

Evidence Study

BERRINBA EAST

‘Doing each piece well’: a culturally and linguistically diverse state school gets serious about learning partnerships

Our change story

We used to think

Kindergartens were responsible for getting children ready for Prep.

Early years learning environments should closely align with the rest of the school.

Children experience transition when they arrive at school.

We used to connect like this

School leaders told kindergartens about school practices and how to prepare children for Prep.

School teachers worked together with other school teachers to plan learning.

School leaders inducted children and families into the school environment.

We used to do this

Teachers developed an understanding of Prep children’s needs throughout Term 1.

Early Years classrooms mostly used a structured and systematic approach to teaching academic skills (explicit instruction).

Use a variety of oral language approaches across educational learning environments.

Now we think

The school and the kindergarten should work collaboratively to ensure they are ready for each child.

Early years classrooms should employ a variety of teaching approaches to cater for children’s interests, capabilities, evidence of prior learning and community contexts.

Children, families, kindergartens and schools experience transition together and plans should honour their diversity and contributions.

Now we connect like this

School and kindergarten teachers, leaders and educators meet regularly to share knowledge and expertise, as well as plan and enact responsive transition programs and initiatives.

Kindergarten and Prep teachers work together with school leaders to plan learning for Prep.

Prep teachers and leaders get to know children and their families early in their transition experience and partner with them through the early years of school.

Now we do this

Prep teachers use kindergarten transition statements to understand students’ strengths, interests and capabilities and to plan for engaging teaching and learning experiences.

Early years teachers draw on a suite of approaches and characteristics to cater for children’s strengths, interests and needs (Age-appropriate pedagogies).

School, kindergartens and early childhood services are taking a common approach to extending oral language development.



Our change journey

An improvement journey in questions

3. Learning with evidence

What combinations of data sets will give useful insights into our student learning and wellbeing and school improvement?

4. Learning with evidence

How will we broaden our vision of what is possible and learn from the experience of others?

6. Maintaining momentum

How will we create opportunities to learn together and share our resources across our contexts?

2. Establishing a team

What is the vision for how we work together as a school community?

Who do we need in our team to be inclusive and to provide a diverse range of views?

5 Learning with evidence

What practices are we willing to keep, adapt, stop or start as a result of what we learn together from conversations informed by data?

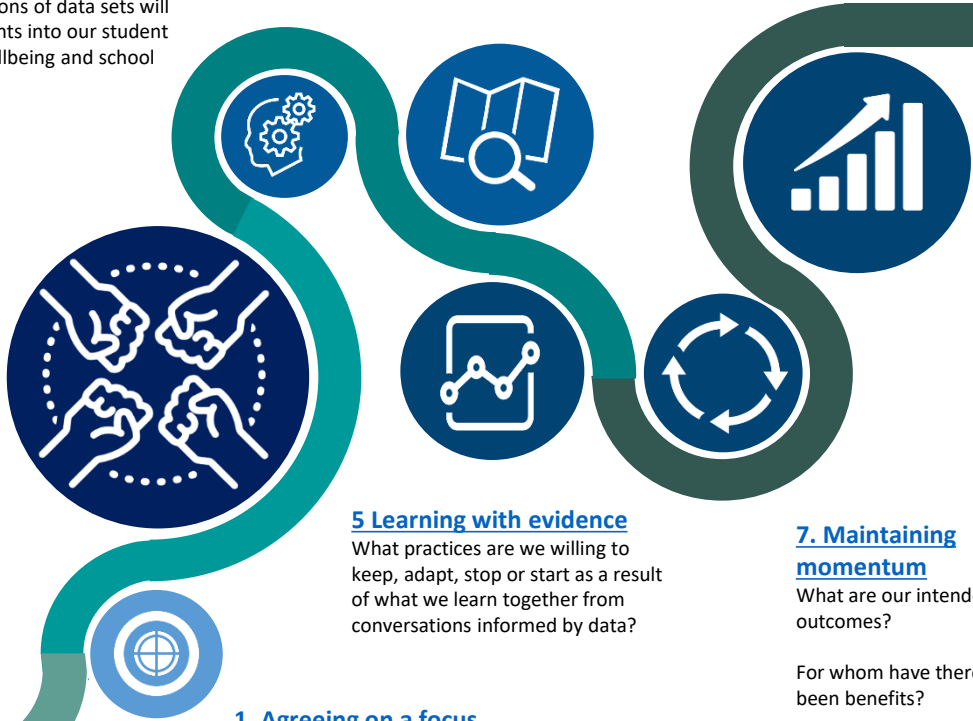
7. Maintaining momentum

What are our intended outcomes?

For whom have there been benefits?

1. Agreeing on a focus

Which data will help develop our understanding?



BERRINBA EAST STATE SCHOOL



Located just south (21 km) of Brisbane's central business district



479 students in 2018, of whom 54% came from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds



Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value was 904 in 2018, placing it in the 11th percentile (more educationally advantaged than 11% of schools in Australia)

'Every student succeeding, regardless of circumstance.'



Agreeing on a focus

Berrinba East State School and the surrounding early years services staff all want children to experience a great start to education. They want young learners to make new friends and feel the sense of belonging and success that comes with being recognised as individuals, with already established strengths and curiosities.

In 2018, Stephen Kanowski, Principal, and his early years team became concerned by the levels of learning disengagement in the newest and youngest members of their school community. Although the percentage of students meeting the Australian Curriculum achievement standard in English had been improving in recent years, the team noticed the consistent presence of a group of students who required additional support.

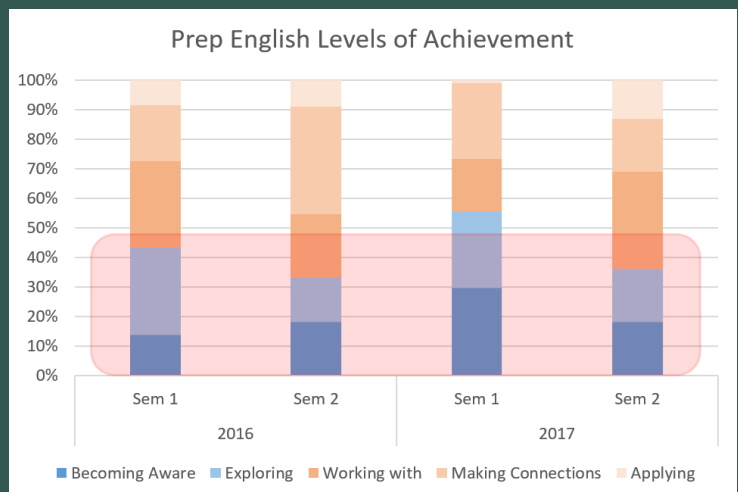
The school leaders and Prep teachers wanted to create environments that support children's natural curiosity and desire to learn. They joined South East region's *K-2 Continuity and Alignment* promising practices and committed to going on a collaborative learning and improvement journey.

"I was sick of suspending Preps. We had to ask ourselves how we were going to support a more positive start and progress children's learning."

Stephen Kanowski – Principal



Prep English report card data Berrinba East State School

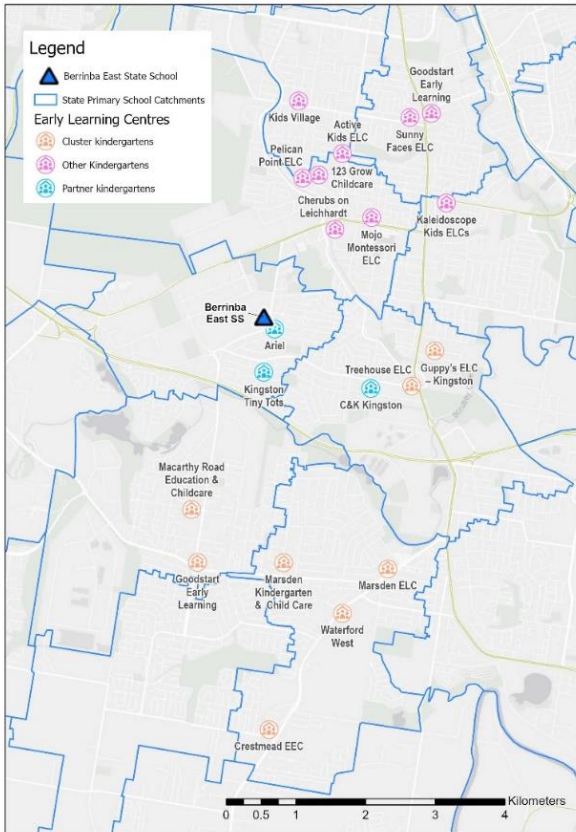


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Which data will help develop our understanding?



Establishing a team



Map of feeder kindergartens and early childhood services

"We were doing transitions to the kindergarten teachers not with them."

Stephen Kanowski – Principal

Stephen, then Deputy Principal, Kathryn Marshall and Kerry Dearness, the Early Years Coach together realised that building partnerships with those who knew the most about the children before they entered school would be a key part of the change ahead at Berrinba East State School.

Engaging in a sustained conversation with staff from a local kindergarten gave pause for reflection.

Recognising the need to place more emphasis on the contribution and knowledge that early years services and kindergartens held about children's learning and successful transitioning to school, the school activated its interest and participation in the local Early Years Network, which now operates under the leadership of Stephen, Kathryn and Kerry.

Stephen and the leadership team planned to monitor the effects of this collaboration.

They identified a number of 'partner kindergartens', with whom they would focus their attention on strengthening a collaborative approach to transitions for children. They set up a system for monitoring whether enrolled students had attended these partner kindergartens, or network kindergartens (kindergartens that attended and participated in the work of the Early Years Network) or other kindergartens (those that did not engage in the network) or no kindergarten at all.



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What is the vision for how we work together as a school community?

Who do we need in our team to be inclusive and to provide a diverse range of views?



Learning with evidence

The school leadership team then combined their knowledge of which students had attended kindergarten programs, the transition statements received by the school, attendance at the Berrinba Prep transition program, and SDA and behaviour incident data to make some action-informing statements. The school noted:

- 30% of 2018 Preps had attended a kindergarten program
- 13% of 2018 Preps had attended their orientation program
- a group of students required more focused supports in order to settle into school learning, and understand classroom expectations and routines.

In the local Early Years Network, Kerry and Stephen presented and led analysis of local [Australian Early Development Census \(AEDC\)](#) data.

AEDC data and conversations with kindergarten partners confirmed children were experiencing communication challenges such as fluency, understanding others and being understood.

Data gathered through Early Start confirmed the school's priority of supporting children's early literacy.

“We had to think differently and be open to adjust and adopt new practices to support a more positive start and progress children's learning. How are we, at school, going to be ready for the child?”

Kerry Dearness – Early Years Coach

The AEDC measures how children are developing across five key areas referred to as domains. The domains are physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; communication skills and general knowledge.

Combined, these domains provide a holistic picture of children's development which can be used by schools to support their planning and service provision.



What combinations of data sets give useful insights into our student learning and wellbeing and school improvement?



Learning with evidence

To envision their preferred future, the school leadership team accessed research evidence in the context of existing departmental frameworks and initiatives.

The [Supporting Successful Transitions: School Decision Making Tool](#) guided the conversations between Berrinba East and kindergartens to reflect and learn more about current transition practices. They found that the school centred approach contributed to a belief that some children were not ready for school, and to the limited attendance at school transition programs.

Oral language development emerged as a priority focus area in the school and broader community and transitions into school-based learning. This focus area was in line with improvement objectives articulated more broadly by the Early Years Network, now renamed *Jarjums Matter*.

The Early Years Network identified the [Abecedarian Approach Australia \(3a\)](#) as an approach to oral language development that could be implemented across both school and early learning settings. The Abecedarian Approach prioritises children's language acquisition and focuses on supporting the frequency of extended rich language interactions in both structured and unstructured learning environments.

The school also identified the importance of deepening their understanding of [Age-appropriate pedagogies \(AAP\)](#). AAP offers teachers a conceptual framework for designing learning experiences that cater for children's strengths, interests and capabilities.

A visit to their neighbouring school, Benowa State School, brought the benefits and AAP approach to life for the Berrinba East team. They shifted their thinking about Prep as a gateway to formal education and saw that AAP was 'the bridge' that would give children continuity of experience as they moved from kindergarten to school.

The Berrinba East team wanted Prep to more closely align - look like, sound like and feel like - kindergarten, while conveying the content rigor of the Australian Curriculum.

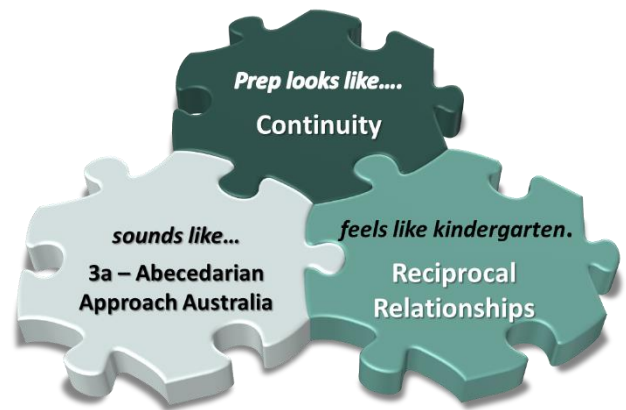
- We need to know where children are up to in their learning and equally we need to know how to best teach each child to maximise their learning.
- The work lies in the design of the learning environment and the pedagogical approaches used to increase access to the curriculum and achieve intended outcomes.
- The challenge is to look for the connections that exist between our Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline, Early Years Learning Framework, Australian Curriculum, Age-appropriate pedagogies and pedagogical framework.



Maintaining momentum

Berrinba East created a simple, yet powerful description of their improvement work for the months ahead – they called it *the formula*. The formula had three interrelated components:

- **Continuity** – to describe activities that focused on supporting the connections for children between early childhood and school settings
- **Informed practice** – to describe the activities that related to language acquisition through the Abecedarian Approach Australia
- **Reciprocal relationships** – to describe the cultural work of softening boundaries and strengthening relationships and knowledge between early childhood staff, school staff, families and children.



The formula was visible in school strategic planning, including the Annual Implementation Plan, budget and school data plan.

Continuity

- Engage in reciprocal visits between kindergarten and school staff to attend to the differences in learning environments and influence a vision for change
- Provide a program of professional learning for teachers and leaders to their deepen knowledge of the [Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline](#) (QKLG) and the [Early Years Learning Framework](#)
- Facilitate school teachers' understanding of child development and Age-appropriate pedagogies (AAP) workshops using the local Early Years Coach
- Learn how to analyse transition statements to inform planning to meet the needs of all children from Day 1 using the Early Years Coach.
- Discuss continuity of learning with kindergarten teachers in order to respond to the identified needs, strengths and interests of the majority of the arriving Prep cohort.

Evidence based practice: 3a – Abecedarian Approach Australia

- Collaboratively develop a coaching and mentoring framework for implementation across educational settings, with a focus on effectively implementing Abecedarian Approaches to language acquisition:
 - engage children in 'serve and return' conversations using the 3N (Notice, Nudge and Narrate) method to extend language interactions
 - promote conversational ('back and forth') reading strategies
 - embed 3a learning games in pre-Prep school transition activities
- Learn more about 'Aspects of speaking' in the [P-10 Literacy Continuum](#) in order inform design optimal learning experiences and prepare to monitor students' progress.

Reciprocal Relationships

- Participate in network meetings, professional learning forums, and transition and orientation activities
- Regularly visit kindergartens to observe and engage with children teachers and families
- Include partner and cluster kindergartens in orientation events
- Consult and collaborate with partner kindergartens to reflect and plan transition and orientation programs
- Jointly facilitate professional learning opportunities
- Re-design enrolment processes to honour the voice of children and families, in response to feedback
- Re-design orientation activities to encourage parents and children to interact and engage with each other, leaders and teachers.



Maintaining momentum

The leadership team provided strategic direction at Berrinba East, but the change story and successes belong to all. The staff at Berrinba East listened deeply to the knowledge, skills and understandings of the early childhood sector and worked hard at knowing and appreciating the strengths that each child brings with them.

Sixty-three percent (63%) of the current Prep cohort and their families attended the school's Prep orientation program in 2019 growing by 50% compared to 2018. The number of transition statements received by the school increased by 74% from 2018 to 85% in 2019 for the eligible cohort. The conditions for a positive start were amplified for Berrinba East learners.

The benefits of children attending kindergarten are well documented. The Berrinba East State School story not only supports the wider evidence base, it also tells a story about how the reciprocity with partner kindergartens strengthened the continuity of pedagogy, contributing to learning success.

Children who have a positive start to school are more likely to regard school as an important place and will have higher expectations regarding their ability to learn and succeed. Enhancing continuity and alignment in the early years is critical work.



What are our intended outcomes?
For whom have there been benefits?

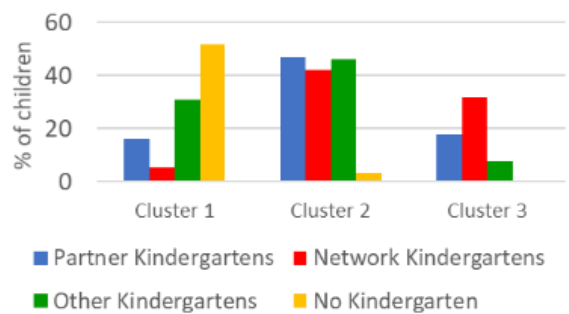


Literacy Continuum data

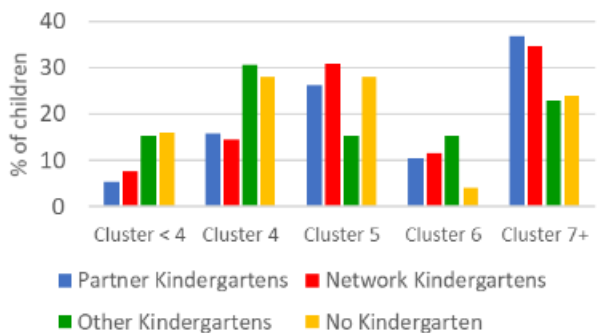
In 2019, the school examined the Prep cohort's progress against the Literacy Continuum: Aspects of speaking. The 2019 prep cohort had been grouped according to their attendance at a partner kindergarten, network kindergarten, other kindergarten or no kindergarten.

The data indicated children who attended partner or cluster kindergartens were positioned highest in their oral language. At the end of Prep a higher percentage of children from network and partner kindergartens met or exceeded expectations in oral language.

Term 1, 2019 Prep P-10 Literacy Continuum: Aspects of speaking



2019, Term 4 Prep P-10 Literacy Continuum: Aspects of speaking



“Successful transitions are the outcomes of the established and sustained connections between the school, the children, their families and early years partners”

Kerry Dearness – Early Years Coach

“We didn’t do anything innovative; we combined simple effective strategies and have aimed to focus on each with the same intensity.”

Stephen Kanowski – Principal