

SMOOTHER TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

ROZELLE'S PRE-SCHOOL TO SCHOOL TRANSITION PROGRAM - PARENTS GET INVOLVED, TOO!

Lyn Doppler, Principal, Rozelle Public School

Preschoolers take starting school at Rozelle Public School well and truly in their stride due to the comprehensive Transition Program which prepares them for their impending school life. With a departmental on-site Preschool at Rozelle the littlies are 'connected kids' as their transition begins earlier in their prior to school year.

They take part in an integrated way in all the activities and life of the school. By Orientation Day in Term 3 they are really accustomed to the routines of the school such as weekly assemblies; library; Book Week and Easter hat parades down Darling St with their Buddies class; Athletic Carnivals and NAIDOC Art Shows. Relationships have also been built between staff and children.

When the official Transition Program begins early in Term 4 the Preschoolers are well and truly acclimatised to the wider school environment. Along with other children from surrounding prior-to-school centres the children engage in class experiences over a 5 week period. Every Tuesday from 9.30-11.00am they engage in activities in their prospective Kindergarten rooms rotating between the three rooms and experiencing the three prospective Kindergarten teachers. While this occurs for the children, parents are invited to engage in interactive workshops over the five weeks. While the littlies are engaged in differing activities each week the parents are paralleling what the children are doing. The parent workshops cover Early Literacy, Mathematics, Language and Restorative Practices, the Learning Support Team and Community Participation.

During the program the teachers get a chance to observe and assess the school readiness of the children and can prepare the composition of the three classes for the next year based on an equal distribution of capabilities and social competencies. Rozelle Public School has based its Program on the research of Dockett and Perry <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v3n2/dockett.html>

The Program puts a strong emphasis on early intervention for children with special needs and on respecting the fact that children and families bring many strengths to school and these strengths are acknowledged and built upon. Along with a cluster of local schools a District Transition evening is also provided at the local high school with experts in the field available to answer any questions from parents.

To accommodate the growing student population at Rozelle and in keeping with the fact that the program is flexible and responsive to the needs of all involved an innovative strategy was trialled in 2005 involving the transition of the whole school population over those five Tuesday mornings. Every child got to experience what it would be like in the next stage of their schooling and they were prepared for the differing expectations. With every stage moving up, Stage 3 students visited the local secondary school for their transition visits. The culmination of the Transition program was a special celebration.

Following the program the children all receive a personal letter thanking them for coming to the program and welcoming them back for the next year. The familiarity of the weekly routine is a comforting factor with families being greeted by student leaders each week. They are guided to the hall to prepare for the classroom visits and parents remain for the workshops. After each session a morning tea for children and parents is provided by the present Kindergarten parents. This same routine occurs on the exciting first day of school the next year.

The program is empowering because it enhances the strengths of all involved, builds relationships and social capital and thus capacity in the learning community as the philosophy of the school is imparted to the newcomers. Both children and parents are valued and connected and will move through the school having met friends, had fun and learnt much about big world of school life!

Lynnette Doppler

Lynette has been awarded a 2006 Churchill Fellowship to study the effects on student achievement in schools where restorative practices have been embedded as a way of learning and not as an intervention for difficult students or situations (U.K., Canada, USA).



Carnival

Preschool students join the whole school for their first athletics carnival in Term 3. "I loved going to the carnival because we got to race at the park and we got ribbons."



Buddies during the Book Week Parade on Darling Street. "I like it when we get to be with our Buddies."



Students from Year 5 & 6 join preschool during recess to make connections for the following year. "We love playing with our Year 6 buddies. They're fun and really cool."