



Early Phase of Learning Action Plan



Foreword

Message from the Minister for Education, Training and the Arts

The Queensland Government wants the best education possible for every Queensland child, both to help build the Smart State and to support individuals in meeting their full potential.

The introduction of Queensland's Preparatory (Prep) Year gives all young Queenslanders the very best start to school by setting them on the path to lifelong learning and by helping them to make a smooth transition to Year 1.


The Prep Year promotes continuity between children's learning prior to school and their future learning in school.

We know that the early years are among the most significant periods of growth and learning for children. The quality of teaching and learning practices is crucial during this phase – directly affecting children's cognitive, social, language and physical development and influencing their disposition for learning as well as their view of themselves as learners. The *Early Phase of Learning Action Plan* acknowledges the unique philosophical and pedagogical approaches that define and refine early childhood education.

The *Early Phase of Learning Action Plan* will assist schools with the planning and decision making processes, enabling each state school to reflect on and review teaching and learning practices. The Action Plan will also assist teachers to create challenging and relevant learning environments for young children. It will also enable teachers to update and improve their skills base.

The introduction of the Prep Year has prompted a re-examination of all year levels in the Early Phase of Learning. The *Early Phase of Learning Action Plan* helps schools consider Prep in relation to Years 1 to 3 to provide a 'seamless' continuity in the learning experiences offered during these years.

The *Early Phase of Learning Action Plan* guides ongoing renewal at the school and teacher level. It highlights the benefits of viewing learning as a continuum and the importance that curriculum and operational decisions have for student learning.



Rod Welford MP

Minister for Education and Training
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Introduction

Background

Why focus on the Early Phase of Learning?

Education Queensland is reforming aspects of the structure, function and aims of state schooling around three identified yet interconnected phases of learning – the early, middle and senior phases. Clearly targeted strategies to improve the educational outcomes for students in the middle and senior phases have been initiated and enacted through the Middle Phase of Learning Action Plan and the senior phase reforms outlined in *Queensland the Smart State – Education and Training Reforms for the Future*.

Reform in the Early Phase of Learning has focused on implementing a full-time, non-compulsory Prep Year. While the Prep Year is an important first step in supporting successful transitions for children and their families into the Early Phase of Learning in state schools, it is the articulation of core values¹ and beliefs² about teaching and learning that defines the Early Phase of Learning in Education Queensland.

The commitment to the Early Phase of Learning outlined in *Queensland the Smart State – Education and Training Reforms for the Future* and Education Queensland's Strategic Plan 2004–2008 capitalises on the need to provide all children with the best possible opportunities to succeed in attaining the fundamental skills, knowledge and attitudes for lifelong learning.

Rationale

Why an Early Phase of Learning Action Plan?

Queensland state schools have engaged in a range of proactive strategies aimed at aligning classroom and management practices with the intent of the middle and senior phase initiatives as identified in their respective action planning processes. The development and implementation of the *Early Phase of Learning Action Plan* completes Education Queensland's suite of P–12 planning frameworks providing a clear vision for school accountability, local planning and teaching and learning pathways.

Early childhood education has a long tradition and commitment to advocacy for responsive, child-focused curriculum. Education Queensland recognises this commitment and proposes to maintain an emphasis on the provision of high quality early childhood programs through the development and implementation of the *Early Phase of Learning Action Plan*.

The *Early Phase of Learning Action Plan* recognises the role of schools in leading the development and delivery of effective early education programs. Through the identified Action Areas, schools reflect on current practices, review existing processes and formulate strategies for implementing the systemic vision for the Early Phase of Learning.

The Action Plan acknowledges the significant role state Preschools played in defining early childhood philosophy and practice and in delivering quality early education programs across Queensland over the last 30 years. The contribution of Prep Year phase-in schools to reigniting thinking around the Early Phase of Learning is also acknowledged.

¹ In this context values refer to the agreed principles that define early childhood education practices.

² In this context beliefs refer to the broad philosophical perspectives that shape early childhood education.

Purpose

What does an Early Phase of Learning Action Plan mean for schools?

Current research³ confirms transitions to school are most successful when children's individual social and cultural contexts are actively accommodated. When teaching and learning practices and school procedures reflect an understanding of the needs of children and their community, transitions are more seamless. Discontinuity occurs when children's prior experiences are not recognised, sought or accommodated.

Schools have grappled with discontinuity at the juncture between Preschool and Year 1. Discontinuities emerge in response to singular beliefs about teaching, differences in the structure and organisation of settings and the demands of curriculum.

The *Early Phase of Learning Action Plan* reinforces the need to view learning as a continuum spanning Pre-Prep through the middle years and beyond. The Action Plan requires reflection on curriculum and practice, review of procedures, a focus on shared beliefs and an emphasis on collaborative planning.

The Action Plan responds to Education Queensland's commitment to improving educational outcomes for all Queensland children.

Definition and approach

What are the characteristics of children in the Early Phase of Learning?

Internationally, early childhood is defined as birth to eight years of age. The Early Phase of Learning in state schools is a subset of this broader definition, encompassing children in Prep to Year 3 classes (P-3), that is, children aged four and a half to eight years of age.

Teaching in the Early Phase of Learning is informed by current research that describes how young children learn. We know young children learn in social contexts where children and adults plan, interact and collaborate. Learning is enhanced when teachers are cognisant of children's learning and developmental needs and guide children to new knowledge through timely and focused support.

Children attain the foundations of language knowledge and application, sense of self, skills for relating to others and knowledge of their immediate world through their interactions with family, community and participation in early education and care settings long before they commence schooling. From this we know children enter our schools as capable, competent learners with diverse knowledge, skills and experiences. This highlights the importance of forming authentic partnerships between the home, prior to school settings and schools to continue supporting children's learning.

In the Early Phase of Learning, teaching and learning are characterised by the active engagement of children in hands-on learning. Current brain research reinforces the importance of sensory learning for young children. Coupled with a focus on active engagement is an emphasis on the role of children in co-constructing their own learning. There is strong research evidence to suggest participation of children in curriculum decision making empowers children and gives them ownership of their learning.

³ Appendix Research Reference list

Key elements of the Action Plan

Key Action Areas

The *Early Phase of Learning Action Plan* consists of six key action areas:

1. Focus

Validating the Early Phase of Learning P–3 within schools and embedding it in school planning and reporting.

2. Leadership and accountability

Supporting the professional knowledge of school leaders to influence curriculum change.

3. Curriculum

Increasing knowledge of the philosophical perspectives and curriculum decision-making processes that drive effective curriculum in the Early Phase of Learning.

4. Pedagogy

Recognising and enacting teaching processes that support the learning and developmental needs of young children within a whole-school planning and reporting framework.

5. Community

Establishing and developing strong links with the community to inform and support partnerships.

6. Continuity

Planning curriculum and school management practices that promote successful transitions across the Early Phase of Learning.



Goals and Actions

Action Area 1 – Focus

Goal

To embed an Early Phase of Learning philosophy drawn from Syllabus and Curriculum Guidelines, Education Queensland strategic direction, school community values and current research.

The Early Phase of Learning in state schools is characterised by a commitment from the school and community of a shared philosophy that promotes greater understanding and knowledge about how young children learn.

Action 1

Develop a strategy to implement the recommendations of the *Early Phase of Learning Action Plan*.

This strategy should be initially informed by, and subsequently monitored through, the school's self-assessment of its progress on the five-point scale expressed in the Descriptors.

Action 2

Signal the importance of the Early Phase of Learning as part of a whole-school continuum of learning.

The Early Phase of Learning will be embedded as an organising principle in state schools to inform programming, resourcing, curriculum and planning.

Action 3

Undertake a process of continual engagement of all stakeholders in professional dialogue about theoretical perspectives and practices that underpin the Early Phase of Learning in state schools in order to articulate a shared philosophy and vision for early childhood.



Action Area 2 – Leadership and accountability

Goal

The Early Phase of Learning is successfully implemented.

Success of the Early Phase of Learning strategy in all schools is dependent on the vision and leadership provided by the principal as a curriculum and change leader.

Action 4

Lead, support and guide the development, implementation and monitoring of the school's Early Phase of Learning strategy.

School leaders drive the curriculum renewal process. Principals and school administrators devise school-based processes that focus on the professional engagement of all staff and the community with the expectations and deliverables of the Early Phase of Learning strategy.

Action 5

Professional development of teachers and principals in the Early Phase of Learning is prioritised and promoted.

Curriculum leadership requires knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy integral to the early years. Leadership teams source, engage in and facilitate:

- professional information exchange and coordination
- identification of relevant websites and linkages with other professional development sources
- advocating best practice in the Early Phase of Learning through networks with a focus on professional development.



Action Area 3 – Curriculum

Goal

The curriculum in the Early Phase of Learning is responsive to the learning needs of young children and reflects the school philosophy.

Strong alignment between the enacted and espoused curriculum is required across the Early Phase of Learning. The school's philosophy drives curriculum decision making.

Action 6

Review and monitor current school curriculum in terms of the school's articulated philosophy.

Having articulated the values and beliefs about teaching and learning in the early phase that define the philosophy, schools will apply these values and beliefs as a lens for critically reflecting on current curriculum practices.

Action 7

Refine curriculum and teaching and learning practices across the Early Phase of Learning.

As a result of critically reflecting on current curriculum practices in light of the philosophy, schools adapt their curriculum decision-making processes, teaching and learning and monitoring, assessment and reporting practices to align with the espoused philosophy.



Action Area 4 – Pedagogy

Goal

The learning and development needs of young children are specifically responded to through the teaching and learning process in the Early Phase of Learning. A clear understanding of how young children learn and develop is fundamental in identifying and enacting relevant, child responsive teaching and learning practices in the Early Phase of Learning. Children in the Early Phase of Learning are viewed as capable, competent and active learners.

Action 8

Review teaching and learning practices to provide a greater focus on the active engagement of children in the learning process.

In reviewing teaching and learning approaches, schools will examine:

- the role of children in negotiating and planning aspects of curriculum
- approaches that promote a balance between child and teacher initiated experiences
- teaching and learning approaches that engage students in active learning processes
- the gathering of assessment data over time to inform planning and monitor progress.

Action 9

Enact consistent teaching and learning practices across the Early Phase of Learning.

Consistent approaches to teaching and learning and assessment, monitoring and reporting are incorporated into school curriculum planning processes. The school's approach to teaching and learning across the Early Phase of Learning is defined by the practices enacted in P–3 classrooms and supported by appropriate resourcing.



Action Area 5 – Community

Goal

A shared understanding of how young children learn in the Early Phase of Learning exists between the school and community.

Effective partnerships between schools and their communities are enhanced when all stakeholders share a common vision. School communities engage in dialogue regarding the teaching and learning process across the Early Phase of Learning and share in school decision-making processes.

Action 10

Establish and maintain strategies and practices to inform the community about the school's Early Phase of Learning strategy.

Schools, through their school management teams, build strong linkages and partnerships with families, pre-Prep providers, other agencies and stakeholders to promote the philosophy and practices inherent in Early Phase of Learning.



Action Area 6 – Continuity

Goal

A seamless transition through the phases of learning and continuity within curriculum, management and organisational processes across the Early Phase of Learning exists.

While the Prep Year is the first year of the Early Phase of Learning in state schools, children's successful transition to school is dependent on the quality of connections made with Pre-Prep services. Schools recognise and plan for the key transition points across the phases of learning by focusing on curriculum continuity and alignment of management and operational processes. These are derived from critical reflection of the needs and capabilities of children across P–7.

Action 11

Develop an engagement and communication strategy that describes how connections will be made, both prior to and post the Early Phase of Learning, in order to maximise the alignment of curriculum, teaching and learning, monitoring and assessment and management and operational processes.

To maximise continuity of learning for children, whole-school planning processes must take account of links prior to school services and between the Early Phase of Learning and the Middle Phase of Learning.

A uniform communication strategy will ensure the dissemination of consistent messages about the intent of teaching and learning in the early phase.

Action 12

Review curriculum, teaching and learning, monitoring and assessment and management and operational processes across the Early Phase of Learning and beyond.

Schools use the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* as the basis for the review.

Action 13

Embed curriculum, teaching and learning, monitoring and assessment and management and operational processes across the Early Phase of Learning in school planning to maximise continuity of learning for children across the Early Phase of Learning and beyond.

School planning documents are reflective of a shared commitment across P–3. These documents reflect links to the Middle Phase of Learning.

Appendix – Current Research on School Transitions

Bredenkamp, S., Knuth, R.A., Kunesch, L.G. & Schulman, D.D. 1992, 'What does research say about early childhood education?' *NCREL*, Oak Brook.
<http://www.ncrel.org/>

Dockett, S. & Perry, R. 2001, 'Starting School: Effective Transitions', *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, vol. 3, no. 2.

Margetts, K. 2002 Childcare arrangements, personal, family and school influences on children's adjustment to the first year of schooling, University of Melbourne Research Paper.

Pianta, Robert C. & La Paro, Karen 2003, 'Improving early school success', *Educational Leadership*, April.
http://www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200304/pianta.html

Renshaw, P. 1998, 'Sociocultural Pedagogy for New Times: Reframing Key Concepts', *Australian Educational Researcher*, 25, 3, December.



Descriptors to support the implementation of the Early Phase of Learning

Scale	Descriptor
No appreciable start	<p>Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Early Phase of Learning strategy has not been identified within the school planning framework. • School yet to facilitate examination of personal philosophical perspectives. <p>Leadership and accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders are not engaged in leading curriculum renewal in the early phase. • Staff not engaged in professional development focused on Early Phase of Learning. <p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School staff have not engaged with the <i>Early Years Curriculum Guidelines</i> or considered curriculum implications of the Prep Year. <p>Pedagogy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum planning does not take account of the role of students in the process. • Pedagogy is not a focus of curriculum planning. <p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No links established with pre-Prep providers, other agencies or wider community. <p>Continuity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No plan exists for supporting progress across P–3. • <i>Early Years Curriculum Guidelines</i> viewed as only relevant to the Prep Year. • School planning does not reflect coordination between Prep and Year 1.
Limited progress	<p>Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School acknowledges need for planning and reporting framework around the Early Phase of Learning. • School acknowledges the need to examine teachers' personal philosophical perspectives. <p>Leadership and accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspects of curriculum renewal occur at classroom level with little input from school leaders. • Awareness of need to access professional development on Early Phase of Learning. <p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early phase staff are familiar with the <i>Early Years Curriculum Guidelines</i>. • Implications for curriculum development across P–3 are recognised. <p>Pedagogy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School acknowledges the role of students in the learning process. • There is acknowledgment of the importance of pedagogy in the teaching and learning process. <p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School acknowledges need to establish process for linking with community agencies and providers. <p>Continuity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School acknowledges the need to develop an early years strategy to improve curriculum consistency across P–3. • School planning exists to support identification of issues impacting on the incorporation of the Prep Year within the school context. • <i>Early Years Curriculum Guidelines</i> seen as a document to inform continuity across the early phase.

<p>Planning and implementation exists</p>	<p>Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School is committed to developing a school-based policy for the implementation of the Prep Year and across the early phase. • Teachers are engaged in collaborative processes to share personal philosophical perspectives. <p>Leadership and accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders facilitate discussion on aspects of curriculum renewal with the early phase team. • School has made links to existing professional development opportunities and supported participation of staff. <p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School planning commenced around curriculum implications of enacting the articulated philosophy. • Early phase teachers engaged in discussions about teaching and learning across the Early Phase of Learning. <p>Pedagogy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active engagement of students in the learning process is evident. • Teachers employ a range of appropriate pedagogies within the teaching and learning process. <p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School has developed strategies and a process to inform the community. <p>Continuity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School has developed and is implementing an Early Phase of Learning strategy to improve curriculum consistency across the early years. • School is developing and trialling strategies that address the transition of students and families into the school setting. • Links exist with Pre-Prep providers.
<p>Significant progress</p>	<p>Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School has developed a policy around implementation of the Prep Year. • Teachers are committed to a whole-school approach to teaching and learning perspectives in the early phase. <p>Leadership and accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders engage early years teachers in substantive conversations about curriculum renewal with the early phase teams. • Early phase teachers have participated in professional development and this knowledge informs curriculum and management planning. • School action plans emerge from curriculum renewal conversations. <p>Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School curriculum documentation identifies commitment to articulated philosophy in the early phase. • Teaching practices reflect articulated philosophy. <p>Pedagogy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation with students about the content, processes and assessment in learning process is evident. • Pedagogical practices are consistent across the early years. <p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School is committed to maintaining community networks through ongoing procedures. <p>Continuity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Early Phase of Learning strategy is used as a framework for curriculum consistency and community awareness across the early years. • Processes and strategies evident that support the transition of students and families into the school setting. • Pre-Prep providers are included in aspects of school planning and transition processes. • School has developed policies and procedures in response to identified issues impacting on the incorporation of the Prep Year within the school context.

Embedded in practice**Focus**

- The early phase is an integral component of school planning and all documentation reflects connectedness to the Early Phase of Learning.
- Community identifies and articulates teaching and learning perspectives in the early phase.

Leadership and accountability

- School leaders provide explicit support and guidance on curriculum practice in the Early Phase of Learning.
- Early phase teachers participate in networks, lead professional development discussions with staff and community.
- School action plans align curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and monitoring and operational and management issues across the Early Phase of Learning.

Curriculum

- School curriculum documentation reflects continual review of teaching and learning in the early phase.
- School examining links to teaching and learning in the Middle Phase of Learning.

Pedagogy

- Students can articulate their role in the learning process.
- Early years pedagogy drives the curriculum renewal process.
- Whole discussions focusing on common/shared pedagogy.

Community

- School links with Pre-Prep providers and community agencies on a regular and ongoing basis (active outreach and focus within the school – internal management of the school).
- School has well-established partnerships with families which support the successful integration of children into the Prep Year.

Continuity

- The Early Phase of Learning strategy is used as a framework for curriculum consistency and community awareness across the early years.
- Processes and strategies ensure seamless transitions across the early phase.
- There is alignment between curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting across the Early Phase of Learning.
- Pre-Prep providers are considered integral to the transition process.
- School policies and procedures address the learning and developmental needs of young students across the Early Phase of Learning.

