

about catholic schools

TERM 1 2016

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to post school*

NAVIGATING
THE TRANSITION



Sydney Catholic Schools

PRESCHOOL TO POST SCHOOL: NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION

Research proves a smooth transition to school sets children up for educational success throughout their life. About Catholic Schools explores the key transitions that mark milestones in young lives.

It's a rite of passage for every child but the transition to big school is one of the most defining moments for Catholic families after the sacrament of Baptism and starting pre-school. Any transition during the schooling years – celebrating first Holy Communion and Confirmation, starting high school, the ability to make friends, balancing part-time work and sporting commitments and the HSC – is significant as it marks a milestone in young lives.

In the life of every child, transition is inevitable and both children and their parents will need strategies to cope with those challenges as the first year of school is just the beginning.

Across Sydney's Catholic schools, 5,883 new Kindergarten students will experience a smooth and comfortable transition thanks to 'back to basics' provided from the NSW Transition To School Statement.

This statement, completed by parents, carers and early childhood educators, records each child's interests, strengths, abilities, preferred ways of learning and how they self-regulate and manage their emotions in order to help them settle into the new world of school.

Many schools also offer transition-to-school programs giving Kindergarten teachers an opportunity to identify a child's strengths on orientation days — but the type and depth of information obtained can vary between locations.

At St Paul of the Cross Catholic Primary Dulwich Hill their transition program starts a term earlier than most other schools. The program runs for two hours every week during Term 3 to give transition a strong focus within the school and involve specialist teachers, rather than in Term 4 when teachers are busy with report writing and end of year events.

The program covers a variety of areas including Religion, Mathematics and Reading which really helps Kindergarten teachers to get to know their new students, gather data and form positive relationships.

"Families become part of our community even before they officially start school," says Assistant Principal Jane Taylor. "We know that fostering a sense of belonging at school leads to a positive sense of wellbeing and thus,

strong academic achievement."

Changes during a child's life at school keep coming long after kindergarten, and depending on your child's age and developmental stage, they will need different types of emotional and practical support.

Ian Bennie, Acting Religious Education Coordinator at St Gertrude's Catholic Primary School Smithfield, says initiation into the Catholic faith is another important transition to prepare young children for.

"A significant level of involvement is required from parents and their children to participate in the Parish's First Communion Sacramental program. The Eucharist is such an integral part of celebrating the Liturgy, and receiving the symbolic body and blood of Christ helps the child feel more connected to the liturgy," he says.

"Most children prepare to receive their first Holy Communion in Year 3. During this time, students are busy forming friendships and are studying for NAPLAN. Family responsibilities can be high as some students are also committed to extra curricular activities like sport or dance. It is important to be supportive at this time as it can be a challenging and anxious time for students."

Towards the end of the school journey, students preparing for their HSC have yet more transitions to negotiate. Rest, diet, part-time work, stress management and life balance become the new basics of learning how to transition.

Transition specialist Jenny Atkinson says moving from primary to secondary school can be one of the biggest hurdles of all. While students now know their colours and their numbers, it's nothing like essays, debates and times tables.

"The transition to high school can for some students constitute worry and stress.

"High school in itself is complex and challenging. New high school students nevertheless are expected to be far more independent and they have a lot more expectations placed on them."

Even the way that they learn today involves a transition from the traditional classroom. From touch screens to breakout pods with mobile, touch-sensitive devices and new furniture designs in flexible and changing spaces, students need to be prepared and transitioned in to 21st century learners."

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"We know that fostering a sense of belonging at school leads to a positive sense of wellbeing."



GET IN TO A HIGH SCHOOL FRAME OF MIND

Students about to start high school worry most about too much homework, making new friends, being lost and late for class, a survey of more than 1600 students in Years 6 and 7 at Sydney Catholic schools found.

The research was completed in 2012 by Sparks Education founder and transition specialist Jenny Atkinson, a former primary school teacher whose two-hour Get Set for High School workshops have been completed by Year 6 students at St Luke's Catholic Primary Revesby, St Christopher's Catholic Primary Panania and others.

Ten of the 29 survey questions were open-ended, allowing students to explain what they thought about navigating a new and bigger school.

"The main concern Year 7 students had was coping with the amount of homework they were given," Ms Atkinson said. "One third were struggling with the type of homework they were doing but two thirds were struggling with the amount at the end of Term 1.

"The Year 6's were worried about getting lost, how to read a timetable and those types of things."

Among the advice Ms Atkinson gives students is to do boring or unpleasant homework tasks first to get them out

of the way – described as 'Eating the frog' – and ask for help when needed. She said there was more focus on students moving into Kindergarten than from Year 6 to Year 7.

"There is this expectation that because school is already very familiar to them it's not that much of a jump," she said. "It is actually a major jump. It's a very different system and they're expected to be far more independent."

