

# Kindergarten research insights

Professional reading resource



## Writing transition statements: Including strengths and challenges

Transition statements are one way that communication between kindergarten and school teachers can support children's transitions to school. Written information about children collated by kindergarten teachers can be used by schools to inform teaching and learning programs and support children physically, socially and emotionally when they start school. While there are many potential benefits, Australian research has also identified that there are some challenges with written documents passed on from kindergartens to schools.

In my Doctoral research, prior-to-school teachers frequently mentioned that there was information that they felt they couldn't include in transition statements, inspiring the title of one of my research papers, 'You can't write that' (Hopps-Wallis & Perry 2017). In particular, there was a concern that information about children's challenges couldn't be included.

### Why is it important to write about children's challenges?

The research results also highlighted why it is important to include information about children's challenges in transition statements.

School teachers in the study explained that, as information about children's challenges was omitted from transition statements, they had to pursue and rely on their own information gathering about children (Hopps-Wallis & Perry 2017). Sometimes this meant that transition statements were disregarded. It is therefore important that transition statements include children's challenges as well as their strengths, so that they are a trusted source of information and their potential utility as a support for children is maximised.

### Strengths-based approaches include challenges

Working with two of my colleagues, Angela Fenton and Sue Dockett, we have explored a focus on children's strengths to understand how this is applied by teachers in practice. Our results revealed that there are some limited understandings of strengths-based approaches. In particular, 'the identification of strengths alone tended to be regarded as being a strengths approach' (Hopps-Wallis, Fenton & Dockett 2016, p.109). There are particular strengths-based approaches that take a broader view and include recognition of challenges, and further, involve working collaboratively to assist children to achieve their potentials. For example, A Strengths Approach, developed at St Luke's Anglicare, Bendigo, Victoria (McCashen 2005) can be applied to support children's transitions in this way.



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## Applying strengths-based approaches

In our [research paper](#) 'Focusing on strengths as children start school: What does it mean in practice?', we began to demonstrate how The Strengths Approach may be applied when working with children and families to support their transitions to school. Collaborative, strengths-based conversations discuss challenges, identify resources, enable strengths and develop next steps. The particular tool developed at St Luke's to guide strengths-based conversations is known as [The 5 Column Tool](#).

Strengths-based conversations with families and children about challenges can occur throughout the kindergarten year. They may then also occur as part of the process of writing transition statements. Here are two examples of how information from a collaborative strengths-based conversation with a child and their family can be provided in the suggestions for continuity of learning and strategies for a successful transition section of the QCAA transition statement.

### Example 1

#### Suggestions for continuity

Robert's family are supporting him to manage his emotions by encouraging him to tell a teacher how he is feeling and what he needs. Robert wants his school teacher to know that he is not 'not listening' but needs some help to feel okay.

#### Strategies for successful transition to school

Robert is sometimes overwhelmed by the noise and busy activity of the classroom. He says that it 'hurts my ears'. Strategies that Robert has used to feel more comfortable include moving to another part of the room, going under a table or covering his ears. We have supported Robert by creating quiet spaces, providing more small-group experiences, being flexible in how Robert participates in whole-group gatherings and gently supporting him to return from quiet spaces.

### Example 2

#### Suggestions for continuity

When separating from family, Elise says that she likes to hold an educator's hand until she is 'ready to play' and doesn't 'feel funny in the tummy anymore'. Elise's family have been supporting her to make friends with other children going to her school and we have been facilitating these friendships too.

#### Strategies for successful transition to school

Elise often needs initial support with separations from her family. We have supported Elise by acknowledging her emotions and using a predictable arrival routine where she is greeted by her educator. Knowing who and where the duty teacher is and having a friend in her class will be helpful for Elise.

## Applying QKLG principles

Using strengths-based approaches to support children's transitions, including writing transition statements, involves applying many of the principles of the [QKLG](#). In particular:

- *respectful relationships* — long before transition statements are written, trust between the child, family and teacher must be developed over time, through open and reciprocal communication. The content of transition statements must always be respectful of children and their families and consider potential unintended consequences. Any request from a child or

family for information to be removed from a transition statement, indication that a family isn't comfortable with the information, or decision by families not to consent to submitting the statement to their school must be respected

- *collaborative partnerships* — strengths-based approaches involve collaborative partnerships with children and families throughout the kindergarten year. Strengths-based conversations recognise children as capable, having important insights and perspectives, agency and autonomy in addressing their own challenges.

Read more information about [strengths-based writing](#) on the QCAA website.



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