



## Summary

# Transitions between school and outside school hours care

August 2023

---

This evidence summary supports AERO's [practice guide for transitions between school and outside school hours care \(OSHC\)](#). It describes the evidence base behind the guides, synthesising insights from available research to connect to policy and practice.

This summary is derived from a systematic review conducted with our partners at Monash University and with support from the National Outside School Hours Service Alliance (NOSHSA), in May 2022, using the Preferred Reporting Items of Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009).

## The importance of a sense of belonging

A key feature of an effective transition is when a child and their family establish a sense of belonging in their new environment (AERO, 2022; Allen et al., 2018). This sense of belonging may include feeling that:

- their educators, teachers and peers like, value and accept them
- the curriculum is interesting, appropriate and relevant
- they are capable of succeeding
- their cultural identity is welcome and valued and they can 'be themselves' (AERO, 2022).

Sense of belonging plays an important role in transitions as it is:

- one of the strongest predictors of positive development in young people (O'Connor et al., 2010)
- a powerful protective factor for mental health and wellbeing (for example, Allen et al., 2022)
- a core component of student success at school (Allen et al., 2018)
- the basis for secure attachments from the earliest years of life (Over, 2016)
- a central part of My Time, Our Place (MTOP), the [Framework for School Age Care in Australia](#) (DOE, 2022).

## Practices to support transitions

Increasing participation in OSHC services signals their growing importance within Australia's education and care systems (Cartmel & Hurst, 2021). OSHC-to-school and school-to-OSHC transitions occur every day for many children, over many years. Effective, well-supported transitions can, therefore, have significant lasting impact.

The practices described here and within the accompanying practice guide are based on the best evidence we have from our synthesis of research and AERO's consultations. However, more rigorous evidence that can provide high and very high confidence of the effectiveness of certain practices is needed (see AERO's [Standards of evidence](#)). While specific evidence about the OSHC-school transition process is scarce, other bodies of research can help identify promising transitions practices. There is increasing evidence about the connection between benefits associated with OSHC and positive outcomes in school (see Dockett & Perry, 2014, for a review). This supports the contemporary view of OSHC as not simply 'childcare' (Cartmel & Hurst, 2021; Dockett & Perry, 2014), but an important partner in achieving a range of cognitive, social, and emotional benefits for children (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016).

At the same time, other research indicates that the quality of relationships between OSHC services and schools in Australia varies widely (DEEWR, 2012). This suggests an untapped potential for schools and OSHC to work together to improve transitions; a view reinforced in AERO's consultations with school and OSHC teachers, educators and leaders. Two key practices to activate this potential are detailed below – **collaborative partnerships** and **child-centred approaches**.

### Collaborative partnerships

Collaboration between schools and OSHC services is important to effective transitions (DEEWR, 2012), as well as partnerships with others involved in the education and care of each child. Family involvement also supports more effective OSHC programs (Milton et al., 2021; Simoncini et al., 2015), just as it does for schools. Research points to 3 ways to improve collaborative partnerships in transitions.

## 1. Positive professional relationships

Overcoming perceptions of OSHC as being of lesser status has been identified as a major challenge in Australia (Simoncini et al., 2015). Some key considerations in creating mutually respectful collaborative partnerships include:

- recognising the important caring role that OSHC plays in children's lives by providing trusted adults to support transitions to and from school (Demircan & Demir, 2014); as well as the caring role also played by schools (Cartmel, 2007)
- raising awareness among families of the importance of quality OSHC programs, not just in supporting parental working arrangements (Winefield et al., 2011)
- acknowledging the specific structural challenges faced by many OSHC services, including limited planning time (Haglund & Boström, 2020); difficulties with staff recruitment (Simoncini et al., 2015) and retention (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016); and limited access to training or professional development (Beets et al., 2013).

## 2. Shared responsibility for children

Effective collaboration is underpinned by a sense of shared responsibility for the care and education of children between OSHC, schools, families and the community. Insights from research analysis on creating this sense of shared responsibility include:

- OSHC services are often an 'invisible' partner in children's education and care within schools, resulting in missed opportunities to work collaboratively in the best interests of children and their families (Cartmel, 2007).
- Professionals from partnering agencies can also help OSHC services identify how they can support children (Earl, 2013), including during the transition process.



## Child-centred transitions

Child-centred transitions build the process around the unique qualities, strengths, dispositions, interests and needs of each child (DOE, 2022). During transitions, educators and teachers can come together to make decisions about what will work best for each child, based on their needs, and with consideration of their interests and perspectives. While OSHC services were historically designed primarily to support families (Hurst, 2019; Westoby et al., 2021), contemporary OSHC services focus on 5 learning outcomes – children and young people:

- have a strong sense of identity
- are connected with and contribute to their world
- have a strong sense of wellbeing
- are confident and involved learners
- are effective communicators (DOE, 2022).

Research points to 4 ways that schools and OSHC can work together to achieve better outcomes for children through the transitions process:

### 1. Treat transitions as opportunities for learning and development

Children's transitions between education and care settings offer rich opportunities for learning (Kennedy, 2013). The potential for transitions between OSHC and school to contribute to learning and development is supported by research that shows:

- Children develop and apply a range of skills during transitions, including self-efficacy, social skills, and coping with stress (Clafferty & Beggs, 2016). These skills align with general capabilities that schools aim to nurture (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], n.d.), as well as skills associated with OSHC participation in research literature (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016).
- OSHC and schools can use transitions to reinforce each other's learning goals and send consistent messages to children. For example, educators and teachers can share information about children's reading levels and interests to ensure that the OSHC program provides engaging, accessible reading material (Tamborello, 2017).
- OSHC services can intentionally build children's capabilities in ways that support their academic achievement and wellbeing. One Australian study found that targeted professional learning for OSHC educators equipped them to increase children's cognitive flexibility and physical activity levels (Veldman et al., 2020).

### 2. Connect practices across OSHC and school, while celebrating differences

A shift between the more structured learning environment at school and the play-based learning environment at OSHC is important to give children space to relax, socialise and play (Simoncini et al., 2015). Additional insights from a research review suggest:

- Overly rigid rules and procedures for managing risks in transitions may feel restrictive or unsatisfying for children (Simoncini et al., 2015).
- Children in OSHC enjoy opportunities to participate in adult-led activities, as well as child-led free play (Simoncini et al., 2015).

### 3. Listen to children's perspectives

A child-centred approach involves children in decisions about the OSHC program (Earl, 2013; Hurst, 2019; Westoby et al., 2021), including transitions. The ability to balance children's interests with adult-led goals is a key skill for OSHC educators (Beets et al., 2013). Listening to children's perspectives can involve:

- showing children unconditional positive regard, empathy, and authenticity to foster belonging, trust, and positive relationships (Westoby et al., 2021)
- ensuring transitions reflect what children value about OSHC, including a sense of community, trust, belonging and recreation (Westoby et al., 2021)
- recognising that transitions to and from OSHC can be experienced very differently by each child, depending on what time they arrive and depart, and the presence or absence of friends or preferred activities (Hurst, 2019).

### 4. Create child-centred physical environments

The quality of the physical environment is important to children who participate in OSHC (Simoncini et al., 2015) and can play an important role in OSHC participation, including the experience of transitions. Considerations raised in reviewed research include the following:

- The benefits of involving children in designing OSHC physical environments can also promote learning and belonging (DOE, 2022; Hurst et al., 2019).
- The risks of tension arising over shared or scarce resources (Haglund and Boström, 2020). Overly restrictive or permissive rules about the use of shared spaces can have adverse effects on OSHC or school programs (Cartmel, 2007).
- The need for schools and OSHC services to work together to ensure that OSHC settings include adequate space for physical activity (Maher et al., 2019).

Our practice guides provide more information about the practical strategies educators, teachers, school and service leaders can use to support transition between school and OSHC. These and a range of other resources are available for free from [AERO's website](#).

---

## Acknowledgment

Our transitions resources were developed in partnership with Monash University and the National Outside School Hours Services Alliance (NOSHSA). AERO appreciates the valuable input from the Transitions Project Advisory Group (PAG) members, the Practitioner Working Group (PWG) and expert reviewers Dr Jennifer Cartmel and Dr Bruce Hurst.

## References

- AERO (Australian Education Research Organisation Ltd.) (2022) *Measuring effective transitions to school*. AERO. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/resources/measuring-effective-transitions-school>
- ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) (n.d.) *General capabilities (Version 8.4)*. ACARA. <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/>
- ACECQA (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority). (2022). *Guide to the National Quality Framework*. ACECQA. <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about/guide>
- ACECQA. (2018). *National Quality Framework*. ACECQA. <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard>
- AITSL (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership). (2017). *Australian professional standards for teachers*. AITSL. <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/standards>
- Allen, K. A., Boyle, C., Kern, M. L., Wong, D. & Cahey, A. (2022). Helping those that don't fit: impacts, causes, and solutions for students who don't feel like they belong at school. In Holliman, A. & Sheehy, K. (Eds.). *Overcoming adversity in education*, Routledge, London.
- Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Broderick, D., Hattie, J., Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: a meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30:1–34. [doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8)
- Beets, M. W., Huberty, J., Beighle, A., Moore, J. B., Webster, C., Ajja, R. & Weaver, G. (2013). Impact of policy environment characteristics on physical activity and sedentary behaviors of children attending after-school programs. *Health Education & Behavior*, 40(3):296–304. [doi.org/10.1177/1090198112459051](https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198112459051)
- Cartmel, J. (2007). *Outside school hours care and schools* [doctoral thesis], Queensland University of Technology. <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/17810/>
- Cartmel, J. & Hayes, A. (2016). Before and after school: literature review about Australian school age childcare. *Children Australia*, 41(3):201–207.
- Cartmel, J. & Hurst, B. (2021). *More than 'just convenient care': what the research tells us about equitable access to outside school hours care*. Department of Education, New South Wales Government. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/information-for-parents-and-carers/outside-school-hours-care>
- CEIEC (Centre for Equity & Innovation in Early Childhood). (2008). *Literature review: A positive start to school*. Melbourne Graduate School of Education. The University of Melbourne. <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/transitionliteraturereview.pdf>
- Clafferty, E. & Beggs, B.J. (2016). *Transition skills and strategies*, Glasgow Caledonian University, [doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.10806.91209](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.10806.91209)
- DOE (Australian Government Department of Education). (2022). *My time, our place: framework for school age care in Australia V2.0*, DOE. <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-law-regulations/approved-learning-frameworks>
- DEEWR (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations). (2012). *Promoting collaborative partnerships between school age care and schools*, DEEWR. <https://www.dese.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/my-time-our-place-promoting-collaborative-partnerships-between-school-age-care-services-and-schools>
- Demircan, H.O. & Demir, A. (2014). Children's sense of loneliness and social dissatisfaction, after-school care. *Psychological Reports: Mental & Physical Health*, 114(1):169–175. [doi.org/10.2466/10.17.PR0.114k10w4](https://doi.org/10.2466/10.17.PR0.114k10w4)
- DESE (Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment). (2021). *Data on families and children in child care for the June quarter 2021*. DESE. <https://www.dese.gov.au/early-childhood/resources/june-quarter-2021>
- Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2014). *Continuity of learning: a resource to support effective transition to school and school age care*. DESE. <https://www.dese.gov.au/child-care-package/resources/continuity-learning-resource-support-effective-transition-school-and-school-age-care>

- Earl, K.N. (2013). *Inclusion-based after-school program evaluation: A capstone research project* [doctoral thesis]. Wingate University. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1433375328>
- Haglund, B. & Boström, L. (2020). Everyday practices in Swedish school-age educare centres: a reproduction of subordination and difficulty in fulfilling their mission. *Early Child Development and Care*, 192(2):248–262. [doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1755665](https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1755665)
- Hurst, B. (2019) 'Play and leisure in Australian school age care: reconceptualizing children's waiting as a site of play and labour', *Childhood*, 26(4):462–475. [doi.org/10.1177/0907568219868521](https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568219868521)
- Kennedy, A. (2013). Transitions: Moving in, moving up and moving on, *National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program Newsletter* (70). <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-01/nqs-plp-e-newsletter-no-70-2013-transitions-moving-in-moving-up-and-moving-on.pdf>
- Maher, C., Virgara, R., Okely, T., Stanley, R., Watson, M. & Lewis, L. (2019). Physical activity and screen time in out of school hours care: an observational study, *BMC Pediatrics*, 19(1):283. [doi.org/10.1186/s12887-019-1653-x](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-019-1653-x)
- Milton, A. C., Stewart, E., Ospina-Pinillos, L., Davenport, T. & Hickie, I. B. (2021). Participatory design of an activities based collective mentoring program in after-school care settings: connect, promote, and protect program. *JMIR Pediatrics and Parenting*, 4(2):e22822. [doi.org/10.2196/22822](https://doi.org/10.2196/22822)
- Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J. & Altman, D. G. (2009). Preferred reporting Items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement. *PLoS Medicine*, 6(7), e1000097.
- O'Connor, M., Sanson, A., Hawkins, M.T., Letcher, P., Toumbourou, J. W., Smart, D., Vassaollo, S. & Olsson, C. A. (2010). Predictors of positive development in emerging Adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 40(7):860–874.
- Over, H. (2016). The origins of belonging: social motivations in infants and young children. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B (Biological Sciences)*, 371(1686):1–8. [doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2015.0072](https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2015.0072)
- Simoncini, K., Cartmel, J. & Young, A. (2015). Children's voices in Australian school age care: what do they think about after-school care? *International Journal for Research on Extended Education*, 3(1):114–131. [doi.org/10.3224/ijree.v3i1.19584](https://doi.org/10.3224/ijree.v3i1.19584)
- Tamborello, S. (2017). *The impact of fourth-graders' participation in the Reading Education Assistance Dog®(READ®) Program has on overall reading, vocabulary, comprehension, and Lexile® scores* [doctoral thesis], University of Hartford.
- Veldman, S. L. C., Jones, R. A., Stanley, R. M., Cliff, D.P., Vella, S. A., Howard, S. J., Parrish, A. M. & Okely, A. D. (2020). Promoting physical activity and executive functions among children: a cluster randomised controlled trial of an after-school program in Australia. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 17(10):940–946. [doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2019-0381](https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2019-0381)
- Westoby, P., Cox, L., Cartmel, J., Roland, B., Treasure, L., Blane, A. & Morgan, J. (2021) Towards a 'third space' community practice school-aged-care: a learning community and 'the new neighbourhood'. *Childhood*, 28(2):309–324. [doi.org/10.1177/0907568221996428](https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568221996428)
- Winefield, H., Piteo, A., Kettler, L., Roberts, R., Taylor, A., Tuckey, M., Denson, L., Thomas, K. & Lamb, I. (2011). Australian parents' needs and expectations regarding out of school hours care: a pilot study. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9(3):196–206. [doi.org/10.1177/1476718X10389142](https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X10389142)