

Queensland's Preparing For School trial

Since the beginning of 2003, 39 state and non-state schools have participated in the Government's Preparing for School trial – a full-time preparatory year of school for children prior to Year 1. In this special feature, principals, teachers and parents involved in the trial during 2003 share their stories.



Westmar State School

EMILY Coggan from Westmar in the state's south-west was one of the 760 children taking part in preparatory year during 2003 – and her mother couldn't be happier.

"The prep year experience for Emily has been one of great benefit," Cindy Coggan said.

"Emily has enjoyed the amount of learning and play and she has a positive outlook on school."

Emily attended the preparatory year at Westmar State School.

Mrs Coggan believes children involved in the preparatory year will be better prepared for Year 1 and will have an easier transition into primary school.

She also praised the play-based curriculum used in the trial, saying her daughter enjoyed learning through play.

"Through play this year the children have already tackled a five-day week, they have been able to explore maths, language, social interaction and further communication with other children in a positive, challenging learning environment," Mrs Coggan said.



Prep year students at Westmar State School learn through play.

Good Shepherd Lutheran College

GOOD Shepherd Lutheran College, at Noosaville on the Sunshine Coast, is one of nine non-state schools participating in the preparatory trial last year.

The school's preparatory year teacher Vivienne Walsh believes children in the preparatory year trial "are far more ready for school".

Mrs Walsh has a class of 25 students ranging in age from five to six years.

"At first it was challenging – I had a steep process of learning and discovery as we implemented a child-centred, play-based program, but now I can see how the children have benefited," she said.

The whole school community – parents, teachers and students – worked together to make the preparatory year trial a success. In one example, the preparatory year class completed an investigation project on the life cycle of the native green tree frog. While the preparatory year students undertook library and internet research, they also listened to talks from science teachers from other year levels and from members of a frog conservation group.

The highlight of the project saw preparatory year students working with Year 5 students to create a frog habitat at the school.



Good Shepherd Lutheran College prep year students create a frog habitat.

Whitfield State School

CHILDREN participating in the preparatory year at Whitfield State School in Cairns were carefully chosen, not only to represent the required age cohort for the trial, but to represent a range of groups within the local community.

Principal Tony Constance said the 20 children in the preparatory class included indigenous children, children with disabilities and children with other special needs. Nine of the 20 students had already completed a year of part-time preschool enrolment.

The preparatory class offered these students further enhancement and support of their developmental needs before tackling the more formal Year 1-3 learning framework.

"Our students are representative of the rich diversity of our wider school community – a community in which each child's uniqueness is highly valued," he said.

"It was important for the school to understand how to best provide a preparatory year for children from a variety of backgrounds and needs."

Mr Constance and preparatory trial class teacher Christine Gane agree their students have benefited immensely from the preparatory year.

"Our students are becoming increasingly independent, confident, active learners, making considered choices and solving problems through experimentation, dialogue and role-play," Mr Constance said.

Ms Gane has observed and assessed advances in students' literacy and oral communication skills including the exploration of print materials, all achieved through the play-based learning curriculum.

"The students learn through engaging in play," she said.

"Their learning is further enhanced through focused learning episodes throughout the day."

Mr Constance agreed. "Implementing the early years curriculum is an important focus for the school," he said.

"Furthermore, the students have become self-directed, have a greater propensity to take risks with their learning and have been boosted to start Year 1 with a high level of confidence and improved competencies in school readiness."



Whitfield State School prep year students explore print.

Bohlevale State School

A QUILT decorated with pressed flowers summed up the achievement of students in the preparatory class at Bohlevale State School in Townsville.

According to preparatory class teacher Wendy Lloyd, the activity was the culmination of many of the skills the children had developed throughout the year.

The preparatory year students designed the quilt and then created it, pressing the flowers gathered by older children at the school, while parent Wanda Lenton helped sew the quilt. Their creation was then presented to the school library.

"Through this task the children developed skills in planning and research and improved their fine motor skills", Mrs Lloyd said.

"It involved the children in a real-life hands-on experience, which is one of the aims of the new preparatory curriculum."

Townsville District Executive Director (Schools) Julie Kommann attended the presentation.

"This beautiful quilt shows just what can be achieved with a talented teacher, motivated students and a supportive parent community", she said.

"It is a wonderful culminating activity and a celebration of a very happy and successful preparatory year".



Bohlevale prep year students created a decorative quilt as part of their class work.

'Our students are representative of the rich diversity of our wider school community – a community in which each child's uniqueness is highly valued'

Another 27 state and non-state schools, including a special school, two one-teacher schools and a consortium of three schools of distance education, will begin Phase 2 of the Preparing for School trial on January 27.

The trial is providing information about how best to deliver a full-time preparatory year of quality early education that will be made available for every Queensland child.

For more information on the Preparing for School trial, visit the website at: <http://www.education.qld.gov.au> and click on the Getting Ready for School link, or call the ETRF team on (07) 3237 1350.