes and the wellbeing of educators/staff
- continue providing consistent curriculum support to build the student and family's level of confidence to know what they can expect
- consider dedicating regular staff release time to develop/adapt resources (strategies, materials), to reflect and evaluate activities, network on site and across the partnership and follow up with students/families
- work closely with staff from feeder primary schools to support smooth planning of transition activities, including carefully coordinating transition days to avoid clashes with pre-booked activities. Working closely with feeder schools is facilitated with leadership commitment and support at the site level and shared commitment and responsibility for all staff

- Focus on developing strong relationships between school staff and families. Building staff knowledge of the families helps smoothly integrate them into the new school.

Resources for sites

View sample guiding year 7 to 8 transition documents developed by Christies Beach High School

[Sample year 7 transition information booklet – Christies Beach High School \(PDF, 460.5 KB\)](#)

[Sample year 7 to 8 transition program 2018 – Christies Beach High School \(PDF, 521.2 KB\)](#)

[Sample year 7 to 8 transition 2018 future student information form – Christies Beach High School \(PDF, 672.2 KB\)](#)

[Transitioning From Primary To Secondary School](#) (Victorian Government) including:

- Transition planning checklist – primary school
- Transition planning checklist – secondary school
- Transition statement template.

[Transition From Primary To Secondary School](#) (WA Government)

Resources for parents

Moving from primary school to high school is a big transition. It can be a time full of fun, excitement and new experiences, but it can also be challenging or worrying for many children. Visit [Starting Secondary School](#) to find ways to help your child feel prepared and supported.

Further information

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