

CONTINUITY OF LEARNING

# Pathways from early learning to school



**ourplace**  
education is the key to the door

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Our Place acknowledges the First Nations people of Australia and Traditional Custodians of the lands that we live and work on, and recognise their continuing connection to land, water and culture. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their Elders past, present and emerging. We are committed to working together for a brighter future.



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# Introduction



## PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

This paper explores the concept of ‘Continuity of Learning’ as a future approach to supporting children aged 0–8 on their learning journey from early learning through to school in order to improve education outcomes.

An overview of the case for a continuity of learning approach is presented, demonstrating the need for greater collaboration between the early learning and school systems. Drawing upon literature and research, the importance of organisational, curriculum, pedagogical and assessment continuity is explained.

This paper provides relevant support and guidance for policy makers, leaders and educators across both early learning and school environments to support improved education outcomes. It is recognised that this paper describes an aspirational approach that would require significant policy change in most cases. This does not discount the progress being made across Australia towards greater continuity of learning in many contexts. This is a future focused paper on what we would like the system to become, not a critique of current approaches.

The Appendices provide some practical resources for navigating the conversations and change processes required to move to a continuity of learning approach. These are intended as guides only and are by no means

complete. Rather, they are a set of ‘living documents’ that will continue to evolve as further resources are developed from real-world application. The design and demonstration of new resources takes time and requires investment but can be a powerful driver of learning for systems change (Corter et al., 2012).

## ABOUT OUR PLACE

Our Place is a unique cross-sectoral initiative of the Colman Education Foundation. Through the Foundation’s ten-year partnership with the Victorian state government, it is being implemented in ten school sites across Victoria, with the support of philanthropic partners.

Our Place’s vision is to ensure that all children and families succeed in life, no matter where they live and believes that education is the key to achieving this vision.

Our Place is a holistic place-based approach that supports the education, health and development of all children and families in disadvantaged communities by utilising the universal platform of schools. Through facilitated partnerships, schools are empowered to be the central place for supports and services that are known to overcome many of the barriers to educational achievement. The Our Place approach has been built on the recognition that families must be able to meet children and young people’s health, developmental and wellbeing needs,



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**Our Place’s vision is that all children and families succeed in life, no matter where they live. Education is the key to achieving this vision.**

and that those closest to the child (especially parents) must value education and role model learning in ways that support aspirations and realise opportunities. While schools are central, the Our Place focus extends beyond the classroom to the broader environment for children and families, especially those experiencing disadvantage.

To this end, Our Place facilitates partnerships between the school, local government, the early learning service provider and the community to enable schools to offer all the supports and services that will improve the lives and aspirations of children, young people and their families.

Our Place also focuses on the wider service system and seeks to influence changes in policies and practices that address the structural causes of disadvantage. This is achieved by taking a holistic approach to untapping potential – as reflected in the five elements at the heart of the approach:

- High-quality early learning, health and development
- High-quality schooling
- Engagement and enrichment activities for children and families
- Adult engagement, volunteering, education and employment
- Wrap-around health and wellbeing services

Each element is built on a strong body of evidence of what actually works to improve life and learning outcomes. Importantly, Our Place is not a direct provider of services or programs. The Our Place is the ‘glue’ that enables all the parts of the integrated, place-based approach to work effectively as a whole. Their expertise is in building long-term relationships and coordinating the engagement, consultation and data-informed planning that helps to drive innovation, targeted service development and a changed way of working with families and the community.

Our Place recognises that continuity of learning is especially important for vulnerable children who have the most to lose from a fragmented approach, and the most to gain from continuity and cooperation between those that support them in their learning.

The philosophies and practices of a continuity of learning approach therefore inform how Our Place works with early learning centres and schools to deliver an integrated and supportive experience for children across their sites. •

# Why is continuity of learning important?

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## EARLY EDUCATION AND CARE BENEFITS ALL CHILDREN

Children's early experiences with education systems have lasting impacts on their relationships, well-being and engagement in learning (Shuey et al., 2019). It can be the difference between children developing academically and socially to their full potential - or not (OECD, 2017).

## CONSISTENCY AND CONTINUITY MATTERS

There is clear evidence that children benefit from high-quality experiences that build on each other steadily over time, with consistency in both early learning and school across curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015).

Consistency and continuity are of particular importance during the period that children move through the early learning and primary school systems. A stressful transition can negatively impact children's academic and emotional capabilities (Nicholson, 2019).

## WITHOUT CONTINUITY, THE BENEFITS OF EARLY LEARNING CAN FADE

When children move from one learning environment to another that is inconsistent with the previous, their emerging skills and abilities may stagnate or slip backwards. Particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable children, the benefits of participation in high-quality early learning settings often fade out when they are in primary school settings with different approaches (Stipek, 2017, Reynolds, 2019, Stipek, 2019, Jacobson, 2019).

This was evidenced by a study of the Chicago Child-Parent Center Program which found that a continuum of effective teaching and learning from preschool through to the early years of elementary school, plus the engagement of supporting of families, led to greater tertiary education attainment in the long term (Reynolds et al., 2018). The fade-out of early learning that had been

observed in many early childhood education enrichment initiatives did not occur. Rather the early learning gains were consolidated and continued into later school years and beyond, including higher tertiary education achievement. Importantly, the Centres were available to all children in the catchment area, so families did not have to identify as 'in need', reducing stigmatisation.

## WITH CONTINUITY, THE BENEFITS OF EARLY LEARNING ENDURE

New learning experiences will be most effective if they are linked to what children already know, their own awareness of their learning journey, and their sense of identity as a learner (Dunlop, 2003). In other words, early learning benefits can be either leveraged or diminished by the transition to primary school (Shuey et al., 2019).

## DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN HAVE THE MOST TO LOSE

Taking shared responsibility for children's success is particularly important when serving children facing risk of education exclusion. Evidence indicates that children facing additional challenges all too often fail to make the same levels of progress and underachieve when compared against their peers.

The evidence also indicated that vulnerable children are the ones who have the most to gain from both high-quality early learning and improved continuity in leaning through to school (OECD, 2018). Just as the advantages from an effective early years' experience are greater for children facing education disadvantage, so too are the advantages greater of a continuity of learning approach.

This is even more important in a time of crisis, with the COVID-19 pandemic creating even greater disadvantages for vulnerable children, as reported in a recent report by The Grattan Institute. Continuity of learning is not just a 'nice to have', it is a means of achieving greater equity and improving outcomes for all (Sonnemann and Goss, 2020). •

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, is sitting on the floor in a classroom, facing four children. The children are sitting on colorful pillows (green, blue, and striped) and looking towards the woman. The background shows a classroom with wooden shelves and a whiteboard.

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**Consistency and continuity are of particular importance during the period that children move through the early learning and primary school systems.**

# Key concepts

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## A MOVE FROM TRANSITION TO CONTINUITY

The need for improved alignment between the early learning and school education systems has become increasingly recognised. And some progress has been made through a focus on 'successful transitions' (Cook and Coley, 2019).

Indeed, across Australia, there are a range of policy documents and support materials that have been developed with the aim of promoting positive transitions (Dockett and Perry, 2014).

The challenge is that, while a positive move, transitions frameworks tend to be heavily influenced by a focus on 'school readiness' rather than bridging system differences. This is not to say readiness is not important, but rather that it is limited in focus. The lens through which individual children's skills are interpreted is largely that of school expectations and practices (Dockett and Perry, 2014).

In other words, the child is expected to align to school norms - what to learn and how to behave - as well as to comply with current school accountability measures and assessment processes. Such an approach is limited because it does not place enough value on the child's pre-existing experiences, knowledge and learning strategies (Babić, 2017).

It has also unintentionally led to a convergence of curricula in a way that imposes school goals and practices on early learning - known as 'schoolification' (Shuey et al., 2019, Jay and Knaus, 2018, Nicholson, 2019).

A readiness focus can also lack emphasis on the importance of wider child, family, community and educational contexts in promoting positive transitions (Dockett and Perry, 2014).

While current efforts to create smoother transitions are important, there is a need to go beyond bridging contexts to actually reducing the difference between the two. When true continuity of learning is achieved, with a unified learning pathway, transition will no longer be required. It is important to emphasise

that current discontinuity is not the fault of any one system, nor any single department or portfolio.

The early learning and school systems are both complex and diverse. This is not just about schools changing their methods, or only early learning settings changing theirs. Creating greater continuity will take time and effort on both sides.

But as both systems become increasingly focussed on the benefits of continuity for the child, the conversations and collaborations required for improved alignment will become easier. And as demarcations between systems are removed, forging a shared path forward should become much more business as usual.

## WORKING DIFFERENTLY TOGETHER

A continuity of learning approach is underpinned by 'ways of working' that enable the early learning and school systems to deliver a unified learning experience for children.

This is because developing opportunities for shared learning and developing greater continuity of learning for children requires the adults working across early years and primary education to act differently together.

All too often, training and continuing professional development opportunities are not aligned for educators in early learning and teachers in schools.

Finding opportunities for shared learning, shared understanding and greater collaboration between adults working with young children, no matter the setting, will help to build greater capacity, mutual understanding and improved outcomes for children. Moving towards continuity involves new ways of working that include a willingness to be:

- **Collaborative** – with early learning and school staff engaging in dialogue and collaboration to create a continuous learning environment
- **Intentional** – with a focus on knowing each child and being intentional in how knowledge is shared about each child across early learning and school settings.



This is also about ensuring children themselves are well prepared for the challenges and expectations they will face;

- **Child-focused** – by prioritising the child’s interests and needs and starting where the child is at and working towards achieving agreed upon outcomes;
- **Cumulative** – by appreciating prior learning and recognising a child’s existing learning styles and dispositions;
- **Empowering** – by creating aligned curriculum that empowers children’s learning and reinforces individualised learning journeys

As stated above, it is recognised that this future-focused paper is ambitious in describing an aspirational approach that would require significant policy change in most cases. •

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**Unless we are ambitious in changing ways of working, then we cannot be ambitious in our hopes for improving children’s education outcomes.**



# Key components

## DEFINING CONTINUITY

Continuity in the context of a transition from one educational setting to another can vary – and be of varying importance – for different children (Wilder and Lillvist, 2018). Both the early learning and school systems are governed by different policies and regulations, and guided by different philosophies and expectations for children and families (Cook and Coley, 2019). Genuine continuity requires the development of shared goals regarding knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and learning environments (Shuey et al., 2019).

A continuity of learning approach is enabled by:

- **Social and relational continuity** – maintaining peer-relations as much as possible during transitions (Dockett and Perry, 2014);
- **Physical continuity** – maintaining similarities in learning environment in both settings (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015);
- **Philosophical continuity** – a shared mindset and consistency in values, concepts and methods used in the different settings (Wilder and Lillvist, 2018).

More specifically, continuity of learning is comprised of four essential components:

1. **Organisational and professional continuity** – alignment in educational system governance and collaboration and consistency across the early learning and school workforces
2. **Curriculum continuity** – broad learning pathways and specific learning outcomes that extend through to age 8, with recognition that early cognitive, social-emotional and physical competencies are built on over time;
3. **Pedagogical continuity** – with common teaching practices that include direct instruction and experiential/inquiry learning approaches;
4. **Assessment continuity** – ongoing formative and summative assessment which allows early years and primary school teachers to work from where a child is towards achieving those outcomes, linked to learning pathways (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015).

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**Whatever the steps taken, it's important that schools and early learning settings build from their strengths and avoid a blanket 'one size fits all' approach.**



Creating continuity of learning requires working to align these four essential components. This section provides further information on what each of these components mean. While the priorities for change or 'the what' will need be determined locally, the 'how' is likely to include these components.

## ORGANISATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONTINUITY

Organisational and professional continuity is characterised by alignment in education system governance and collaboration and consistency across the early learning and school workforces. A continuity of learning approach is not as simple as it might sound. Achieving this requires educators and teachers across both early years and school settings to reconsider their policies, procedures, and practices. It is also important to note that educators and teachers are not the only people responsible for policies, procedures and practices. Centre directors, school principals, and government departments also all have an important role here. A positive first step would be to make the conscious decision to understand and appreciate each other's diverse perspectives and discover common understandings that can be hidden behind different vocabulary for the same concepts. This



## CASE STUDY - CHANGING RESULTS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN (CY4YC), CANADA

[cr4yr.com](http://cr4yr.com)

would require honest dialogue about the challenges of navigating bureaucratic and practical constraints on curriculum and pedagogical alignment. A second step may include developing and implementing new governance and collaboration structures that facilitate the move towards a more unified approach to learning. This would require supportive leadership. It may also require dedicated cross-system teams that are tasked with managing and developing relationships between early years settings and schools (Jay and Knaus, 2018). It is likely that a range of policies and procedures would also need to be reconsidered, especially where this ensures greater consistency.

A particular area of focus may need to be the current differences across the early learning and school workforces. Despite their shared objective of nurturing and securing the future success of young children, education professionals across early learning and school systems are not as cohesive a workforce as it could be. This is partly fuelled by different qualifications and working conditions for educators and teachers across both systems (Shuey et al., 2019). The expectations and requirements for professional preparation and credentials have not kept pace with the science of child development (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015).

In the long term, it may be appropriate that all adults working with children aged 0–8 train together, with both school and early learning settings recognising the same qualifications and ascribing equal professional value and status. While this may not be feasible in the short term, an immediate action could be to create new opportunities for shared professional development and learning. >

An example of a collaborative inquiry project is CR4YC. It brings together Community-based Early Childhood Educators, Strong Start Facilitators, and Kindergarten Teachers who are released to work collaboratively in six joint professional learning sessions with release time provided by the CR4YC Project. CR4YC focuses on social and emotional well-being to improve outcomes for young children. One of the CR4YC goals is to identify and apply a strengthened understanding of quality practices associated with improving the social and emotional well-being of young children. Another goal is to increase the coherence in pedagogy between Early Childhood Educators and Primary Educators.

In its first year, educators at three sites, representing eight British Columbia school districts and communities, met seven times over several months to explore and reflect on practices for enhancing the social and emotional well-being of young children. At each site, an equal number of educators from StrongStart British Columbia BC programs, Community-based Early Childhood Programs, and Kindergarten classes met with a facilitator to pursue their own questions related to several facets of social and emotional well-being. Groups explored practices, recorded and shared observations, interpreted what they observed, and planned strategies to support social and emotional well-being.

## › CURRICULUM CONTINUITY

Curriculum continuity is characterised by broad learning pathways that identify specific learning outcomes up to the age of eight, with recognition that early cognitive, social-emotional and physical competencies are built on over time. The impact of two systems is most apparent in the context of curriculum. At school, curriculum documents tend to address age-specific learning goals or standards, either according to school grades or in groupings of levels or stages covering a band of two or three years. In early education settings, it is more common for curriculum documents to address broader, overall goals (Shuey et al., 2019).

Differences in curriculum are further exacerbated by differences in mindset and beliefs (Pyle and Danniels, 2017). Primary school teachers are sometimes not prepared to recognize the educational value of inquiry experiences and play-based learning that support social-emotional well-being and self-regulated learning as well as thinking and language skills. Meanwhile, early learning educators and teachers are sometimes not prepared to recognise learning pathways and to engage children in specific learning experiences that lay the groundwork for success in later learning.

Continuity of learning recognises that children who experience a common approach to curriculum from early learning into early school years have better outcomes. The good news is that most Australian jurisdictions have tried to build some degree of curriculum curricular continuity between early learning and school (Shuey et al., 2019).

The task ahead is to make greater progress in creating a unified learning pathway that includes connected goals and learning experiences. This is particularly important in the Australian context where the age variation between students starting school can be as large as eighteen months.

Learning goals and experiences can be challenging but attainable for most children within a given age range. Learning pathways should be consistent with children's ways of thinking and learning (National Research Council 2015). Specially, it is important to:

1. Construct learning pathways that identify learning outcomes for social-emotional competencies, literacy, STEM, creative thinking and creative expression.
2. Use learning pathways to guide monitoring of individual children's progress, make curriculum decisions and inform conversations with families.

3. Establish a common curriculum that spans early learning settings as well as the early years of formal schooling

## PEDAGOGICAL CONTINUITY

Pedagogical continuity is characterised by common pedagogical practices that include direct instruction and experiential/inquiry learning approaches can be applied in early learning and primary school settings.

Coherent teaching strategies across early learning and into primary education would offer young children a consistent, connected series of learning experiences. Both direct instruction and child-directed instruction can boost children's academic skills, and teachers can combine different approaches (Schleicher, 2019).

This may require developing a greater appreciation of and, ultimately, application of divergent approaches to pedagogy. For example, early learning educators could become more aware of the value of direct instruction that matches individual children's abilities. Meanwhile, primary teachers could become more aware of the value of play-based, experiential learning and exploiting learning opportunities to nudge children's metacognitive and problem-solving skills.

While seemingly divergent approaches to instruction and pedagogy abound, they actually serve children best when used in combination. Some of these 'false dichotomies' include 'direct' versus 'inquiry' instruction, 'play-based' ›

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**Coherent teaching strategies across early learning and into primary education would offer young children a consistent, connected series of learning experiences.**





➤ versus 'academic' instruction, and development of content knowledge versus socioemotional learning. Steps that education leaders in early learning and school settings need to collaborate on include:

1. Identifying pedagogical practices, including ongoing assessment, that recognise and track children's learning pathways. These should also recognize the value of direct instruction and experiential learning. At a minimum, this might require reconsidering approaches to creating learning environments and establishing daily routines;
2. Developing a shared appreciation that a continuity of learning approach will require early learning educators and primary teachers to expand their pedagogical repertoire and include strategies and approaches that cross traditional practice boundaries.

## ASSESSMENT CONTINUITY

Assessment continuity is characterised by a consistent approach to ongoing formative and summative assessment that is informed by a shared set of learning outcomes. This allows teachers and educators to work from where a child is towards achieving those outcomes. As teachers and educators know, assessment is a critical component of any effective learning programme.

Effective assessment provides vital information to guide and inform learning and teaching. For children, assessment helps to confirm understanding and direct learning activities towards areas in need of further attention. Listening to what children say and monitoring their responses provides vital feedback to support new learning.

Developing shared approaches to assessment (for example in expectations for different areas of learning or the way we use praise as a teaching strategy) can help to build learning confidence and encourage children to take responsibility and monitor and regulate their own learning. Assessment is not about ticking a box. It should be about:

- **Assessment FOR learning:** providing teachers and educators with information about what children understand and need. Teachers and educators can study the learning activities and interactions that children are involved and the learning they are acquiring through these experiences;
- **Assessment OF learning:** enabling teachers and educators to use information from assessments to inform the decisions they make. Teachers and



educators can create opportunities for children to demonstrate what they know and can do in relation to key concepts and skills. Children's learning is assessed against specific measures of identified learning outcomes. Pedagogical documentation found in learning portfolios can provide evidence about individual children's progress. Direct assessment of specific skills or concepts may also be used;

- **Assessment AS learning:** supporting children to monitor and regulate their own learning through feedback.

Teachers and educators can help child use evidence of learning to recognize what they have learned. Children can look back and follow their own learning pathways.

A consistent approach that is informed by shared learning pathways and outcomes is critical. To this end, steps that both teachers and educators can collaborate on include:

1. Establishing a range of approaches and practices to assess and monitor children's learning to inform pedagogy and to support children in achieving learning outcomes.
2. Developing an approach that uses a range of assessment information to provide additional opportunities including small group and one-to-one support to ensure all children secure key learning milestones.
3. Establish common learning pathways to guide planning for learning experiences and guiding assessment. •



## CASE STUDY - MORWELL CENTRAL PRIMARY SCHOOL AND GOODSTART EARLY LEARNING

Morwell Central Primary School is located in Morwell in the Latrobe Valley. It is an Our Place site with an implementation group consisting of Department of Education and Training (South Eastern Victoria Region), Morwell Central Primary School, Latrobe City Council, Goodstart Early Learning and Colman Education Foundation.

Early learning on the site is being provided by Goodstart Early Learning. With a deep appreciation of the importance of early learning for success at school, Morwell Central Primary School staff began a conversation with Goodstart to explore opportunities to better link the practice and pedagogical approaches between the two educational contexts.

Through this dialogue they were able to identify a range of linkages across their work, including alignment between the 'discovery' approach of the school and the 'play based learning' approach of the early learning centre. When explored, it turned out that they reflected essentially the same learning philosophy - they just had different names. Once this was realised, it was possible to unpack each approach and find commonalities that could then be both translated and value added to, across both contexts.

This process has also strengthened relationships between the early learning educators and school teachers. To maintain connections, the ongoing intention is to hold joint planning days that bring teachers and educators together.

By continuing the conversation and commitment to collaboration, together they are ensuring greater consistency in objectives and continuity of learning across both environments.

# Where to start?

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While more work remains to be done to create common ground between distinctly different approaches across the early learning and school systems, a gradual shift is already underway.

There is increasing realisation that it is both essential and possible to move from a broad 'cohort approach' that necessitates a 'transition to school' towards a strategy that accommodates the variable age and developmental status of children.

It is acknowledged that breaking down the historical barriers between early learning and school approaches and contexts will take time. We have to start somewhere.

The first step is to realise that change is required. A second step is a willingness to both experiment and demonstrate new ways of working together.

In the long-term, it is hoped that a seamless approach to education in the 0-8 age group can result in a more integrated system of education. In the spirit of getting started, some concrete actions are suggested below.

While many of these may be possible immediately, it is recognised that some actions are longer-term and will take time to eventuate. While this is a future-focused paper, it is important that the seeds for change are being planted today. >

## SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS:

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- 1 Reviewing key development and learning priorities including to ensure they are well aligned to the learning needs of each child.
- 2 Planning to improve learning continuity for the next cohort of children scheduled to join the next phase of their learning.
- 3 Working together to develop a common professional vocabulary.
- 4 Recognising common domains of learning (e.g. language, STEM, social-emotional learning, creative expression and learning approaches).
- 5 Working towards continuous learning pathways for each domain that identify learning outcomes from age 3 to year 3 and guide design of learning environments and assessment.
- 6 Recognising that the domains can be integrated in learning experiences throughout the day rather than dedicated 'subject' times for reading or mathematics. For example, by building with blocks children can practice numeracy skills by counting the blocks, spatial awareness skills by attention to placement, patterns and symmetry and writing skills by writing down their design ideas.





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**Breaking down the historical barriers between early learning and school approaches and contexts will take time. We have to start somewhere.**



## SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR LEADERS IN EARLY LEARNING AND SCHOOL SETTINGS:

- 1 Agreeing to create a shared vision of implementing a continuity of learning approach.
- 2 Reviewing professional learning opportunities to ensure they enable early learning and school colleagues to engage with each other;
- 3 Providing paid time for joint professional learning and planning between educators in early learning and teachers at schools – whether this is grouped at the community, regional or state level.
- 4 Reviewing the arrangements in place to welcome parents and planning to include some joint messages from both settings where incoming children have been and are now enrolling.
- 5 Reviewing the first month of a child's experience as they enter the new setting and identify areas to promote greater continuity in learning and teaching.

## SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS:

- 1 Ensuring that all policies recognise the full contribution that all phases of learning make to secure improved outcomes for all children.
- 2 Taking full account of the value of improving the continuity of learning when designing and developing new education and learning settings.
- 3 Facilitating greater collaboration between staff and joint innovation between early learning and schools to foster improved continuity of learning for children.
- 4 Phasing out transition statements and gradually replacing these with an ongoing learning profile that is used by early learning and then primary school programs.
- 5 Investing in expansion, renovations and new builds of schools to accommodate early learning in the same or adjacent physical space that includes a shared entrance.
- 6 Considering the creation of an integrated qualification for early learning educators and school teachers (covering up to year 3).

➤ With considered and sustained action, success is possible. And this success will be visible to all. We will know that continuity of learning has been achieved when it is clear that there is greater collaboration and shared action between professionals across primary schools and early learning settings.

With a greater shared understanding of each other as well as the children they work with, coherent learning journeys will be possible. And children will make quicker progress at school by not losing the benefit of early learning due to discontinuity.

This would translate to improved outcomes (particularly literacy and STEM related) for children at Year 3 and beyond. In the longer-term, it would lead to a reduced equity gap between children experiencing disadvantage and those who have more fortunate circumstances in life.

## LEARNING THROUGH OUR PLACE SITES

Our Place will be working to further develop a shared understanding of how children learn and to encourage more joined up approaches to early learning and school curriculum and assessment across its school sites.

Our Place will be documenting and sharing new insights as they come to light. New resources will also be developed that build upon those provided in the appendices. This practical guidance will grow and evolve over time and will also be made publicly available. •



# Appendices – practical guidance and resources

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## APPENDIX 1

### MANAGING THE CHANGE PROCESS

Within early learning and school organisations, learning and inquiry are constants. ‘How best can I engage, motivate and support each child’s learning?’ Our work as institutions is no different. Effective schools and settings are constantly striving to improve they are the ‘best at getting better’.

The greatest challenge for early learning and school leaders is to determine where to direct the improvement effort. Professional judgement and reliable evidence help to direct and inform our ambition.

Improvement isn’t a random act or an accident, it’s the result of restless leadership, a culture of professional trust and an outward looking curious mindset.

Effective implementation ensures that good intentions and a desire to improve delivers effective and lasting change. Implementation is what organisations do to improve: to change and be more effective. One of the characteristics that distinguishes effective and less-effective organisations, in addition to what they implement, is how they put those new approaches into practice.

Often, individuals (and organisations) that implement well tend to do so by instinct, or what might be called common sense. Unfortunately, good implementation occupies a rarefied space of ‘uncommon common sense’, with too few explicit discussions of the characteristics and qualities that make it effective.

We need to surface the professional practice of implementation – to talk about and document our knowledge and ‘show our working’.

The United Kingdom’s Education Endowment Foundation has worked with colleagues from a number of related disciplines to assemble some of the evidence that helps to define the features of effective implementation (EEF, 2019).

Six key recommendations are included in their guidance report:

- **Recommendation 1:** Treat implementation as a process, not an event; plan and execute it in stages.
- **Recommendation 2:** Create a leadership environment and school climate that is conducive to good implementation.
- **Recommendation 3:** Define the problem you want to solve and identify appropriate programmes or practices to implement.
- **Recommendation 4:** Create a clear implementation plan, judge the readiness of the school to deliver that plan, then prepare staff and resources.
- **Recommendation 5:** Support staff, monitor progress, solve problems, and adapt strategies as the approach is used for the first time.
- **Recommendation 6:** Plan for sustaining and scaling an intervention from the outset and continuously acknowledge and nurture its use.

Ultimately, it doesn’t matter how great an educational idea or intervention is in principle; what really matters is how it manifests itself in the day-to-day work of people in schools and early learning settings.

Exceptional educators and education leaders in early learning and schools may collaborate to create a unique environment that brings together early years and primary years in school. Their leadership and exceptional skills can make ‘magic’ happen. However, if it is not part of a larger system change process with a comprehensive communication strategy, it does not last long beyond the participation of the exceptional individuals.

Lasting change happens when unique innovations in practice are carefully documented, widely communicated, replicated and moved into system-wide policies that can guide the daily practice of teachers and leaders. >

## EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

### Foundations for good implementation

#### RECOMMENDATION 1:

*Treat implementation as a process, not an event; plan and execute it in stages.*

Allow enough time for effective implementation, particularly in the preparation stage; prioritise appropriately.

#### RECOMMENDATION 2:

*Create a leadership environment and setting and school climate that is conducive to good implementation.*

- Set the stage for implementation through school policies, routines, and practices.
- Identify and cultivate leaders of implementation.
- Build leadership capacity through implementation teams.

### Explore

### Prepare

### Deliver

### Sustain

#### RECOMMENDATION 3:

*Define the problem you want to solve and identify appropriate programmes or practices to implement.*

- Specify a tight area of focus for improvement that is amenable to change.
- Determine a programme of activity based on existing evidence of what has – and hasn't – worked before.
- Examine the fit and feasibility of possible interventions to the education context.
- Make an adoption decision.

#### RECOMMENDATION 4:

*Create a clear implementation plan, judge the readiness of the organisation to deliver that plan, then prepare staff and resources.*

- Develop a clear, logical, and well-specified implementation plan:
  - Specify the active ingredients of the intervention clearly: know where to be 'tight' and where to be 'loose'.
  - Develop a targeted, yet multi-stranded, package of implementation strategies.
  - Define clear implementation outcomes and monitor them using robust and pragmatic measures.
- Thoroughly assess the degree to which the setting or school is ready to implement the innovation. Once ready to implement an intervention, practically prepare for its use:
  - Create a shared understanding of the implementation process and provide appropriate support and incentives.
  - Introduce new skills, knowledge, and strategies with explicit up-front training.
  - Prepare the implementation infrastructure.

#### RECOMMENDATION 5:

*Support staff, monitor progress, solve problems, and adapt strategies as the approach is used for the first time.*

- Adopt a flexible and motivating leadership approach during the initial attempts at implementation.
- Reinforce initial training with follow-on coaching within the organisation.
- Use highly skilled coaches.
- Complement expert coaching and mentoring with structured peer-to-peer collaboration.
- Use implementation data to actively tailor and improve the approach.
- Make thoughtful adaptations only when the active ingredients are securely understood and implemented.

#### RECOMMENDATION 6:

*Plan for sustaining and scaling an intervention from the outset and continuously acknowledge and nurture its use.*

- Plan for sustaining and scaling an innovation from the outset.
- Treat scale-up as a new implementation process.
- Ensure the implementation data remains fit for purpose.
- Continuously acknowledge, support, and reward good implementation practices.



## › APPENDIX 2

### FOSTERING DIALOGUE ACROSS EARLY LEARNING AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Ensuring that children enjoy continuity in their learning experience is the result of shared professional beliefs and an appreciation that the approaches adopted by educators should recognise and attempt to build on the work of colleagues to create a seamless learning experience. Taking a ‘whole education’ view of children’s learning requires educators to develop a long-term view of child development and learning.

Not only looking back to understand the needs of younger children who may be encountering learning concepts and strategies for the first time but also to look forward, to understand and prepare children for the challenges they will face. This should be a ‘joint field of action’ that can be constructed through dialogue and relationship building (Dockett and Perry, 2014).

Dialogue requires creating the space to engage in reflection, analysis and critique, developing joint understandings, and sharing expertise and alternative perspectives. Dialogue should include open and honest discussion about blocks to thinking and working in a more aligned way is needed. This could include those things in the either context which cannot be changed such as the physical environment and or a mandated curriculum (Jay and Knaus, 2018).

The frameworks below are derived from the UK Early Careers Framework (UK Department of Education, 2019) and are designed to support ongoing professional dialogue between colleagues educating children in

early learning settings and the first years of school. They draw from the existing evidence to set out what educators and teachers need to know about learning and development and then exemplify the behaviours of early learning practitioners and teachers.

It’s important to note the examples are described as characteristics of practice. The aim is to encourage a conversation that begins with shared principles and moves on to appreciate the way adults engage with children differently as the children learn and develop.

### ACTIVITY

These simple frameworks are organized around three key building blocks to professional practice in early learning and primary education – assessment, pedagogy (how children learn) and curriculum. The goal is to identify: what all early learning and primary school educators need to know; what they need to learn how to do; and what they are already doing to support children’s learning. The following three questions should be used to frame collective conversations around each of the grids:

1. What more can we do to [use assessment, pedagogy and curriculum] to build on children’s experiences to consolidate and extend learning?
2. What implications [for assessment, pedagogy and curriculum] emerge from a focus on continuity of learning?
3. What current practices can be incorporated into practice in early learning and schools?
4. Can you identify a practical change [to assessment, pedagogy and curriculum] that might improve the continuity of learning in your school? ›



## ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

All educators need to know that...	All educators need to learn how to...	Currently, in early learning educators	Currently, in the first year of school, teachers
<p><b>ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING</b></p> <p>Effective assessment is critical because it provides teachers and educators with information about what children understand and need.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create formative assessment opportunities linked to learning objectives to test children's understanding.</li> <li>● Look at patterns of performance over time and across a range of tasks to develop rounded judgements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Observe and document children and how they respond to the learning environment, their engagement in play and planned activities.</li> <li>● Create opportunities to make assessments against a range of contexts and over time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create activities to include specific directed questions to identify knowledge gaps and misconceptions.</li> <li>● Prompt children to elaborate and extend their answers to that a correct answer stems from secure understanding.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING</b></p> <p>To be of value, teachers and educators use information from assessments to inform the decisions they make: in turn, children must be able to act on feedback for it to have an effect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use assessments to recognise what children know and can do, checking for prior knowledge and misconceptions.</li> <li>● Use validated resources or agreed standards to inform summative assessments.</li> <li>● Create opportunities for children to demonstrate their understanding of key concepts and provide enough time for them to respond to feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Direct feedback to focus on specific actions in real time and guide children's responses.</li> <li>● Use age related expected outcomes to inform judgements and guide opportunities for additional support taking into account cultural context.</li> <li>● Gather assessment information in environments with a balance of child initiated and educator led activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Choose where possible, externally validated materials when required to make summative judgements.</li> <li>● Use examples from other children to highlight successful learning behaviours - making learning visible.</li> <li>● Continue to observe children in a range of child initiated and teacher directed activities to support formative assessment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ASSESSMENT AS LEARNING</b></p> <p>Over time, feedback should support children to monitor and regulate their own learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use dialogue to prompt and sustain feedback to identify knowledge gaps and misconceptions.</li> <li>● Scaffold self-assessment by sharing model work and highlighting key details.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Place an emphasis on using talk to support sustained shared thinking as children play or tackle planned tasks to assess their understanding and misconceptions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Scaffold self-assessment by sharing model work with children highlighting key details.</li> </ul>



## HOW CHILDREN LEARN

All educators need to know that...	All educators need to learn how to...	Currently, in early learning educators will	Currently, in the first year of school, teachers will
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning involves a lasting change in children's capabilities or understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scaffold the challenges of new learning against their informed understanding of what their children already know and understand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a broad range of starting points to ensure that all children can participate in the shared learning.</li> <li>Engage with children to create opportunities for sustained thinking and dialogue – testing understanding and supporting new learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities are designed to support learning against key learning outcomes.</li> <li>Adaptive teaching is deployed to ensure that all children are supported to secure key foundational skills and knowledge.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure prior knowledge provides a foundation for future learning and plays an important role in how children learn: committing some key facts to their long term memory is likely to help as children face more complex ideas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design learning 'journeys' to provide opportunities for children to link their new learning with what's already known.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan the use of the learning environment to build on prior experiences. Responses to the children's own interest are designed to extend and deepen their prior learning.</li> <li>Emphasis is placed on developing social skills and dispositions for learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key areas of learning are elevated and identified as foundational including aspects of literacy and numeracy.</li> <li>Emphasis is placed on securing the tools for independent study and learning.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular purposeful practice of what has been taught can help to build 'education confidence' and consolidate new knowledge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a balanced programme including opportunities for their children to: practice, generate new understandings and retrieval tasks and provide just enough support so that pupils experience a high success rate when attempting challenging work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Play, songs, stories and other engaging activities are used to support retrieval and practice. For example, rhymes and songs to embed language patterns and structures.</li> <li>Support is scaffolded (in terms of the resources and the role of adults) to ensure all children enjoy a balance of success and challenge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase challenge with practice and retrieval. Teachers will begin to remove scaffolding, lengthening spacing between learning and retrieval or introducing interacting elements to combine elements of learning.</li> </ul>





## CURRICULUM

All educators need to know that...	All educators need to learn how to...	Currently, in early learning educators will	Currently, in the first year of school, teachers will
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 A school's curriculum enables it to set out its vision for the knowledge, skills and values that its pupils will learn.</li> <li>2 Ensuring that pupils master foundational concepts and knowledge is valuable; aiming to achieve fluency before moving on is likely to be an effective approach.</li> <li>3 In order for pupils to think critically, they must have a secure understanding of knowledge within the subject area they are being asked to think critically about.</li> <li>4 In all subject areas, pupils learn new ideas by linking those ideas to existing knowledge, organising this knowledge into increasingly complex mental models (or "schema"); carefully sequencing teaching to facilitate this process is important.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In different areas of learning: identify key concepts, knowledge and skills and provide a range of opportunities for all children to learn and master the critical components.</li> <li>● Be aware of common misconceptions and refine their teaching to ensure key concepts are understood and secure.</li> <li>● Design schemes of work and lesson sequences that deploy a carefully selected range of resources to balance exposition, repetition, practice of critical skills and knowledge.</li> <li>● Use a variety of approaches to revisit and secure key concepts and employ retrieval and spaced practice to build automatic recall of key knowledge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use a balance of child initiated and adult directed activities to introduce children to key concepts and knowledge particularly around early language and number concepts.</li> <li>● Create learning environments that stimulate enquiry guiding children to areas of learning and pre determined key concepts.</li> <li>● Encourage children to spend time 'roaming in the known' as they secure the experiences of knowing, fluency and transferability.</li> <li>● Maximise the opportunities for children to talk about their learning attending to outcomes and early concepts of meta cognition as the children are encouraged to reflect on the learning process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Design a learning programme to ensure that children experience a broad and balanced curriculum directed to secure clear objectives and observable outcomes.</li> <li>● Frame some learning in defined blocks of time and use the lesson structure to reinforce key learning strategies: recalling prior learning; clarifying success criteria; deploying a range of strategies to investigate and pursue lines of enquiry and finally, to review and consolidate new learning.</li> <li>● Encourage children to build and apply their learning vocabulary' and engage in explicit meta cognitive conversations talking about their behaviours as a learner and important task specific strategies.</li> </ul>

> APPENDIX 3

INVOLVING AND INFORMING PARENTS

Evidence conclusively demonstrates the value of securing parental engagement in education. As the first and most enduring teachers of children parents have the potential to make a huge difference to children’s progress. Effective early learning settings and schools know this and have well developed strategies to engage, involve and inform the parents of children in their care.

Many parents are understandably anxious when their children move from one phase of learning to another. An over emphasis on the point in time that children move from early learning to the first year of school can unwittingly reinforce what is different between the phases of education and create unnecessary anxiety. Many parents who have supported their children through early learning see starting school as the beginning of their child’s ‘formal’ education. In reality children entering school are experienced learners. It’s important to emphasise that the vast majority will have already secured a huge array of complex skills, built a network of relationships and critically, begun to develop a sense of themselves as a learner.

At its best the move from early learning to school encourages children to see themselves as effective learners ready to use the skills and knowledge they have acquired in early learning to meet the new challenges of school. Making the shift from emphasising transitions towards a culture of continuity in learning will require



**At its best the move from early learning to school encourages children to see themselves as effective learners ready to use the skills and knowledge they have acquired.**

engagement and buy in from parents. This may require a shift in the balance of the communications.

Information about assessments and the information they will receive about their child, conversations about the layout of the classroom and even information about the nature of parent/teacher conversations can all be useful in informing and engaging parents. The following table provides further examples of some of the shifts in messaging and communication that might be required. ●

Transitions	Continuity of Learning	Key messages for parents
Emphasis on future expectations	Emphasis on past achievement	Both institutions recognise and celebrate your child's past achievements
Focus on generic age-related behaviours	Focus on individual child and their needs	We focus on your child as an individual and want to know as much about them as possible
Heightened attention on differences between EY and school	Explicit attention on the points of similarity and planned shifts over medium term	The educators are working together to make the transition as smooth as possible for your child
School presented as a challenge and test	Record of successes in early education are used to promote confidence and self-awareness	We are ambitious for your child and believe in their potential. What they've achieved is a great starting point
Children begin the next stage with a clean slate – no baggage	Focus on knowing the children well and maintaining an ongoing open dialogue	The adults who know your child well will check in and make sure your child is settling well

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