

Preparatory Year in review 2004

See the Future



In February, the State Government announced that a universal, full-time Preparatory Year of education would be available from 2007

Sixty-six schools — comprising 52 state, 10 Catholic and four independent schools across 34 districts took part in the 2004 *Preparing for School* trial. For school, district, and central office staff, 2004 has been a busy year of planning, innovation, and determination to ensure the preparatory year is the best it can be.

Following is a roundup of what happened in prep classrooms and behind the scenes to implement the Preparatory Year. Thirty more state and non-state schools will join the existing prep schools as part of the phase-in commencing in 2005. Keep up to date by visiting the website — www.education.qld.gov.au/prep

Prep evaluation delivers thumbs-up

Queensland Early Childhood Consortium's evaluation of the 2003 *Preparing for School* trial concluded that the Preparatory Year was highly successful in promoting social-emotional development, as well as communica-

tion, numeracy, literacy and motor skills. The report was released in July. An executive summary, as well as the full report, is available on the departmental website at <http://education.qld.gov.au/etrf/pubs.html>

Pathways to maths at Arundel State School prep class

The Olympics provided inspiration for the prep class at Arundel Hills State School to extend their mathematical understandings.

The children investigated flags from all the participating countries. Attributes of the flags were discussed and they then constructed their own flags, which incorporated an array of shapes and colours including stripes, stars and crosses.

A tally was undertaken to record the different patterns and determine the most popular.



Prep students at Arundel's State School wave the flag for maths.

Wyandra State school prep student goes to the snow

Wyandra State School in Roma may be small in numbers with only 13 students, but that does not stop it from providing students with rich learning experiences.

The school's only prep student, Robert Newby, joined his older classmates and students from neighbouring Thargomindah State School on a visit to the snow.



Year 1 student Connor Hampstead and prep student Robert Newby from Wyandra State School enjoy the snow during a recent school trip.

Learning about the community at Woodridge North



Learning about the community has been the focus for Woodridge North State School's preparatory class. Prep students have built a community in their classroom, which includes a doctor's surgery and veterinary surgery. The students also visited the Logan Disability and Resource Centre to find out about people with disabilities.

Dinosaurs inspire prep students

At Maryborough Central State School Mrs Alba Belz is extremely pleased with the academic and social development of her prep students. "The children are really responding and showing great capacity to engage in investigative learning and to negotiate the curriculum," Mrs Belz said.

"Dinosaurs caught the attention and imagination of several students after they noticed posters of them in the library. One of the students asked if we could learn more about them.

"While I didn't have plans to study dinosaurs, I encouraged the children to initiate and take responsibility for their own learning as part of the child-negotiated curriculum," she said. The children embarked on many activities including building dinosaur caves, pits and nests and constructing active volcanoes.

Mrs Belz recently overheard a prep student comment: "Mum, I just love learning".

"That is what makes teaching in the preparatory class worthwhile," she said.



Prep students at Maryborough Central State School dig dinosaurs.

Prep in a one-teacher school

The teaching principal at Ubobo State School, Margaret Pengelly, is confident that the prep year has reshaped the student community at her school.

"The challenge I faced at the start of the year was learning, planning and teaching a new curriculum while developing units for work and assessing students in the other grades," she said. "There was also the issue of parents' concerns about having younger children in the school.

"We were able to use a number of strategies including information sessions and school open days to help parents and community members gain a greater understanding of the preparatory year.

"We also welcomed support from the Gladstone district office.

"I am happy to say that by Term 3 the prep children were just like any other students at Ubobo.

"They competed in the interschool sports in all events from ball games to long jump; honed their skipping skills for the Jump Rope for Heart campaign; wooed the gardens judge for the Civic

Beautification Committee's Gardening Competition; and handled the microphone like professionals while presenting their findings to the community at the culminating event for the unit — Our Changing World.

"Prep is well and truly part of our school community. "Older students open lunches, tie laces, settle arguments, play all kinds of games and even let the prep students win when they had actually lost," she said



Prep students at Ubobo get to know an orphaned calf.

Planning for prep in Fraser-Cooloola District

The Preparatory Year Change Leader for Fraser-Cooloola District, Wayne Alexander, said a reference group was behind a district plan for implementing the preparatory year.

"Priorities were identified at our initial meeting and the next task is to implement our district's strategic plan," he said.



Wayne Alexander, Jacque Baxter, Teresa Stallard, Tasmin Cowling, Matt Dyer and Karen O'Neill at the Fraser-Cooloola District Prep Reference Group Meeting.

Professional development: a key to prep year implementation

Teacher aides in partnership

Prep teacher aides and teachers from across the state attended a professional development conference in Brisbane in May. For many who attended, the conference helped clarify early childhood strategies recommended in the draft Early Years Curriculum Guidelines.

The teacher aide from Camp Hill State Infants School, Michelle Bobir, is confident the preparatory year curriculum will contribute to a child's lifelong love of learning.

"It is important for kids to get a good feel about school early on," she said. "If they don't develop a love of school by Years 1 or 2, they'll carry that with them."

Great start to prep phase-in

Teachers and principals from 30 schools offering the preparatory year for the first time in 2005 participated in two days of professional development in Brisbane in November.

Participants were provided with a comprehensive and practical program covering the draft Early Years Curriculum Guidelines and strategies for the management and operation of prep.

Teachers and principals were also encouraged to reflect on strategies for implementing prep across the state's diverse physical and cultural landscape.

Highlights included presentations from current prep school teachers and principals on ensuring continuity between student learnings in the prep year and the early primary school years.

Current prep teachers also emphasised the importance of developing partnerships by encouraging parents to become actively involved in student learning.



Prep teacher Felice Eastwood and teacher aide Michelle Bobir with prep year children at Camp Hill State Infants School.

Professional development informs 2005 school visits

Education Officers Special Duties (EOSDs) Nieke Groenenberg, Angela Hack and Sandra Grant will use information gathered from the prep professional development program to support teachers and principals in 2005.

School visits will help individual teachers and schools to successfully implement the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines, and to manage change and incorporate prep into the early phase of learning in schools.

Establishing support networks for prep teachers within districts is another vital aspect of the work undertaken by EOSDs.

Happy Valley prep outback style

Happy Valley State School teacher aide Jo Madgics' backyard was transformed into a camping ground as a learning experience for the school's prep year children and their parents.

"Everyone enjoyed a night by the campfire

and the children learnt how to prepare a barbecue," she said.

"We listened to campfire stories and teachers joined in the games."

The best of both worlds at Seven Hills State School

As an experienced early childhood teacher, Seven Hills State School prep teacher Shannon Bull said the prep year combines the best parts of preschool and Year 1.

"I just love teaching prep," she said. "When you walk into our classroom there is a strong sense of ownership — students, staff and parents all contribute to the negotiated curriculum.

"It looks like most typical early childhood centres with a block area, a home corner, puzzle shelf, kitchen, trapezoidal tables, collage trolley and painting easels.

"It's very busy and noisy with a lot of different things going on at the same time with all the children actively engaged," she said.

"Introducing the new curriculum made me reflect upon and adapt many of my teaching practices.

"I had to shift from a more teacher-directed structure to a more cyclic 'plan-do-reflect' model that supports planning for meaningful experiences.

"The Early Learning Record has been an important tool to assist with monitoring and assessing the children's development as well as supporting my curriculum decision making," she said.



Prep students enjoy a country lunch at Seven Hills State School.

Strategic planning guides Nambour District

It's full steam ahead with implementation of the preparatory year in Nambour District according to district Change Leader Chris Curtin.

Ms Curtin said the district had developed an innovative strategic plan focusing on partnerships, preparatory education in local communities, communication, early years philosophy and pedagogy, leadership and networking.

"Three schools in the district will offer prep in 2005," she said.

"Our steering committee is made up of the Executive Director (Schools), principals of trial schools, the Education Officer Special Duties (EOSD) who provides support to trial schools, and myself.

"Two workshops on key areas of the strategic plan have been well attended by prep school principals and early childhood education teams," she said.

Ms Curtin was a guest presenter at the recent District Learning and Development Contact Conference in Brisbane.

Prep facilities on track

The prep capital works project team has visited most schools requiring new buildings and major refurbishments and consulted with principals on their facilities needs.

The construction of new and refurbished classrooms is under way for the state schools offering prep for the first time in 2005.

Proserpine and Tullawong State Schools will be the first to pilot the new prototype classrooms (pictured).

