Successful transitions from early intervention to school-age special education services

Report to the Ministry of Education

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TE RŪNANGA O AOTEAROA MŌ TE RANGAHAU I TE MĀTAURANGA

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List of Abbreviations

AoDC	Advisor on Deaf Children
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EIT	Early Intervention Teacher
EI	Early Intervention
ESW	Education Support Workers
GSE	Group Special Education (previous name for special education services in the Ministry of Education)
IP	Individual Plan (also known as an IEP – Individual Education Plan at school level)
ORS	Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (Formerly known as ORRS)
OT	Occupational Therapy
PT	Physiotherapy
RFP	Request for Proposals
RTD	Resource Teacher of the Deaf
RTLB	Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour
SLT	Speech & Language Therapist
SE	Special Education
SEG	Special Education Grant
SENCO	Special Education Needs Co-ordinator
TA	Teacher Aide

Executive Summary

When children transition from early intervention to school-age specialist services, Ministry of Education (Ministry) staff play a critical role in ensuring an effective transition—both across services and across learning contexts. Guidelines, specialist standards and locally developed protocols provide a framework for the transition process.

In 2012 the Ministry released a Request for Proposals (RFP) to understand more about transitions from Early Intervention (EI) into school-age services for children with high levels of special learning needs. The Ministry wanted "on the ground" perspectives about effective and ineffective transitions using a case-study approach. NZCER was contracted to undertake this research.

This research focused on the Ministry role/s in supporting transitions, on children's transitions to school and the associated transition from EI to school-age services specialist support.

The data from the case studies have been analysed for key themes; this report summarises the findings from 14 case studies. The case studies were drawn from four Ministry offices across two Ministry regions.

In this series of case studies, some of the students with the most challenging needs have had very effective transitions. Some (but not all) of the children who appeared to have less-challenging learning and social needs at the time of transition had less-effective transitions. Sometimes, less-effective transitions were related to the amount of time available to plan and undertake the transitions. Less-effective transitions were also characterised by one or more of the following:

- less-effective relationships between Ministry providers and other providers

- less-effective relationships between Ministry staff and the school, or Ministry staff and early childhood education (ECE) centre, or school and ECE centre (or a combination of all three relationships)

- issues in planning and timing

- continuity issues

- role clarity and communication issues

- funding issues

- perceptions of Ministry staff skills

- less previous experience within the school

- issues with timely support of specialist staff and resources.

For many families and whānau approaching this ECE–school transition it was both a time of anticipation and a time of anxiety. Many of the children themselves had already been through a number of transitions in their short lives. Some of these previous transitions added to the complexity of the ECE to school transition.

While transition planning needed to reflect the individual circumstances for each of the children, from our data we were able to identify some key process themes in effective transitions.

The first of these themes was relationships. Relationships were viewed by many we interviewed as key. Family, whānau and Ministry relationships were often strong—especially between EI staff and families. For some families, this relationship changed quite abruptly as the child began school. There were different staff, and some had not yet met their new Ministry lead worker even though the child had been at school for many months.

Relationships between Ministry staff and ECE centres were mostly positive. These relationships were based on mutual respect and complementary skills. Where the relationships were less positive, the issues related to ECE centres' perceptions of delays, reduced resourcing, and centres being less happy with the skills of Ministry staff visiting the centre—whether education support workers (ESWs) or specialist staff. One comment that came up a few times—in general comments as well as in relation to one of the case studies—was about the lack of a Ministry relationship with some ECE centres. This meant that sometimes staff in some ECE centres were not referring children to the Ministry for specialist support. This impacted on the time and length of early intervention and could lead to more difficulties in the transition process.

There were some strong Ministry–school relationships. However, in a few case studies we noted poorer relationships. These poorer relationships were coloured by school perceptions about Ministry staff competence, inadequate resourcing, poor timing of support, poor information, or personality issues, or a combination of these areas.

In a few case studies we noted that Ministry staff willingness to proactively manage conflict was a positive influence on relationships.

We noted some variability in Ministry relationships with other providers of specialist services. If there were good relationships, there was more chance of there being good communication. In turn, good communication influenced continuity for the child and coordination of people and resource in a timely way during transition.

Parents generally had good relationships with both the ECE centre their child transitioned from and the school their child transitioned into. The school the child went to was not always the family's first choice. We did note some reports of difficulties when trying to enrol in families' first choice in school—in one case study, and in the general comments interviewees made.

We noted that positive and ongoing ECE centre–school relationships were of benefit in transition.

However, transitions were not only about relationships. Handover systems and processes was another key theme from our data. Ensuring appropriate continuity was a major component of the handover systems we encountered—especially since about half the case study transitions involved children on the autism spectrum. Staffing continuity was greatly valued by schools. Where Ministry teams were structured to provide services to children from 0–8 years of age within the one team there was capacity for a greater continuity in staffing. However, staff turnover or changes in staff due to children transitioning across geographic patches sometimes still meant a change of staff for children during transitions even where there was a 0–8 team structure. The other option that gave effective support to continuity was when EI staff stayed in the transition longer than usual. When there were the same staff in an ECE centre and in the first term or so the child was at school there was a much greater opportunity for full information sharing and a longer period of support from staff who knew the child well. We also noted considerable effort in a number of case studies to ensure sufficient continuity in surroundings and routines for the child to be able to make a smooth transition.

Planning and timing were also important. In some cases, planning began six months in advance of the child going to school. Generally the most effective planned transitions were staggered with multiple school visits. Late referral to Special Education (SE) services and late changes of school hampered planning.

Communications systems and modes of communication were important. Good communication could enhance relationships and had the capacity to maximise good planning processes and handovers. We saw some good examples of communication being adapted to meet the needs of different parents and family and whānau. Role clarity was also important; each child had many different specialists working with them: specialists within Ministry teams, specialists across Ministry teams and across different organisations. They all needed to understand one another's roles, and families and whānau and schools also needed to understand those roles. Also, there needed to be someone to take responsibility for overseeing the transition.

The final theme identified was resources. Resourcing was most often talked about by school staff in our interviews. While resources were important in effective transitions, when transitions were less than effective sometimes it was not just resourcing that was an issue.

When resources worked well, there was understanding about the funding available and how best to use it. Where there was conflict about the quantum of resourcing, it had been actively managed by Ministry staff. Schools were happy with the quality and type of support provided by Ministry staff. Additionally, a number of schools used their own skills and experience developed during the transitions of other children with special education needs into their school.

1. Background to this research

Ministry objectives

Success for All—Every School, Every Child is the Government's plan of action to achieve a fully inclusive education system by 2014. Launched in 2010, Success for All—Every School, Every Child has a vision of achieving a fully inclusive education system. Many initiatives have been implemented as a result of this plan to provide more support to children with special education needs in school. For example, an extra 1,100 places will be provided on the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS) for school-age children with the highest needs, and the Communications Service will be extended to provide intensive individualised support to an additional 1000 students aged 5–8 with significant communication needs but who don't qualify for ORS. One component of the Success for All action plan is to fund services for an additional 1,000 children during the first three years of schooling to better support young people with special education needs transitioning to school. It is therefore important to understand fully what helps transitions and what hinders transitions. Current Ministry client satisfaction surveys focus on the Ministry specialist services themselves, rather than the *transitions between* specialist services.

In April 2012 the Ministry released an RFP to understand more about transitions from early intervention into school-age services for children with high levels of special learning needs.

> Transition to school represents a time of significant change for children and their parents/caregivers. Children with special education needs and their parents often face additional challenges when they make this transition. At this time, many children with special education needs also transition from Early Intervention services to school-age Special Education [SE] services.

> The Ministry of Education wants to better understand factors associated with successful, as well as problematic, transitions between Early Intervention [EI] and school-age services. (Ministry of Education, 2012)

The overall objectives for the research were to:

- explore what is currently 'not working' in transitions from EI to school-age services from the perspectives of people involved in these transitions—to identify 'what we can do better'

- explore how to improve transitions and outcomes for young people—to identify 'what we do well' and 'what needs to be changed, and how'. (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 4)

Different stakeholders are likely to have different perspectives about what is working well and what could be improved because of their different roles in the transition. The RFP (Ministry of Education, 2012) highlighted the importance of gaining these different perspectives.

Questions
The Ministry posed a number of questions in their RFP.

- What factors support successful transition from EI to school-age services?

- What factors inhibit or prevent a successful transition from EI to school-age services?

- What does a successful transition look like from the perspective of different stakeholders?

- Using specific examples of 'unsuccessful' transitions, what could have been done to improve the outcomes for the young person and their family? What went wrong? (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 4)

We have used these questions as a basis for the interview schedules in this study (full sets of interview questions are found in Appendix 1).

How the research fits into a wider programme of research

In 2004 the nationwide *Let's Talk* consultation process on Special Education was undertaken by the Ministry. Transitions between EI and school-age services were identified as an area to be improved. Findings in the Review of Special Education (Ministry of Education, 2010a) mirror the 2004 findings.

The Ministry undertook a literature review and analysis of administrative data. NZCER conducted the case-study research that is reported on here in late 2012. The goal was to contribute to understandings about what EI to school-age service transitions look like currently—and why—so that existing service strengths can be built on, and solutions to issues developed from a sound knowledge base.

Parameters of field work

In the RFP, the Ministry outlined the nature of the fieldwork required, and wished to see detailed information to shed light on some of the "on the ground" issues in transitions from EI to school-age services. The Ministry was:

seeking proposals to carry out interviews with parents and teachers of young people who have recently transitioned from EI to school-age SE services, and with SE service providers.

The Ministry wished to see the full range of perspectives of transitions. It called for:

Interviews with teachers and other school staff, and SE regional staff, to identify factors that support or inhibit successful transitions, and changes that could be made to improve transitions.

The Ministry favoured a case-study approach to the work:

A series of 'case studies' focused on transitions that have been identified as unsuccessful by SE—drawing on perspectives of parents/caregivers, school and SE staff, and potentially young people with disabilities.

The number of case studies was determined by the available funding. It was important, however, to make sure that priority learner groups and the perspectives of more than one Ministry office area were considered:

The research should include fieldwork in at least two centres around the country, and ensure transitions for Māori and Pasifika children are considered in the research. (Ministry of Education 2012)

Our approach to fieldwork

We created a set of criteria and sampling procedures for Ministry staff in four offices across two regions to select the children at the centre of each case study. The case-study children were to be selected in a way that ensured a range of experiences could be documented. We wanted to be sure we that had a range of transition experiences, and that for each case study there were sufficient Ministry, school and ECE centre staff available for interview. To make sure of this, we included staff availability in the selection criteria. We also thought it important to have a range of services covered so

that we were able to look at differences and similarities in transitions processes. These services were the Ongoing Resourcing Scheme (ORS), Severe Behaviour and Severe Communication. As it happened, the sample also yielded other services such as Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) support with either Severe Communication or Severe Behaviour Ministry support, or Resource Teacher of the Deaf support (RTD). Additionally, as indicated in our initial proposal to the Ministry, we were keen to include some students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as transitions for students with ASD are particularly important. The sampling criteria also included ethnicity.

We gave careful consideration to the Ministry's requirement that we include less-effective transitions in the case studies. After further discussion with Ministry staff, we included a full range of case-study transitions experiences rather than just case studies of ineffective transitions. To get this range, we asked Ministry staff to identify whether there were any issues in the transition as part of the criteria for the wider sample we asked them to draw for us and from which we could then select individual case studies. As the Ministry had suggested in the RFP—and as borne out by the case studies—there were sometimes different views about whether a transition was successful. Just selecting case studies of unsuccessful transitions from the Ministry perspective would not have given a full picture of the issues related to transition processes.

We were aware of a range of different team structures for specialist services within the Ministry. There was speculation that different team structures might impact differently on transitions. After discussion with the Ministry we included a mix of team structures in our selection of offices. These teams were structured in three different ways.

- A team structured to provide services to 0–21 years of age.

- Teams structured to provide services to 0–8 years of age (which included a focus on transition processes).

- Teams structured to provide services to 0–5 and 5–21 years of age.

We created a template for each of the four Ministry offices which included the criteria described in the previous paragraphs, and provided instructions for selecting the sample. We requested a larger list from each office to account for possible declines to participate in the research, and to ensure a range of ethnicities and transition experiences. The characteristics of 32 children were provided back to us across the four offices. After some discussion, we selected and interviewed the participants for eight case studies from the lists supplied by two offices—a ninth case study did not proceed as the school declined to participate. For the other two offices, we encountered more difficulty in securing a sample. Of six possibilities in one office, we were able to interview participants for only one case study. In another office we were able to interview participants for three case studies. To complete the sample of case studies we located two case studies that had not been on the initial sample lists—these two case studies were from one of the latter two offices. While there were no outright declines in the last two offices, the difficulties related to staff with very busy caseloads, staff planning on taking leave, and staff views that parents were very difficult to contact in the normal course of work and that the selected parents would not be interested in participating in additional interviews and discussion for this research study. We may have therefore missed some transitions that were very ineffective.

We carried out interviews with parents and whānau of 15 children who had transitioned between EI and school-age services between February 2011 and February 2012. We also interviewed these children's previous ECE teachers, and the teachers and principals (or the staff member the principal delegated) from their schools. EI and school-age services specialist staff from the Ministry who had worked with these children were interviewed. The semi-structured interview schedules used are included in Appendix 1. In addition to these interviews, we consulted Ministry case files on the children's transitions from EI specialist support to school-focus specialist support to provide clarification on aspects of each of the transitions. This gave us 14 case-studies, as two of the children in the case studies were twins.

In reporting stories about aspects of transitions we have changed children's names to respect confidentiality.

The children at the centre of the case studies

Ethnicity

The 15 children in the case studies included:

- 7 European children (this included NZ European and 1 European migrant family)

- 4 Māori children

- 3 Pasifika children

- 1 Asian child.

Services

- 9 children were receiving ORS services (7 with high ORS funding and 2 with very high ORS funding).

- 7 children had been diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum (sometimes in conjunction with other diagnoses)

- 3 were moving from EI services to Severe Behaviour services

- 2 children were moving from EI to Severe Communication services

- One child was transitioning from Early Intervention Advisor of Deaf support to Resource Teacher of the Deaf support. (After consent had been gained for this interview, and the interview began, it became clear that this case-study child would not meet the original criteria for the case studies, as the child did not meet the criteria for weekly Resource Teacher of the Deaf support. However, we have included the case study in our analyses and commentaries because it highlighted transition issues of relevance to this research study.)

Interviews completed

We completed interviews with all the 14 families of the case-study children: 12 mothers, 3 fathers and 2 extended family members (sometimes there was more than one person at the family interview).

School interviews included: 3 principals; 4 assistant principals; 1 deputy principal; 9 special education needs co-ordinators (SENCOs); 1 outreach teacher; 2 resource teachers of the deaf; and 12 teachers (sometimes roles were combined—e.g., SENCO and assistant principal).

We talked with staff in 13 of the 14 ECE centres (in one centre all the staff who had been involved in the transition of the case-study child had left). Sometimes there was more than one ECE staff member at the interview.

Relevant Ministry staff were interviewed for all 14 case studies. For a number of these interviews, more than one Ministry staff member was present. In total, 35 Ministry staff were interviewed.

Our approach to analysis

Inductive analysis

We wished to maximise both the information from our interview data and the confidentiality of participants. Thus we have reported the data from the case studies as thematic analyses rather than as individually described case studies. The process we have used is an inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006). The themes have been derived from detailed readings of the raw interview data by the lead researcher, with a number of "checking back" processes with other interviewers in the project during the development of the themes. The themes arise directly from the analysis of the raw data, not from any prior expectations or models.

Case-study data

Almost all interviews were taped, and written notes also made. A full summary of the interview was written up. Each participant received a summary of their interview notes, and was invited to return any alterations if required (via a stamped self-addressed envelope we supplied).

After the thematic analyses were completed, individual interview data were coded according to the themes identified through detailed reading across case studies. This enabled us to look at patterns across and within case studies.

General commentaries offered by participants

The Ministry was keen to gather general commentaries on transition as well as commentaries specific to the case studies. Our interview schedule asked participants about their general views on transition processes, as well about their views on the particular case-study transition. We have included these views, where relevant to the theme being described, in sections titled *General Comments*.

2. "Deceptively simple but incredibly complex" – main trends across case studies

This section of the report outlines: transition definitions and expectations; varying perspectives on what constitutes an effective transition; a consideration of the overall effectiveness of the transitions in the case studies; and school outcomes thus far (the latter described as children's progress at school).

Defining transitions

Supporting transition for students with special education needs is an important component of Ministry specialist staff work. There are frequent transitions for students with special learning needs, and those transition times can be challenging.

> Transitions occur when the child or young person changes setting or experiences a change in circumstances. Transitions may be major ones for the child or young person, such as the change from home to an early childhood education service, or from school to vocational and support services. For many children changes of teacher or classroom may also require careful planning and support. (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 28)

> Times of transition are times of vulnerability for students with special education needs and their families. The main transitions are into school from early childhood education, between different special education services, between different levels of schooling … (Ministry of Education, 2010)

This study looks at children's transition experiences from early childhood to school. It focuses on the role of Ministry specialist staff in supporting the transition from ECE to school, and from EI support to school-age services specialist support. This focus was an essential requirement of the Ministry's RFP for this research (Ministry of Education, 2012, pp. 3–4).

Ministry expectations for transitions processes

Transitions have frequently been identified as a critical area of practice for Ministry specialist staff. Reviews of special education have identified transition as an area for further attention (e.g., Ministry of Education, 2004, 2010).

Effective transitions occur when there is:

- an understanding of what the students want and need

- active planning to ensure the right services and support are available in their new settings

- flexibility regarding the services and supports that are provided in schools and after school

- close work between schools and the various agencies that can be involved, especially when students are leaving school

- cooperation between professionals as students move from class to class or between years. (Ministry of Education, 2010)

The *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Guideline* (2008) which was jointly developed by the Ministries of Health and Education also emphasises the importance of transition planning—both for the child and for the new environment. The guideline document outlines actions or activities that are important in the transition of children with ASD from ECE to school.

- Preparing children to function as independently as possible from the beginning. This may begin by teaching imitation and attention to adults and then particular skills taught in small steps.

- Actively teaching 'survival skills', for example, turn-taking, sitting quietly during activities, listening to directions from both near and afar, communicating basic needs.

- Members of the team around the child visiting the new setting and considering the demands of the environment and teaching the child the skills needed, for example, putting belongings into a tray or locker, indicating they need to go to the toilet, putting toys away.

- Members of the team from the current setting providing information, support and education to the staff in the new setting.

- Planning the transition to the new setting with visits which take place on a gradual basis.

- Using social stories and other visual strategies to introduce the new setting and the people in it. (Ministry of Health, 2008 p. 94).

The Specialist Service Standards (Ministry of Education, 2006) are standards that apply to specialist staff working to support the full range of specialist services funded by the Ministry of Education. All Ministry staff interviewed in the research are covered by these standards.

The standards cover all components of the service pathway: access; engagement; assessment and analysis; programme planning; implementation; review; closure; and reflection and follow up. Figure 1 below shows the Ministry Service Pathway in diagrammatic form.

Figure 1:   Ministry Service Pathway
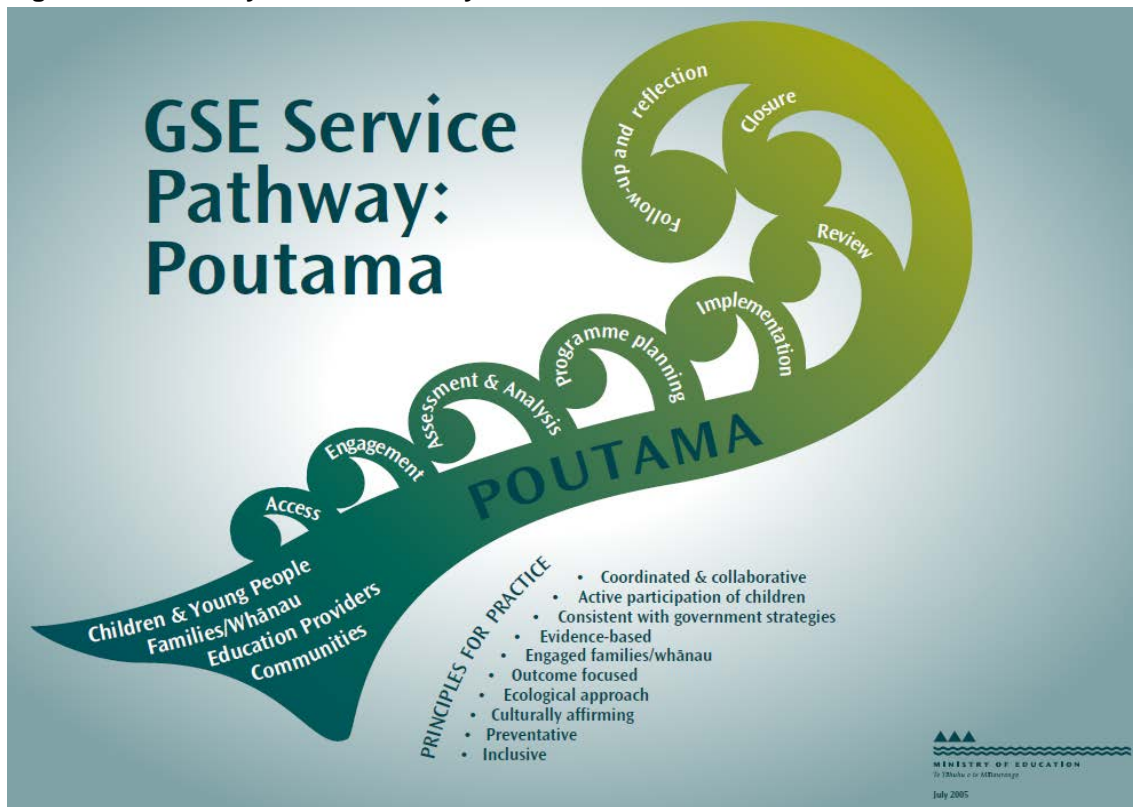
All components of the service pathway have some relevance to children transitioning to school (as they finish receiving EI support and commence receiving a school-age specialist service). There is also a specific service standard relating to transition: Closure Standard 1.

Professional Practice Standards

CLOSURE STANDARD 1

Transitions should be planned, prepared for and documented.

GOOD PRACTICE WILL ENSURE THAT:

- planning is sensitive to the stress on the child or young person, their family and whānau, that may be associated with transitions,
- transitions are agreed to and documented by the team,
- transition planning will involve members of the team into which the child or young person is transitioning,
- transitions are a collaborative process that are planned in advance and implemented within an agreed timeframe, and
- a written summary is shared and discussed at transitions.

Management and Organisational Standards

CLOSURE STANDARD 1

Management supports the closure process, which can be in the form of a transition, through:

- policies or procedures that ensure transitions and closures:
- are timely,
- are collaboratively planned and implemented,
- record the outcomes of the service provided,
- are documented and placed in the child or young person's file,
- support file management that is consistent with the Archives Act 1957 and the Privacy Act (1993),
- provide information about the process for seeking future support, and
- are sensitive to the needs of family and whānau in times of grief. (Ministry of Education 2006, pp 22–23)

Examples of locally developed expectations for transitions

As described above in the specialist service standards, managers are expected to have transitions policies and procedures available for specialist staff. During our research we were shown examples of locally developed policies and processes to meet the varying contexts. These local documents reflected the national Specialist Service Standards and outlined the necessary procedures within the local office context. One set of local examples shared with us contained: timelines for transition to school; forms and checklists; protocols for working with other agencies, and guidelines to relationships. Relationships were described through the headings *commitment, communication, collaboration, flexibility, transparency*, and *individualised*. The templates provided a range of examples or ways to share information with others (adults and children). They included social story templates; "communication passports" describing the transitioning children so that other children could understand their ways of working; and introductory letters for classmates and their families.

What did the transition case studies reveal?

Parent, family and whānau anticipation of the transition process

While going to school was a time for new opportunities and for anticipation, for most families in these case studies anticipating their child's transition to school was also a time of anxiety and uncertainty, or something that occupied time and thought, or a combination of these factors.

> Quite stressful I mean ... I think transitioning a child without special needs is stressful enough, but I think because you've got so many other considerations ... was actually quite worrying really, I was actually quite anxious about the whole thing. (Parent)

Some were anxious about what their child might do to others at school.

> We had one meeting of talking ... all four of us talked about the things to be aware of, of his language, of his behaviour and everything. At that meeting, even though I think she's an amazing teacher and I really like her, she was like he'll be fine, don't even worry and I was like well everything can be fine but you still need to understand that he will hit somebody. He doesn't have the ability to stand back and go 'oh I need to walk away'. (Parent)

They wondered too about how their child might cope academically. More discussion was sometimes necessary about this.

> I was very much bent on him not starting because I just felt that he was not ready but then we got an appointment [with the paediatrician] and she was kind to me but said it didn't matter whether he started now or in January or February, he would never be educationally ahead. (Parent)

Safety of the child was also an issue that family needed addressed as they sought support through the transition process.

> Mum was concerned Zac might be bullied or would be targeted as he would be new and not able to express himself well. She wondered how he would cope. (School)

Some family members had held concerns when their child began ECE. However, they had some reassurance from that first transition experience.

> As soon as he went I was concerned, and didn't want to let him out of my sight because at any time he could have gotten sick and died on me. So I wanted to spend that time with him. But as soon as he hit kōhanga he was just thriving. He started to walk better, run, climb and freak them out. (Parent)

Other experiences however sensitised parents to potential difficulties; parents could have quite mixed emotions therefore about transition to school.

> I've had a lot of issues with having to deal with different people. If I'd listened to them he'd still be where he was back then not eating, walking, not trying things. (Parent)

The time commitment required was also evident. Parents, family and whānau attended many transition meetings at the ECE centre. Sometimes they were also invited to make multiple visits to school. (This is in contrast with a standard transition to school, where school visits by parent and child are more limited). One parent even gave up work for the transition time to be available for any issues that arose. For families where both parents worked, and for single-parent families, the time commitment required was sometimes a challenge.

Multiple transitions

Before focusing on the EI to school-age services support, it's important to acknowledge the broader transitions "picture" for the children in these case studies. In addition to their transition from ECE to school, most of the children (and their family and whānau) had already experienced other "changes in setting or experiences" in their young lives:

- At least five children had been to more than one ECE centre.

- Two children transitioned from language nests (kōhanga, and a Samoan language nest) into English-medium schooling.

- In five of the case studies the transition was not from the local ECE centre to the local school. This meant that the children had a complete new set of peers as well as new teachers, new surroundings—and possibly new specialist support staff—because of geographic changes rather than team structure changes.

- Many had also already transitioned out of their new entrant classroom into the next classroom. There was variation across the case studies about the amount of transition planning that carried over from the EI contact, through the new entrant classroom to the child's next classroom. In some cases, teachers were involved in detailed transition planning and discussion that carried on from the EI to school transition. In other cases, the information and planning for transition into school did not carry over as much into subsequent classrooms.

- There was movement back and forwards in different care arrangements within the extended family (meaning two different geographic living arrangements for a child).

- There was movement within and across towns and cities.

- Two children had a change from two parents to a single-parent family.

- One child spent periods of time overseas (including just after beginning school).

- One family had returned to New Zealand, and another family had immigrated to New Zealand.

- A family left New Zealand shortly after the interviews for this research.

Many of these transitions also involved additional changes in the wide range of specialist professionals (not just Ministry staff) supporting the child. Multiple transfers of information about the child were needed. Sometimes, too, there was uncertainty about who that information should come from or go to during these additional transitions. These additional transitions frequently created a cumulative complexity of transition from EI to school-age services.

What made for an effective transition?

Participants' descriptions of good transition processes

There is a range of written guidance at national and local level for transitions. We asked the case-study participants about the characteristics of a good transition. There was clearly variability in how closely different Ministry teams or individual staff members adhered to the prescribed process. One interviewee commented on how, on the surface of it, the transition process was relatively straightforward—but that transitioning to primary school was a major change for all children, and particularly for children with special needs. The interviewee noted that there was not a

> one-size-fits-all template but [the transition process was] moulded around the individual needs of child and family [and was] deceptively simple but incredibly complex. (Ministry)

Answers reflected the high level of detailed planning needed, the necessity to keep an overall picture of the process in mind, and the need to adapt to individual child and family circumstances.

> The whole process and the conversations that start way back from near their 4th birthday … likely scenarios … when to make applications, what resources are going to be wrapped around her—seeing the whole picture. (Ministry)

Many staff felt there were no set processes, and that it was important to work with the family and whānau needs.

> There is no formal protocol; we work on a needs basis. (Ministry)

On a couple of occasions it was clear that sometimes processes and family circumstances did not fit as well, or there was insufficient guidance about how to adapt processes and protocols.

> It's easier to follow the process with some, especially if educated, middle or upper middle class (Ministry)

Our analysis of effectiveness
While it's clear that effective transitions do need to reflect the specific child, family and whānau contexts, from our data it was clear there were some key process elements which assisted us in judging the effectiveness of the transitions processes. We were also able to begin to identify some outcomes of effective transitions and less-effective transitions.

Relationships
Relationships between key stakeholders were critical. Was there trust and confidence across stakeholders? It was clear in the analysis of transitions that sometimes relationships were strong between some stakeholders, but not across all stakeholders. Where relationships were not strong across all stakeholders, there was a lack of trust and confidence. Sometimes there was a sense of having to struggle to achieve progress and gain resources. Additionally, where the relationship was not strong there was potential for less information about the child to be shared, and for less coordination to occur regarding support and resources for the child. Poor relationships did not bode well for the next step in the child's journey or for future children with special learning needs transitioning into school.

Systems and processes
Systems and processes were also critical. Planning and timing, role clarity, communication and continuity were the central elements in systems and processes. Where there were gaps in these processes some key stakeholders were not aware of important dates or all the details of planning. They were not sure about roles or who to contact. This resulted in incomplete information about the child being available both to support the child and to ensure continuity across the transition.

Resources
Resources were another critical component. Resources came as funding, materials and people. "People" included specialist skills, the experience of key people, people's time, and professional learning and development. Inadequate or inappropriate resourcing meant high levels of stress for school staff, and sometimes for parents and Ministry staff. Unresolved transition resourcing issues led to parental or school views, or both, that the child was "missing out" on key resources needed to progress at schools, or that others in the class were "missing out" because insufficient resourcing for the child meant the teacher did not have sufficient time for all members of the class. Again, resourcing issues had the potential to impact on how school staff viewed future transitions of children with special learning needs into their school. In a few cases, resourcing discussions led to "battle" and "fight" terminology.

How effective were the transitions in our case studies?

As already noted, transitions are complex. There were no transitions in which every single aspect was fully positive. However, there were a number where the descriptions of process and outcome were overwhelmingly positive and made for an effective transition. In another group of transitions the outcomes were largely positive, but some aspects of the transition were less effective for the child. In a smaller number of transitions it was clear that the transition—for a range of reasons—had not been very effective. We acknowledge the complex processes in transition presents challenges to simple categorisations of the effectiveness of a transition process. However, the use of the categorisation assists in making clear what is required in effective transitions and where issues can arise that compromise effectiveness.

What follows below is a summary of our categorisation of the case studies and then a table which provides an overview of the case studies regarding the key themes identified from our data.

Overall effectiveness

We found that there were seven very effective transitions of children. Five of these children had particularly challenging and complex needs, and two had less-challenging needs. These effective transitions included three students with ORS funding, and four with severe behavioural needs. The transitions were characterised by strong relationships where trust, confidence and respect were often evident. Detailed and collaborative planning processes were in place, along with an effective use of resources. There were sometimes discussions and different perspectives about resources, but these discussions and disputes seemed to be actively managed, or largely resolved, or a combination of both.

> You almost over-plan so that you're ensuring as best as you can that the transition will be successful. Particularly for those high and complex children so that you're setting it up. You're setting the situation up for the child to succeed, not think … it will be all right with one visit and it's a really complex child and then it all falls to pieces and the child has a negative start. (Ministry)

One SENCO's account of a very effective transition captured many of the critical elements.

> I think with George the transition that we experienced was probably one of the smoothest we've had ever, so that was working with his early childhood case worker [EI teacher] who came well before he started school to come and meet with us, give us some background, came with our special ed service manager at the time, and so we had a really good insight into what presented as some of his difficulties, what worked for George. The teacher and myself had the opportunity to go and visit the early childhood centre that he was at so that was really great too because you could see him in his own environment and I certainly encourage [people] to do that. …
>
> We also met with the special language therapist, all the people who were involved in working with George we met so we could set up systems for him before he started school and then once he was at school we really worked hard in making that transition for him easy and settling so he came for part of the day. So a morning block, we extended that to include morning tea and then we extended it to include lunchtime and then we extended it to the afternoon and then full days for half the week and then into full days so it wasn't just straight into school, this is what it's like, particularly because at the beginning of the year everything is new, everyone is new and so that worked really well ... So as a school, we set up the resources that would be valuable for George, made sure we had a good teacher aide, that was able … Everyone was on board, mum and his extended whānau so his grandmother and mum, both always at meetings or willing to attend them. And again it's really trying to encourage them to share the things that happened at home for George that we would know what might trigger any anxieties or anything like that. (School)

In another group of transitions (five case studies) there were some effective components in all transitions, but each had at least one significantly less-effective component. Some of these students—whose needs were, on the surface of it, less challenging—appeared to experience less planning, coordination and attention. Diminished planning and coordination impacted on children's transition outcomes, at least in the short term. These transitions featured strong relationships across most key stakeholders, but not all. In some, for a range of reasons, there were "glitches" in the planning processes. Additionally, in some there were disputes about the quantum, or nature, or timing of resources. The disputes did not appear to be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. Despite this, most children appeared to be making progress at school.

The third group of two children experienced less-effective transitions overall. Of these two transitions, one of the children appeared to have less-challenging needs. With this transition there was no written agreement or transition plan—just a series of emails. The parent declined an offer to visit the school alongside Ministry staff, and Ministry staff did not visit the teacher on their own. The teacher interviews showed they had minimal knowledge of the child's needs (as they did not seem to know the content of the emails about the child's transition). The documentation in the email was quite full between Ministry and school SENCO. Yet the planning did not appear to have been implemented for the transition. It appeared that staff changes in the Ministry might have led to less coordination in this particular transition. Some months after the child began school the child's needs were being more appropriately met.

One student with challenging needs also experienced a less-than-effective transition. In this case study the poor relationships and communication across key stakeholders compromised the transition. There were also high levels of stress evident at the school about resource allocation for the child.

Differing perspectives within a case study

In seven case studies there were markedly different perspectives in different participants' accounts of the same aspect of transition.

Three cases featured conflicting perspectives about the overall effectiveness of the transition itself. In one case study, Ministry and school staff had different perceptions about the nature of their relationship:

> … good transition ... despite being picked up late. (Ministry)

> They didn't have any idea of what we do here and [EI teacher] wasn't willing to work with us. (School)

In five case studies, the conflicting perspective was about the state of relationships, or mutual respect, or both, between different stakeholders. These conflicts mostly related to Ministry–school or Ministry–ECE centre relationships. For example, one case study has dissonant stakeholder perspectives:

> … good relationship with the school. (Ministry)

> We knew we would get very little from the Ministry of Education … Offers of support from SE staff rarely come to anything … There is limited expertise of Ministry staff. (School)

In about half the case studies there was conflicting information from interviews about whether communication had occurred. The most frequent example of this was whether early childhood staff had invited school staff to the ECE centre as part of the transition process. Schools would claim that they had not been invited; ECE centres would say that they had invited the school, but that they had not come.

Two schools felt that full information on a child had not been disclosed to them, whereas Ministry of Education staff felt they had supplied all the available information. In another case an itinerating specialist provider felt they had not been given sufficient information about the child prior to working with the child, while other parties in the same case study reported a smooth and effective transition.

Even in highly effective transitions there were sometimes different perspectives. For example with one child's transition, a Ministry staff member reported good communication and understanding with parents and school, and while the parent was mostly happy with the transition it was clear on a number of occasions during the interview that the parent was really puzzled by the ORS criteria and funding processes, and felt her queries about the process had gone unanswered.

In one study we found conflicting personal information about the case-study child. There was a 6-month difference in the date of birth recorded by the school and by the Ministry. (Our checking confirmed that the Ministry date was correct, and this date has now been changed at the school). A misunderstanding of 6 months for a child who was only just 6 years old makes a significant difference for a school assessing a child's progress. In this case, the school thought that the child was making good progress for the time she had been at school, but that she was behind her chronological age. However, because of the mix-up in birth dates she had started school on her 5th birthday, not 6 months later. In fact she was progressing well for the time at school and compared to her peers. While the school has responsibility for recording a child's date of birth, with a detailed set of transition plans this error would most likely have been uncovered much earlier. (We did note the correct date had been on the e-mail information from the Ministry staff working on this case.)

We want to make the point that ineffective transitions are not necessarily the "fault" of any one staff member. We saw examples of outstanding transition processes by Ministry staff, and from time to time the same Ministry staff might be involved in less-effective transitions. Factors combined to make transitions more or less effective.

In Table 1 (below) we summarise the trends, broadly, within and across the case studies. The ticks denote where participants were in agreement that things had gone well in that aspect of the transition. The circle indicates that at least one participant felt that part of the transition had not gone well. Where a circle and a tick occur in the same cell of the table this denotes that there was an issue but it was resolved, or that there were mixed aspects within the transition for that particular case study.

Table 1:   Summary of case study themes in transition from EI to school-age specialist services

Case #	Relation-ships	Systems processes						Resource					
	Ministry/ family	Ministry School	Ministry & other providers	School & ECE	Planning & timing	Continuity (of staff and of setting and routines)	Commun-ication across key players in transition	Role clarity for key players in transition	Funding	Ministry skills (as seen by ECE – school staff)	Previous school experience with children with SE needs	PD opportu-nities for school staff	Timely support
2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	✓	✓	○✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	✓	✓	n/a	-	✓○	✓	✓	○✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8	✓	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	○✓	✓	✓	✓	○✓	✓
9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	✓	✓	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	○✓	✓	○	○	✓	○✓	○✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	○	✓	○✓	✓	✓	○	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○
10	✓○	○	○	○	✓	○	○	○	✓	○	○	✓	○
11	✓○	○✓	✓	✓	✓	○✓	✓	✓	○	○	✓	○	✓
12	✓	✓	✓	✓	○✓	○✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	○
1	✓	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	✓	○	✓	✓	○
13	✓○	○ ✓	✓	○	○	○	○✓	○	○	○	○	○	○

Note: The circle indicates that at least one participant felt that part of the transition had not gone well.

Where a circle and a tick occur in the same cell of the table this denotes that there was an issue but it was resolved, or, that there were mixed perspectives for that particular case study.

Progress at school after transition

The focus of this study was on the transition process. One measure of success is how the child is doing at school after the transition process is complete. We asked schools, parents and Ministry staff how children were progressing now they were at school. Some were at or above the level of their chronological peers. Others were non-verbal, and developing self-care such as toileting and eating. For many schools there was a lot of learning about where the children's achievement levels sat when they started school. The Individual Plan (IP) and notes from EI to school did not all meet the schools' needs. In most cases, schools, parents and whānau, and Ministry staff reported positively on the case-study children's progress at school—sometimes despite less-effective transitions.

Clearly, the children in the case studies began school at very different stages of development. In our interviews many teachers in the study provided very detailed information about the children's progress: what the entry skills had been, what their current progress was, and what the next steps would be. Of note, too, was frequent family delight in that progress.

Case-study children's progress

Some parents felt their expectations for their child's progress at school had been exceeded. This was most evident where children's early years had been challenging for parents, and where the transition planning and process had been effective.

> The school has been amazing. I can't believe how much Damien has come in the last six months …. He's now eating, running, walking heaps. He doesn't really need his wheelchair anymore….. He's come so far. We didn't think he wasn't going to get to this point in his life. (Parent)

> ... now very settled at school, has made friends and is progressing with school work ... never thought it would get to this. (Parent)

Some teachers showed high levels of skill and expertise in scaffolding progress. Some teachers described in great detail the current and next steps for the child they were working with.

> Writing was one of his main issues last year … not even wanting to hold a pen or pencil, so we've made great gains with that, slow but encouraging—and maths is one of his strengths. Reading, he's got a very large sight vocab and so one of our challenges is getting him to express his understanding non-verbally so working out resources that can assist him in doing that … (School)

We did not ask about National Standards. However, a number of teachers made comments about National Standards and their case-study child in interviews. They noted the child's considerable progress, but did not feel able to relate that easily to National Standards.

> I think he's doing well. He's certainly a lot more settled with the routine, school routine, school life. He's quite self-managing, it's a really good skill that we have and his learning is coming now. I think that was too really re-emphasising to the teacher that because they get worried, he should be at this level. But really … so long as he's making progress and that's what we've got to look at. So again it's always the mindset. You're always having to get people to think in a different mindset, yes he's been at school for a year and I know we talk about National Standards and they should be at a certain level, but again that's not going to happen for George in his first year of school. It's not to say that he's not going to get there, but we have to understand that he also has some areas that are difficult for him, like in relation to just keeping focused. (School)

Another teacher was working with a child who had considerable cognitive and social impairment and who was non-verbal. The teacher described her high level of focus on the child's academic progress at school and whether that child would, or could, reach the National Standards. She also talked about how she might measure that progress legitimately.

> For comprehension and reading—he's reading at a Level 6 or 7 and I've just been doing a whole lot of trial and error with Thomas at the moment, but I'm just making a resource where we can write the question. He'll have multiple choice answers on some flash cards and he can pick the appropriate one. At the moment I've been trialling that with him just circling the right one, but he has a kind of tactile defence to pens and everything. I've come up with this one so that's in the process of being made and he can indicate the right answer. So it's just finding something that will be usable so they can quickly change the question and the answers, but whether that is going to be a legitimate adaptation to a running record, you know that's where he falls down. (School)

Sometimes progress was expressed in terms of relief; the teachers had worked out approaches for the child after what they had regarded as a difficult transition.

> … eventually worked out and adapted the environment to suit Joseph in terms of what he could and couldn't do. (School)

> Now a year later it's all working out really well. (School)

Parents did not always feel the teacher had a direct role in ensuring the child's progress at school. In one case, teacher aides were seen to have the lead responsibility:

> ... nothing personal about teachers but obviously they had their own things to do … Joseph had the teacher aides … so pretty much that was his teachers … the teachers were there but they weren't. (Parent)

In another case study the teacher noted that the itinerating teacher prepared lesson plans for the child in the case study. The teacher had begun to prepare lessons, but found they were not used and so had stopped lesson preparation for the child.

> … at first I prepared lessons plans but they were not done … Samantha has her own lesson plans prepared by [the itinerating teacher]. (School)

At times teachers saw the challenge ahead, and the need for further specialist support, while still acknowledging progress.

> Has not physical ability to point—she can't point to the words—we have had to adapt, I could have done with more help earlier to work around ways to strengthen her physically. (School)

> The main focus is for Jennifer to initiate conversation—rather than a question/answer—Jennifer beginning the conversation. (School)

> She has met some milestones—she knows all her sounds now and she did not come with that knowledge. (School)

> Her language has improved, but she's finding it very difficult to learn, especially more abstract things ... Literacy and numeracy are really difficult for her. (School)

In one case, poor communication and poor information exchange by the Ministry was seen as an issue that was impacting on a child' progress.

> No-one had that background knowledge … we discovered that she had more problems than we had realised. (Specialist provider outside Ministry)

Progress was also often measured in social and engagement terms by teachers and Ministry staff

> Success in the first six months of school was actually not about Peter learning to read, it was about Peter learning to be at school in terms of his key competencies and his ability to be part of the group ... non-compliant episodes and the tantrums and things used to be every few minutes and now they are maybe, it depends. It can fluctuate but way less than that, like maybe once a day. (School)

> She is now not running out of class—she is staying in class because she likes it. (Ministry)

Impact on the school, or class, or both

Some teachers in the study reflected positively on the impact on the class and school.

> He's an important part of that classroom. (School)

> We have noticed that as an inclusive school there are changes in the other children's behaviour. (School)

> It's hugely rewarding teaching children like him and your class is a more caring class if you handle the [situation] right. (School)

In a few case studies the progress at school was reported to have had costs. Teachers were focusing on those costs as much as on the progress of the child.

> Joseph's needs have impacted on the whole class ... there would have been less stress for the teacher and students if the teacher was aware of Joseph's sensory needs. (School)

Summary comments

Transitions to school are important for all children—the manner in which a child transitions to school impacts on their school learning trajectories (Peters, 2010). It's widely recognised that transitions are a critical time for children with special educational needs—particularly the transition from ECE to school.

When children transition from EI to school-age specialist services, Ministry staff play a critical role in ensuring an effective transition—both across services and across learning contexts. Guidelines, specialist standards and locally developed protocols provide a framework for the transition process.

For many families and whānau approaching this transition it was a time of anticipation and of anxiety. Many of the children themselves had already been through a number of transitions in their short lives. Some of these previous transitions added to the complexity of the ECE to school transition.

While transition planning needed to reflect the individual circumstances of each child, from our data we were able to identify some key process themes to effective transitions. The first of these themes was relationships. This included relationships between the Ministry and key stakeholders, the parents and key stakeholders, and between ECE centres and schools. The second theme was handover systems and processes. Continuity, planning and timing, communication, and role clarity were included in this theme. The third theme was resourcing, which includes funding, people, experience of schools in teaching children with special education needs, and professional learning and development for ECE and school staff.

Our analyses of the interview data suggest that half the case study transitions were very effective transitions. Another group of case study transitions had an issue, or issues, that prevented them from being fully effective. In two case studies there were sufficient issues to make these transitions markedly less effective. We do note that, in all transitions, parents appeared pleased with progress at school. Teachers, however, sometimes felt that progress had been impeded by difficulties during the transition.

In the next three sections of the report we look at the three themes identified above in more detail.

3. "Relationships … really are the key to everything"

Relationships were a key theme in interviews. Time and time again the critical role of strong relationships came up in discussions with participants in this research. Trust, respect and credibility were important. As noted in the previous section, strong relationships between parents and the Ministry were a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for a fully effective transition. Transitions where children had particularly challenging needs were more likely to be effective where there were pre-existing and ongoing strong relationships—between parent and Ministry staff, Ministry staff and school, Ministry staff and ECE centre, Ministry staff and other specialist providers, and between the school and the ECE centre.

> Relationships … really are the key to everything. (Ministry)

> The relationship is the most important thing, and it also takes time. (ECE)

> ... just love having them [Ministry staff] at the Centre … we can talk freely about what's happening with a child and come up with a very good outcome … you always feel they support the kindergarten as well. (ECE)

This section begins with participants' views on relationships between Ministry staff and different stakeholder groups: parents and whānau; ECE centres; schools; and other providers. It then describes parent and whānau relationships with ECE centres and with schools, and then finishes with ECE centre and school relationships.

Following from a discussion of participants' views on relationships, this section then describes the range of relationships we encountered in the interviews, how those relationships developed and how they impacted on the transition process. In many case studies, positive relationships provided a way forward when challenges arose. Ongoing strong relationships provided a framework in which systems and processes (e.g., communication and planning) could more easily operate. Issues and challenges were more quickly recognised, discussed and mitigated against. Strong ongoing relationships meant a more common understanding of quantum and use of resources, and they provided a positive context for managing differing perspectives about resourcing. While we have separated out different themes there is of course interaction between the three themes. Good relationships provide a foundation for effective discussion about—and coordination of—systems, processes and resources. Similarly, good systems and processes will strengthen a relationship, and so will adequate resourcing.

Parent and whānau views of their relationships with Ministry of Education staff

Strong Ministry–family and whānau relationships were a prerequisite for effective EI to school-age services transition. But on its own that strong parent–Ministry relationship was not sufficient for a fully effective transition. Not all case studies showed a link between strong EI–parent relationships and a fully effective transition.

The family and whānau relationship with EI Ministry staff is the foundational Ministry–family relationship. In a number of case studies, the EI staff had been working with family since or shortly after referral, or diagnosis, or both. Ministry–parent and whānau relationships in the case studies can be described on a continuum. This continuum ranges from ongoing strong relationships to strong relationships during EI but less so in the school context, and then on to relationships that did not appear strong, even in the EI phase of support.

In the case studies where the relationship was strong, contact was frequent. Support varied according to the needs of the family and whānau, but might have included some or all of the following: frequent visits, calls and reassurance, going with the parent to specialist appointments, making contact with other agencies, and putting the parent in touch with different support groups.

A dominant theme in transition interviews was the change in relationship between Ministry staff and parents when children moved onto school. School-age specialist support was perceived by schools, parents, and Ministry staff to involve a very different—more distant—relationship between Ministry staff and parents and whānau, in contrast with the relationship during EI support.

Many Ministry staff acknowledged the very different models of specialist support. EI support occurs in both the home and the ECE setting. One EI staff member said:

> We work all the time on relationships with family and whānau. (Ministry)

That focus changes as the child moves into school. Ministry staff work to ensure that the child is a full member of the school community, and that the school community leads the support and education for the child.

> It's important that we foster relationships between the parents and the school. (Ministry)

Parents experienced this shift in focus as a sharp and unsatisfactory change in some case studies.

Case-study experiences

In about two-thirds of the case studies, relationships between families and EI staff were reported by parents as being very strong. Sometimes the EI staff had been with the family since diagnosis:

> .. very involved right from the diagnosis ... always available by phone or to meet up in person. (Parent)

> She jumped on board since Joseph was about two and that was at the other childcare place.... And she kind of helped with the diagnosis as well with the paediatrician giving her notes and ... No, she's done a lot for Joseph really ... good getting me access to things. Did the parenting course—Incredible Years … and she got me on to like stuff for disability allowance and stuff for Joseph and showed me … CCS ... You know if she knew that there were things that I needed to know or just if she'd sometimes just ring and ask if I had any questions or anything that I wanted. (Parent)

> The EI people were amazing. (Parent)

The lead worker helped to advocate for us and reassured us that there were services designed to support children like our [s]. (Parent)

There was an appreciation of the passion of Ministry staff by some parents.

Staff dedicated—not half hearted. (Parent)

As signalled above, the relationship between Ministry staff and parents and whānau changed markedly at school level when a different team was involved. Familes found the loss of regular contact difficult, and they sometimes felt they understood less of what was happening about support for their child. Parents generally remarked on the difficulty of this change, which became harder when there was minimal handover between lead workers.

We have a new lead worker ... We haven't met him but we have talked on the phone and he has been to the school ... Would have been much better if we could all have met together, face to face, so that [new lead worker] could have gained an understanding of Jack's background and family, and we could have had a chance to talk to him and have a more effective handover. (Parent)

At primary school the school controls the budget so we aren't sure what happens now because at kindy the [Ministry] coordinator has been the main support. … It feels like two very different systems ... it felt like a handover and an immediate cutting of ties, rather than a gradual transition ... everybody cares but they can only care until they turn five. (Parent)

Other families reported that if they had a question they might still contact the EI staff—even if their child was at school.

Generally, parents showed a variable understanding of the potential for lead workers to change as the child moved from EI to school-age services. One parent specifically said

We see less of [EI staff member] now, but she explained that would happen once our daughter began school.

Sometimes the relationship was not managed according to guidelines. Parents were not clear about who their lead worker was and did not know who that person would be well ahead of time. In a couple of cases, the parents had not met the school lead worker face to face (although the children had been at school for about 9 months at the time of interview).

Other parents sought clarification:

I made contact with ... EI ... for clarification around the roles of different people and what would change after the transition—initially confusing. Wasn't really 100 percent certain what was going to happen when he started school—whether [the EI lead worker] would continue on at school as his main person. I actually rang her one day for clarification and she explained that she would no longer be our main point of call, but there would be another team/person. (Parent)

For a small number there was a minimal relationship between parents and EI staff, or school-focused specialist staff, with parents reporting little benefit from the Ministry staff. In one case study the parent placed store on other specialists such as their child's paediatrician.

Māori perspectives

The number of Māori children in these case studies was small (four) and so it's important not to draw too much from the data in these studies. Māori parents appeared to have good relationships with Ministry staff and seemed comfortable with their relationship with Ministry staff (both Māori and non-Māori staff). In all but one case there were kaitakawaenga involved as well; in the remaining case, the parents declined kaitakawaenga support. This was because there were already so many new faces in the family's life at the time of diagnosis. In the one instance that involved a transition from kōhanga to an English-medium school the mother was happy with the Ministry support for that transition, which involved non-Māori Ministry specialist staff working alongside a kaitakawaenga.

Kaitakawaenga spoke about the way they made sure contact happened and the different ways they worked to establish relationships.

> It can be difficult to establish communication with whānau—sometimes you have to chase them and be 'in their face'. Ringing, and ringing again and face-to-face communication and having relationships and networks with other providers in the community, e.g., Māori health providers, help to establish relationships. (Ministry)

Relationships began by building links.

> I don't take this stuff [Kaitakawaenga book and profile information]. I usually start by telling them who I am. All the whānau I've met from [geographic area] they'll say ah yeah, we're from there too so we make close connections. I get those links from having those conversations with them. I think it's important to know and I always share with staff this is important to know … (Ministry)

But kaitakawaenga were aware that a relationship on its own was not sufficient.

> I visit families I have identified as needing more help. We talk about the learning environment, the home and what they want for the child, what they want at school. I find out what they are worried about e.g., hearing issues or they need respite. I can then put through a referral for them. This can be used to follow up and the family feel they are gaining something useful from me. If they see they can get something from me then they'll let me come back. (Ministry)

Pasifika perspectives

Again the limited number of Pasifika families in these studies (three) precludes any general statements. Pasifika parents and family were generally happy with their relationship with the Ministry. However, in two out of the three case studies they also seemed to expect and or demand less from that relationship with Ministry staff than other families and whānau in these case studies.

Extended family care arrangements for two of the Pasifika children provided challenges for Ministry staff in maintaining relationships. But Ministry staff changes also made it difficult for some parents to recall who those relationships had been with. In common with other parents, some were surprised and a little overwhelmed with the number of different people involved in supporting their child. Unlike some other parents, they did not have support systems outside the family (e.g., parent support group contacts).

One Pasifika parent said they were given all the advice and support needed, but didn't really know how to deal with the situation, and didn't really take it all in initially. They received all the information and would say "yes, I understand". She suggested Ministry staff could double check if parents are OK and really understand, and are not just saying yes. She acknowledged that she and her partner had different ways of dealing with the situation, and that her partner initially found it hard to accept their daughter's disability.

For another Pasifika child in the study, Pasifika teachers wondered if the child's parents felt ashamed and didn't want her to be singled out as having a disability. They wondered if this was why the parents had not come to the school to talk about her needs.

General comments made about Ministry/parent/whānau relationships

With EI services, staff can work in the child's home and at the ECE centre with children and their families. Less parent face-to-face contact with specialists is expected at school level, because specialists work at during school hours at school with the child and staff (Ministry of Education 2010).

Ministry staff, in their general comments, acknowledged the challenge of explaining the different relationship as a child moved into school. The support systems were different and they were implemented in a new context.

> In terms of the family we try to explain the difference between the two services quite carefully so the family understands it so the SLT isn't necessarily going to be the same person that goes to the classroom. Some of those things take a bit of time to get through. (Ministry)

> There's a gap after EI where here is this person who has walked us through this process and now is going. (Ministry)

> There's definitely a lot of work with the family to help them understand the change in the type of support from EI to School Focus. (Ministry)

> All parents are anxious but some of our parents with children with special needs are even more anxious so unless they already have children at school and have some idea of a school setting it is even greater. So giving them the opportunity to ask questions or clarify or even meet some of the members of the team like the lead worker , that would be another way of cementing the relationship. (Ministry)

It was clear, from case study and general comments, that how the Ministry staff assessed the parents' readiness for particular roles played an important part in how Ministry staff worked towards creating the relationship.

> ... depending on where a parent is at in the process we try to adapt the process to give them as much responsibility as they're wanting to take. (Ministry)

If Ministry staff "misread" the parental expectations about the transition and the various EI and parental roles in transition, this has the capacity to compromise the nature of the relationship and the quality of the transition. A couple of Ministry staff acknowledged that it was easier to form a relationship with some parents and that transition processes were therefore easier. Other Ministry staff talked about the need to work from where the parents were at when explaining the relationship changes and other associated changes with transition to school. One of the kaitakawaenga gave an example of this.

> In a case where a child where had a lot of support at EI, mum wanted the same people involved at school. I talked to the school and explained the child and family situation e.g., how the family works. I took the lead worker to the home … Introduced the new school services people slowly to the mum. The team at the Ministry listened and the school knew how mum worked. (Ministry)

Relationships between Ministry of Education staff and early childhood services

Case-study experiences

These relationships were generally (but not always) commented on positively by both ECE staff and Ministry staff. The relationship was valued when the Ministry staff could supply useful resources and advice, as well as support for the work of the ECE centre with the case-study child.

> EI team already know us .... I can flick an email to them and say have you got this and they'll just flick it to me. (ECE)

> The kindergarten teachers are great to work with. (Ministry)

> Well we knew Thomas because we taught his older [sibling] so we were prepared when Thomas came to kindergarten so it was very easy for us to access GSE support right from the very beginning. And GSE also gave us a course on children with Down syndrome so we knew exactly what we needed to do that was extra for him. (ECE)

> It was helpful to have the EI teacher .... living locally—we developed a good relationship with her and she was able to pop in when we had concerns and also give positive feedback about the work we were doing with her. (ECE)

Poorer relationships existed when there were issues of timeliness or competence of Ministry support. Early difficulties with timeliness or perceived skill set coloured how people viewed Ministry staff. When there were poor relationships, there was less credence given to information or advice being shared—including during transition.

> ... urgent referral ... in the first week she arrived ... and didn't get any support for 6 months. (ECE)

> ... EIT .. had her own agenda about what was happening ... (ECE)

In a couple of case studies, the relationship between the Ministry staff and the ECE centre was negatively affected by the perceived quality of the education support worker (ESW) assigned by Ministry staff to the particular case-study child. The ESW was the most frequently present person from the Ministry in ECE centres. The way ECE staff perceived the ESW's skills and behaviour influenced overall relationships between ECE and Ministry staff.

In two case studies, children's moves from one ECE centre to another brought differences in relationships into stark contrast.. It was evident that in one case the previous ECE centre had little contact with Ministry specialist staff since they did not recognise the need to refer on to the Ministry. (Subsequently, at school level, that need was allocated ORS funding.) In the other case, the Ministry was not able to work successfully with the centre to support the child's need.

General comments

A small number of Ministry staff and a few schools and ECE centres were worried about ECE centres that did not raise concerns about children early enough. Late referral to SE was an issue. Late identification and referral meant less intervention before the transition to school and commensurately bigger challenges in the transition itself.

A concern raised in a couple of ECE centres was the quality of ESW support generally.

> Children like Jack need trained professionals the whole way through .. how many untrained adults do we have to get [looking after our children with special learning needs] ... (ECE)

Relationships between Ministry staff and schools

Case-study experiences

While there were some strong relationships reported in some case studies, relationships between Ministry staff and school staff in four case studies were not effective.

In cases where there was a good relationship, comments highlighted the things that schools and Ministry staff valued.

> Good communication. Being informed and supported. (School)

> ... love the way the school took ownership. (Ministry)

> Well in terms of GSE he's got his case worker ... and she's been brilliant, fantastic, so she will come in and visit once or twice a term depending on the need and catch up with me and I will update her on his progress. She will kind of record that feedback and will chat through some possibilities of where to next. She's been a really good sounding board and she'll send me some resources or something that she's thought of that might be applicable to Oliver and she's always been available have we needed any follow up. (Outreach teacher about Ministry)

> They were great and that was why it was really great being able to have the opportunity to visit ... extremely good to work with, very open and just proactive and really great ... We work really well, we're always open. We communicate with each other so ... and when we hit some glitches [Ministry] would come on board. We wouldn't necessarily just wait to have a meeting. We would contact, we would update via email and just ring and say look this is what has happened, what can we do? There's always been that relationship where it was responsive to needs, not 'we'll get to you when we can'. I really believe it's been really good. (School about Ministry)

Other interviews indicated a pragmatic understanding of how best to maintain the relationship.

> Schools recognise that [the Ministry] does not make the rules—it carries the rules out—[the Ministry] is trying its best ... Support is usually there if you use the right strategies to seek that support; build good relationships and know when to make a request and when not to. (School)

Ministry staff were quick to praise particular schools where they had ongoing relationships that therefore meant a wide range of potentially challenging transitions were possible. In the following example, a change of family plan meant a case-study child transitioned into a different school than planned, at quite short notice.

> ... not the best of transitions—kind of worked because of the school—they are very good. (Ministry)

Ministry staff also appreciated schools that enrolled students without resourcing dominating discussions.

> ... school really good—positive response to Jennifer without the usual comments of the difficulties of using school RTLB and SEG. (Ministry)

Less-positive relationships were related to: insufficient communication; perceived lack of competence of Ministry staff; lack of timeliness of support; perceived withholding of information; lack of confidence that Ministry staff understood the primary school setting; personality issues; and frustration about how the Ministry managed the distribution of resources related to the case-study children.

> There was a problem between what we were told by EI and the kindergarten. We talked about when we went to the kindy what Cain was doing and the EIT said that was not normal ... more independent now. That meeting went on for an hour and a half. At the end the three kindy teachers came back up the stairs and said we need to talk to you. They said all that the EIT said to you is completely wrong. (School)

> The woman who came along [Ministry] was quite aggressive. She was "you should be doing this and you should be doing that" ... She was almost saying you shouldn't be too hard on them. I don't think she had very much understanding of what primary schools do. (School)

> No visits from anyone in special education ... would like to have known about the hearing loss and [need for] aids ... (School)

Sometimes Ministry staff were well aware of the relationship difficulties; sometimes they were not. The following example outlines one situation where Ministry and school were aware of gaps in their relationship. From interviews for the case study it was clear that this initial difficulty was still affecting the relationship between the school and Ministry staff.

> At the visits the school principal implied that the GSE team held information back about Joseph's severe needs [We] had no idea what he was going to be like in a bigger school situation. Never our intention to make the school feel as though they had been set up .... not a good start when the principal at the school is already implying that you were trying to put a "fast one" over them. (Ministry)

Our file analyses of the above case show that the Ministry staff involved in this case study had shared quite a lot of information with the school. In this case, where relationships were poor, it seemed that the relationship difficulty was about managing the conflict arising from non-agreement on a range of resources (property and funding for teacher aides). We also noted that the Ministry staff involved in this case study were the same Ministry staff who were involved in one of the more-effective transitions.

General comments

One group of schools offered generally favourable comments about their working relationship with Ministry staff when working with transitions generally, not just with the case-study children. They held great respect for the Ministry staff and valued their practice greatly. For example, in two different schools the staff described Ministry staff members as:

> ... really, really, extremely good to work with, very open and just proactive. I have to say we're very fortunate, the [Ministry] team that we work with, so we work well, we're always open. (School)

> ... the most fabulous capable speech language therapist I've ever worked with. She's very proactive. (School)

In another school, the general relationship was less positive because of the school view of the level of support.

> ... expect little support from Ministry ... ASD are poorly supported ... dropping off for support for ASD students at school level ... even when the child is ORS funded we don't see the support often enough ... (School)

Ministry staff offered mixed views about their relationships with schools. Where schools had gone though the transition processes before, and where there were existing relationships, Ministry staff felt the transitions were smoother and more timely.

> … if you know the school and they know you I find it easier to manage those situations than the schools that are completely new … once you have built up a relationship … (Ministry)

Several Ministry staff expressed frustration about the status of their advice with some schools.

> Schools often say 'thanks for the info—but that's the way we are doing it'. (Ministry)

Relationships between Ministry staff and other providers

Children who have high needs require support from the Ministry. Often these children have support from other specialist providers too. The Ministry's review of special education in 2010 acknowledged that there was sometimes difficulty in the relationships between Ministry specialist providers and other specialist providers.

> There could also be simple measures that could be taken to reduce the burden on students who are making the transition from one setting to another. Measures could include ensuring that schools and agencies consistently work closely together so that as students transition from one setting or specialist support to another, there is no unnecessary extra needs assessment. This may be particularly relevant when moving from early childhood education services into programmes like ORRS and from intermediate to secondary education. (Ministry, 2010)

Case-study experiences

Many of the children in the case studies had a range of specialist agencies and individual specialists working with them. Some children had concurrent health support (occupational therapy, physiotherapy, mental health services, paediatricians, other medical specialists, or a mixture of these services) at the time of transition. Three children had Resource Teachers of the Deaf (RTD) from Deaf Education Centres. Several had Strengthening Families involvement, or involvement with non-government support agencies, or a combination of both. A few had experienced CYFS or WINZ involvement—or both—at some time during their early years. Several parents had undertaken Incredible Years or Early Bird courses—or both—with a range of providers. Some children also had a private speech therapist or psychologist. Additionally, in two case studies the specialist teachers were employed through the Outreach services (meaning that the specialist teacher was from a special school, and therefore not part of either the school itself or Ministry of Education). RTLB involvement was also anticipated in two of the case studies alongside Ministry of Education staff.

There were some examples of close working relationships across providers. Mechanisms for working in Strengthening Families teams seemed well established in the case studies.

But the myriad of provision presented challenges for parents, schools and Ministry staff. The challenges related to confusion, variable communication, differing views on the child's need, some differences related to "patch protection", staff turnover and staff vacancies in various agencies, and confusion after redesign of some services. Sometimes this meant that support for the child was not timely, or not coordinated for transition. Information exchange was not full, or timely, or both. These factors meant that teachers had gaps in their knowledge of the child.

There were times when the relationship was strong and effective, with extensive communication evident in the files:

> Having another health agency involved was also made easy because of the deep level of collegial respect and communication they had [between the health agency and Ministry of Education]. (Ministry)

At other times, Ministry staff worked hard to compensate for vacancies in other agencies. For example, while the Ministry could not compensate for lack of Ministry of Health physiotherapy and occupational therapy, they made sure there was consistency in SLT provision.

For parents it was sometimes hard to work out the roles of each provider—one kept a notebook to keep track of the different agencies, and another produced at interview a sheaf of papers and asked for clarification as to which agency the current research was about. One family kept separate ring binders for their two children. The ring binder for the

case-study child was already almost full with copies of IPs, minutes and email communication with Ministry, and school staff as well as a paediatrician's report.

> ... was initially overwhelming, working out who does what and what the different roles are ... (Parent)

> ... complex funding bucket for parents to come to terms with—three different services—health (for motor needs), [Ministry] SLT for communication, and RTLB for learning needs. (Ministry)

> Everybody got involved (various services). It was both overwhelming and supportive. (Parent)

In one case study, the number of providers was overwhelming for the teacher too.

> I think the teacher ... had trouble coping with having so many people in the room because of the new entrants class and there was other children in there with issues, I think the teacher found it hard coping with having so many adults in the room ... oh it was awful ... it was not an ideal situation for the teacher. (School)

In the two case studies where RTLB were involved (in two different districts) there was uncertainly from Ministry staff about how RTLB now got involved in transitions (after the recent redesign of RTLB structures). RTLB had not been involved in the transition meetings for these two children, even though it was expected that RTLB would also be providing support alongside specialist Ministry staff at school level.

When Ministry staff worked with RTD there appeared to be some role confusion (across three different case studies in different parts of the country). Interview participants noted a current review of the roles. The role confusion appeared to impact on relationships. We noted in some interviews an element of frustration from RTD or Ministry staff about some aspects of transition.

> [Relationship] seems to depend on the personalities of the people involved .... at the moment there's a bit of confusion as to what the job is for the Advisor on Deaf Children and what is the job of the RTD. Some personalities will just get in and do what needs doing anyway and others will hold back saying that's not my job. (RTD)

> There is some blurring between the role of RTD and AoDC—never quite sure where one role starts and another one finishes. (RTD)

In a couple of case studies, the nature of the Ministry's relationships with other providers impacted negatively on family and child, with subsequent impact on transition processes. In one instance there was a disagreement about roles, and one provider's services to the child stopped until a resolution could be found. In addition, there was not full attendance from all stakeholders at transition meetings because of the disagreement. In another case, a child was missing some specialist teacher time at school because there was not—at the time of interview—a resolution about how private speech language services could be integrated into the provision of support.

In another case study it was clear that the paediatric advice on educational need was held in higher stead than that from Ministry of Education staff.

> Paediatrician a good authority figure to help assert needs for Jennifer. (Parent)

However, in another case the Ministry of Education staff member had a good relationship with the paediatrician and regularly attended appointments to support the parent. This relationship enabled the paediatrician to receive up-to-date

information about the child's progress in the home and school contexts. The Ministry staff member then also had a better knowledge of medical information that might impact on the child's progress at school.

General comments

In general discussions, Ministry staff acknowledged the importance of getting these relationships right.

> We have other agencies, but if we don't have the proper communication then ... our reports and their reports clash and then it doesn't help the support. (Ministry)

Staff also commented on how sometimes the health reports from medical specialists were at odds with the service intent of Ministry specialists. There was sometimes a problematic relationship because of this and because parents often valued the paediatricians' views. This meant that parents developed a view of what resources and services should be available at school after transition. This view did not always match the Ministry's approach to provision of services.

> … we get those reports that say we recommend special education kids get speech language therapy so that's setting up expectations of the parent in virtually every report. (Ministry)

> Health professionals have much more status than special education staff in the parents' eyes. (Ministry)

Some schools also noted the additional demands of working with multiple professionals as they worked to transition students into school.

> ... some teachers are facing up to 6 to 7 adults trying to meet with them e.g., RTLB, case workers, physiotherapists, and Strengthening Families. (School)

Multiple-provider relationships were also compounded in late referral or identification of need.

> … if it's a late diagnosis and that's happening at the point of school entry it can be really tricky … (Ministry)

Relationships between parents, whānau and early childhood services

Case-study experiences

Relationships between parents and the ECE centre from where the child transitioned to school were generally strong.

Of note were previous ECE experiences that were not always so strong. One child had not fared well at a previous ECE centre. In other cases, previous ECE centres had not recognised the case-study children's need for support and therefore not recommended to parents that the centre make a referral to the Ministry of Education.

Sometimes that change in environment between different ECE was marked.

> Transitioning to the new kindergarten was also a success. The head teacher invited all the parents to a meeting and they discussed how to meet Jack's needs. She followed this with a letter that was distributed to all the parents ... (Ministry)

> When Jack came from the other ECE centre he had quite a bit of anger built up and once he settled into [new kindergarten] he became a completely different child ... parents would come up to ... mum and give her a hug and say welcome and she would be in tears in those first few weeks. (ECE staff)

General comments

In EI the Ministry staff focused on the relationship between themselves and the parents, and the Ministry employed the specialist support staff to work with children in the ECE centres. When Ministry staff and the ECE centre staff had different views the ECE centres occasionally felt caught between Ministry advice and family wishes.

> For us, the parents' wants and wishes are the primary driver. We take our direction from the parents—they are our clients. We can get stuck between the service and the parent. It can sometimes seem that they are not on the same page. This can make the relationship with the special education services quite fraught. (ECE)

Relationships between parents, whānau and schools

Some Ministry staff interviewed for this research were focused on getting relationships between parents, whānau and schools working well. They viewed part of their role as supporting the school to coordinate and lead support for the child.

This segment of the report looks first at the early parts of developing that relationship: choosing a school. Some early contacts with school did not result in development of any relationship and parents moved on to other school choices. Once the school was selected and the child had begun, parents were generally very happy with their relationship with the school.

School choice: case-study experiences

Finding a school for their child was an evident theme in commentaries by parents, ECE staff and Ministry staff. Parents and whānau in the case studies took account of a number of factors when they embarked on choosing a school for their child. Factors that influenced school choice were:

- local school, or one where siblings attended, or both

- facilities at the school that might support their child

- whether it should be a mainstream school or a special school

- "word of mouth" about the school's reputation with students with special needs in general or with particular groups of children with special needs through contact with or membership of various parental support groups/play groups (e.g., deaf; Down syndrome)

- views of Ministry staff

- views of friends, associates or other specialist providers (e.g., in health/medicine).

The school initially chosen was not always the school the child subsequently attended. In one case study, many different interviewees made similar comments about the initial parental school of choice.

> First we (EIT and I) had to find a school that would take him. We tried a lot of schools. We went through hell with that. (Parent)

> I wasn't happy about our visit to [the school]. The school's response was heartbreaking for all concerned and non-inclusive and not how we want to work. (ECE)

> I was apprehensive as we'd had experiences with other children there where it had been difficult. We'd had a previous child who had high autism ... who they'd wanted to go there too and we went through a very difficult case there and it wasn't easy at all. We had to try anyway, for the mum. And after that we talked to [the parent] and said, "This is difficult. You don't have to go to this school. You may choose." Because they were more or less saying at the time of interviewing us that the school was too big, the school would not suit his needs. It felt like they weren't accepting. (Ministry)

Ministry staff clearly had a challenging role supporting parents to make a school choice. There was some variation in the explicit nature of support and advice. Some parents sought a great deal of advice and wanted clear recommendations. In one or two other instances, parents resisted advice. (In one case, the parent felt that the Ministry EI lead worker was initially pushing her to a special school, rather than to a mainstream school.)

School choice: general comments

General comments about school choice were common with ECE staff, Ministry staff and with some parents. Ministry staff discussed their role in supporting parents in making school choices. They saw the need for a careful balance in the way they provided advice about school choice. Ministry staff wanted parents to make the choices, and they were also aware that there was from time to time a better "fit" possible at some schools rather than other schools. They were aware of their role of providing information for parents to make good choices, but also aware they should not have undue influence on families and whānau about school choice. They did, however, acknowledge that it was difficult when schools were not welcoming to parents.

Meetings with schools ... and then after the meeting Mum is very upset ... Mum feels victimised and not welcome ... (Ministry)

I am surprised at some places who just blatantly say no to a child with special needs and I have heard occasionally of some schools doing that ... parents get the impression that they're not welcome and of course if you're not feeling welcome you really wouldn't want to send your child there. You know I just, you know I've heard stories. (ECE)

Parents talked with other parents, and the view that some schools were not welcoming to children with special needs was discussed at support groups. For example:

… with a lot of mainstream schools … I've heard from a lot of other mums that you don't feel very welcome. (Parent)

One school laid down a challenge to the Ministry. This school regarded itself as a magnet school and therefore had a number of students with special learning needs.

The Ministry say they are going to make schools inclusive. However, schools just say "parents didn't choose us". How then is the Ministry going to measure schools' lack of interest so that parents feel welcome? (School)

Relationships after starting at the school: case-study experiences

Parents were generally positive about their relationship with the school their child attended, even when there had been difficulties in the transition. Parents were appreciative of the support schools gave to them and to their child.

I felt nervous ... but the school was amazing. (Parent)

... was also honest and said look I haven't dealt with a lot of autistic children in my teaching career so this is a challenge for me ... But you know I just sat down with them and I just said this is what ... I would like from the school and so far they have ... met ... what I've wanted for my child ... commend the school—they are really awesome. (Parent)

Very happy with choice of school ... chosen because of ... warmth of the school, physical environment. (Parent)

... school has been really good to him since he started there. (Parent)

The school was amazing; as soon as Damien started they sent around a booklet for all the children to tell them that Damien was special and to be careful of him. Then they started up sign language so he started learning sign language with the other children. (Parent)

Some schools were quite explicit about the ways they made parents feel welcome.

It's also a place where we are very strategic to make it welcoming for parents, there are places for them to come and be, and couches, and we try to have information available. (School)

... strong message to parents that Jack was welcomed and that [we] would work to make the transition successful. (School)

The school had a lot to do with making the transition successful and were very involved. We were made to feel very welcome and there is no judgement ... They made us feel that no matter what Jack did, they could absolutely handle it and we didn't need to worry. The DP will ring if there had been a problem, for example if Jack has had a meltdown, and reassure me that Jack is safe. We will discuss what triggered the problem and work out strategies. The principal sometimes rings after hours to have a chat about how things are going. (Parent)

... they have been open right from the start. They communicate well—they come straight to me if there are issues. There's no third person. (Parent)

Some schools were appreciative of parents' efforts to support transitions.

Parents gave lots of input—popped in and out of school, to school fairs; driving past school room and pointing it out; making it part of daily conversation etc to help Samantha transition ... walked past the school on the weekends so Samantha was familiar with the environment. [Parents] very keen to work with the school for the transition—supportive and realistic parents—the parents were working with the school to make it work. (School)

For some parents there were issues about the length of time taken for transition into full-time school attendance—this issue featured prominently in two case-study interviews with parents. An analysis of case notes and interviews shows that, in one instance, Ministry staff had played a major role in managing the differences between parent and school. In another case, the Ministry appeared not to play a major role in the situation.

Danny was only allowed to be at school for half a day for the first two terms—the school were not too sure about watching him and there was not enough funding for him to be there the whole day. Don't know how we could have angled the funding better. Did not know he would only be going for half days until just before he started school ... had to employ someone … to look after Danny in the afternoon—quite a big stress last year. (Parent)

I thought at the time it had gone on probably for a term too long. But one of the issues that I made crystal clear with the school was that I wasn't going to start dictating to the school because I'm not the expert on it, they'd obviously said that they'd been through ... transitioning children before. And the very last thing I wanted to do was dictate to the school what I wanted because obviously that makes life a bit difficult for the school as well and as I said it was a working partnership that I'm having with the school. But on the last IEP for term two this year I sort of said look you know this is ... my legal rights ... (Parent)

In a small number of cases there were differing views about particular aspects of the transition which parents found difficult at the time. For one parent, while her overall relationship with the school was now positive she recalled her mixed feelings at the beginning.

I got the impression that [the SENCO] didn't really want Thomas at the school. You know she just wasn't that enthusiastic about having him. It seemed to me that it was more of an extra workload for her that she didn't really want but now that he's there, the teacher aide's brilliant and the teacher that he's got now is really good. She's lovely to talk to, easy to talk to. (Parent)

Relationships between early childhood centres and schools

While we did not expect to focus on this aspect of transition in our approach we were struck by the range of ECE–school relationships we found across the case studies. Some schools and early childhood centres had established relationships and transition arrangements for all children. However, sometimes case-study children were not involved in these programmes because they attended ECE centres outside the immediate school area (for family or language reasons, or both) or moving into a school area only recently.

In one group of case studies there were strong, positive and respectful relationships. These schools and early childhood services had longstanding formal and informal relationships, and knew about the children who might be moving from the ECE centre to the school.

> Our visits to [kindergarten] are informal—we have established a routine where when children come on school visits, we sometimes drive them back to the kindy. It gives us time to establish a relationship with them, make an informal assessment and also to keep in contact with the kindy ... With Jack there was informal contact with kindy, so we knew he was coming to us, then a formal invitation to the last IP—this is standard practice. (School)

> ... they wanted to know all about Thomas, they wanted to know from me what I saw of him and what things he could do and possibly what shortcomings he needed help with, things like the toileting and that sort of thing. They made sure that every aspect of him, of his whole personality and his needs were met ... (ECE)

For other schools and ECE centres the relationship was emerging.

> We had the opportunity ... to go and visit the ECE that he was in so that was really great too because you could see him in his own environment ... I have to say it's the first time I've been and he's not the first high autistic child ... at our school. (School)

There were a number of teachers and ECE staff who wanted these visits to happen more frequently.

In other situations there were no relationships evident. Sometimes, but not always, this was because the child was not going to the school closest to their ECE centre. One school, for example, had a transition programme from the local kindergarten, but the child came from a Pasifika language nest so missed out on the school's transition programme. We noted a similar issue when a child transitioned from kōhanga to a school which was not the closest school. Sometimes, schools overcame this lack of contact if they had had prior experience with Ministry specialist staff, and a strong relationship. In other cases, where there was not that knowledge and experience at teacher or school level, and not a strong relationship with the Ministry staff, it was clear that handover information and knowledge about the child was not available in a timely way for classroom teachers.

We noted that in about a quarter of the transition case studies there seemed minimal respect from the school for the ECE centre. Sometimes this was mutual. In these cases the school did not have, or did not use, information from the ECE centre, and there was some trial and error as the child started school. This was particularly so if there was not a compensating strong relationship between Ministry staff and the school.

> School chose not to participate in the transition meeting, and there were no discussions with or visits from the school prior to transition. The school was not open to seeking or receiving information from the ECE. The school preferred to do things their own way; the kindergarten staff were disappointed that their knowledge about Joseph and his needs did not seem to be valued. (ECE staff)

In the same case study the school maintained they had not been invited to the ECE centre to see the child before transition began.

> If the school was more open to ECE observations then it would have been a much smoother process. (ECE)

> The intervention that was put in at the kindergarten was very minimal from what I could see so when Cain arrived at the school there were no routines. (School)

General comments

Some schools in the study had strong existing relationships with ECE centres. When talking about ECE–school relationships generally, one school staff member noted the value of that relationship when there was not Ministry support available. They had been able to set up systems for transitions of other children.

> I've another child transitioning at the moment and interestingly there's not been the level of support for this child but because we already have a very good relationship with this early childhood centre and systems in place where we run a transition playgroup thing once a week so over many months I've seen this child in that context informally and then [deputy principal] and I once a month we go down and take mat time so I see him in that context, so with him transitioning, even though no-one has set this up in terms of managing it for us, he's come for his visits and he's come on a day with no-one else … much like James has … (School)

Summary comments

Relationships were viewed by many we interviewed as key. Family, whānau and Ministry relationships were often strong—especially between EI staff and families. For some families this relationship changed quite abruptly as the child began school—there were different staff and some had not yet met their new Ministry lead worker.

Relationships between Ministry staff and ECE centres were mostly positive—these relationships were based on mutual respect and complementary skills. Where the relationships were less positive the issues related to ECE centres' perceptions of delays, reduced resourcing, and centres being less happy with the skills of Ministry visiting the centre—whether ESWs or specialist staff. One comment that came up a few times—in general comments as well as in relation to one of the case studies—was about the lack of a relationship with some ECE centres. Sometimes staff in a few ECE centres were not referring children to the Ministry for specialist support. This impacted on the time and length of EI and could lead to more difficulties in the transition process.

There were some strong Ministry–school relationships. However, in four case studies we noted poorer relationships. These poorer relationships were coloured by school perceptions about Ministry staff competence, inadequate resourcing, poor timing of support, poor information or personality issues, or a combination of these factors. In a few case studies, we noted Ministry staff willingness to proactively manage conflict as it arose was a positive influence on relationships.

We noted some variability in Ministry relationships with other providers of specialist services. If there were good relationships, there was more chance of there being good communication, which in turn influenced continuity for the child and coordination of people and resource in a timely way during transition.

Parents generally had good relationships with both the ECE centre their child transitioned from and the school their child transitioned into. The school the child went to was not always the family's first choice. We did note reports of difficulties when trying to enrol in families' first choice in school—in one case study, and in the general comments interviewees made.

We noted that ECE centre and school relationships, when positive and ongoing, were of benefit in transition.

Finally, transitions were not only about relationships. If there were good relationships but difficulty with handover systems, or resources, or both, there could still be issues in transition.

4.   Handover systems and processes

While relationships were clearly of importance, discussions on handover systems and processes, and resources, also featured strongly during the interviews. In this section we describe a range of handover systems and processes. We begin with systems and processes that maintain appropriate continuity for both children and families. This section includes reference to different team structures and practices. Next we discuss planning and timing, communications and role clarity. For each of these areas we describe what worked, and what the challenges were.

Continuity

> Families are generally quite anxious leading up to transition. A lot of the anxiety with going to school is about having to start again. (School)

Managing continuity is a major consideration when children move from ECE to school. With about half the case-study children also being on the autism spectrum, continuity considerations were especially important (Ministries of Health & Education, 2008). A good deal of the transition handover systems and processes were aimed at ensuring continuity for the child and family and whānau.

In the interviews, continuity had many dimensions:

- continuity of services and staff supporting the child

- sufficient knowledge and knowledge transfer about the child to enable continuity of IP social and learning goals for the child

- sufficient continuity in environmental factors such as people, peers and routines.

What worked

Staffing continuity
Staffing continuity was valued by schools. EI staff were seen as playing a pivotal role in transition. In many instances the lead worker had a very long association with the child—sometimes more than 3 years. Some of those interviewed talked about the value of EI staying with the child for a longer period in the school setting. This was to maximise knowledge exchange about the child and make sure that the new learning environments best met the child's learning needs without a great deal of "trial and error" at school.

As noted in the first section of this report, we purposely chose case studies from a range of team structures. There is only a small number of case studies in total, and each team structure comprises a subset of these studies. When staff involved at the EI level stayed longer with the child at school this was sometimes because of an adaptation of existing team arrangements. In other cases, this was because of an explicit Ministry decision to create a team structure that minimised change in personnel as a child went to school. In the small number of cases where Ministry specialist staff stayed the same for the first term or so at school, school staff appreciated this—there was much more detail about the child and the resources available to school staff. The 0–8 team structure made it more likely that staff would stay the

same. However, this did not always occur because of staff turnover or geographic patch arrangements. The positive comments below that relate to continuity in transition reflected teams where there was a 0–8 structure, or where there were separate EI and school teams but there was a flexible view about how long the EI team stayed with the child after the child's transition to school.

> The EIT needs to be the conduit to walk alongside the teacher and parents and School Focus team and eventually then they step back. We don't want a parent to have to repeat their whole story to the school focus people—that's the role of the EIT ... we are staying in longer and that's helping the transition lots …. (Ministry)

> Having the SE people not shut off after 28 days has been the most valuable. Not having the gap between EI and school SE. These people know this child and we need the continuity to happen. Best transition in terms of support and knowledge of the child. (School)

> [Change to] Early and Ongoing Service ... this change helped to make the service more seamless. Previously there was sometimes a gap in getting support if the child wasn't ORS funded. (Ministry)

> So it wasn't … like George came to school and we didn't have [EI staff] anymore… that can be the risk and I have experienced it with an EIT team … They [0–8 team] stay with us until we're all feeling quite comfortable … doesn't stick to a particular time limit, it's the child's needs and the school's needs. (School)

ESWs and continuity

A frequently mentioned theme in relation to continuity of staffing was that of the ESW being able to go to school with the child for a two-week transition period. This helped continuity and information exchange.

> The meetings with the ESW were about his independence—what he can do–what he found difficult. Not so much about the learning but his physical needs and socialisation. (School)

Individualised resources

Helping the child understand the journey ahead was enhanced in a number of cases by specifically prepared individualised resources (as recommended in the ASD guideline). A number of children had booklets made for them about their transition to school, and social stories about the move to the school setting. This was mostly completed by Ministry specialist staff. In a couple of instances parents either made the booklet or prepared supplementary work.

Local knowledge, knowledge exchange and handovers

Where children were transitioning from a local ECE centre to a local school there was also some other continuity available. The children had peers who knew and understood them as they moved into the school environment.

> It's really nice that it was a local school that his sister went to ... the children at kindergarten knew who he was, so there were children in the class that knew who he was. (ECE)

> A lot of Samantha's friends from kindy also went on to the school. (ECE)

> I know one of the huge positives is that he's been at the school [because his sisters go there too and the family lives in the same street]. He knew the school and wasn't just going onto new territory that he'd never been before. He also knew the teachers, seeing the teacher and said hello to the teacher around, you know so there were huge pluses …. He knew the school and knew the teacher and … he wanted to go to school. (Parent)

Maximising knowledge exchange—from the ECE centre, parent, and Ministry staff to school staff—was a frequently recurring theme. For this to occur, a teacher and/or SENCO visiting the child in the ECE setting was particularly valued by many school and ECE staff.

Some staff reported a careful handover to different staff when there were changes at the time of transition.

> ... the key worker now from the school focus team, she came with us to the first transition meeting so the family were introduced to her and would know that it was changing over. We try and give the family that time, so the transition isn't so bumpy: they still have you, the key worker that they're used to liaising with. I'm still doing it a bit for [the new lead worker], because she's having trouble contacting Mum, so I say, "I'll go and see her for you" ... (Ministry)

Routines

Parents, Ministry staff and ECE staff sometimes worked on continuity of routines. This enabled the child to begin to get used to school routines before transitioning.

> Sometimes they'll do things for him which are the same at school like they started getting him to do the school lunchtime and playtime instead of the kōhanga lunch and playtime so he knew the same hours. (Ministry)

Conversely, some schools also worked on ensuring there was continuity between the school environment and the ECE environment.

> … our local kindys have particular systems for the kids signing in with their name cards and where they keep their communication bags so we, I, went and looked at what they do and thought right we'll have the same so ... they will arrive on our deck and there will be exactly what they've had at kindy for two years. (School)

Challenges

Staff changes and team structures

Where there were 0–5 EI teams there were many comments about the change in staff and how that detracted from the transition. However, team structures alone do not always account for what happens on the ground. High rates of staff changes, or staff turnover, or both, in the 0–8 teams sometimes made the transitions less effective.

Additionally, children moved to schools in different Ministry geographic "patches" within the 0–8 structures. Even when there was a 0–8 team there were occasions when the actual Ministry person supporting the child needed to change. Ministry staff considered there would have been too many Ministry staff in the one school if the staff always stayed with the child no matter where they went to school. Moreover, there would have been an increase in travel time (and therefore less contact time) for Ministry staff.

There was often frustration at some lack of continuity, whatever the team structure might be. The comment below was from a school supported by a 0–8 team.

> No it's not seamless. I don't see why it couldn't be. (School)

Most case studies mentioned change of specialist staff as being an issue for continuity at the time of transition.

> You have people that have been working with a child and who have built up knowledge of that child. All that prior information, then you get to school ... and you have to start again. It's been more so with a couple of other children ... ORS—totally new people—they had none of the case history and it was very frustrating—

would be good to have the same people across both sectors for the first 6 months. I do spend a lot of time both as classroom teacher and as a SENCO trying to put all the bits into place. With Jennifer she only had some support so she did not have a key worker that came with her ... Sometimes it feels like there is one part that is EI and another part that is school so you almost have to start again ... I almost had to start speech therapy again. The therapist she had had in EI was different from the one she would have in school. (School)

One parent who was experiencing a change of staff both in Ministry specialist support and in other specialist support noted:

... if you keep chopping and changing, you're like one step forward and two steps back; with that stability, you just keep going forward. (Parent)

In addition to the reported change in staff at transition time there was a recurring theme about staff change generally— for Ministry staff, and for other key specialist staff. There was also considerable comment about the nature of the handover to new staff.

The personnel changed quite regularly and so it's hard to keep track of who is actually the right person that's with him … so there were a lot of Ministry changes or people standing in for at that particular time. Really the school, we're just open to whoever says they're coming for whatever need we try to accommodate; but the high turnover of staff isn't the best because you don't know which person you're talking with. I'm telling the teacher about a special needs person who is coming in, it's going to be this person, but that's not and then somebody else. The roles get a bit blurred and confused. (School)

Limits to EI time in school

Many school and Ministry staff mentioned the time limits to EI involvement at school as a difficulty. There was, however, some variation in perceptions as to what that actual time "rule" was.

The drive to disconnect at 20 days we find untenable. (School)

I would have liked a little bit longer involvement of the key worker for the transition at school—once Jennifer was at school. I know they can work up to 6 weeks—in essence it was 4 weeks—they came into school a couple of times to make sure she was OK. If that could be extended—to one term—coming to school is a big challenge and we would feel more supported as a teacher if we had access to specialist staff who had known her for longer. Then gradually bring in other services … (School)

… not two weeks and finished … (School)

ESW

In about a quarter of the case studies there was discussion about whether the ESW should go on to be the child's teacher aide in the school context. There were a couple of parents who would have liked that—their children were strongly attached to the ESW at the ECE centre.

We also lost the teacher aide, [X], and Cain was so attached to him. (Parent)

There were those who wanted a longer transition time with the ESW; they felt that having the ESW just for a short time did not give them the opportunity to begin to understand the needs of the child.

I've had the ESW for a week or something but a week for some of these children they are barely in the door, barely on the page .... (School)

Another thing that is important is that the Education Support Worker that works with the child in centres and kindys only stays in until they go to school and then they get dropped, so you've got that gap. I would like it if the ESW stayed in for a month and then introduced the child to whoever's going to take over e.g. teacher aides... I think we lose a lot of children because the support worker they feel comfortable with is all of sudden not in their life. (School)

Ministry staff tended to discourage the practice of using the ESW in the school setting as they felt sometimes there was a need for the child to have new input. Parent understanding of the need to sometimes change support staff as the child moved onto school was variable. In one instance, the ESW did continue on to school.

… saw an opportunity in the support worker Danny had at ECE—we could see the skills in ESW, and we have hired her as a TA for Danny at school—continuity makes a big difference for children with ASD … Otherwise we are starting from scratch—we have to train them up—they don't have the skills and they don't know the child. (School)

Danny's caregiver [as his mum worked] went through ECE as an ESW and into school as his teacher aide. This is not always the best because children need to be helped to be independent and often pre-school teachers will continue to do the things they do in pre-school. This was not the case with [this caregiver]. (Ministry)

ECE centre–school links

While most saw the ECE centre–school link as a critical part of creating continuity for the child and the case study children's learning, in several case studies we found barriers to achieving this. As already reported, sometimes there were no existing relationships between the ECE and the school, and therefore contact was minimal. In other cases, there was reportedly no school interest in learning about the child's routines and activities in the ECE centre. Ministry staff did see their role was to share as much information as possible about the child's skills, needs and routines, but the ECE centre itself had the "day to day" knowledge of the child. It was difficult therefore for Ministry staff to fully rectify this knowledge gap if there was not ECE centre and school contact about the child.

Others reflected on the links that had been made between the school and ECE centre, and wanted to have more. Both school staff and, to a lesser extent, ECE staff talked about the time needed for school staff to make multiple visits to the ECE centre, or the ECE staff to make visits to the school, or both. They also talked about the barriers to making that time—release processes for ECE staff to go to school; SENCOs with limited release time to make a range of visits; lack of classroom release time for the teacher to make those visits, or ECE centre polices that made arranging school visits difficult.

General comments

School staff sometimes mentioned that it was overwhelming for school and child when a child started school with no planning at all.

… a child is enrolled and arrives in your class and just presents behaviours. The trickiest are when the parents don't even tell you that there are behaviours which are complex, maybe because they don't realise, maybe because there's been no early childhood, anything involved. And so you're left to unpack a complex situation. They're the, like the children who haven't actually been out of their homes … they are faced with so many new experiences that they are in absolute overload and almost collapse under the strain ... (School)

Transience in children was also an issue raised as a general challenge to continuity.

… children who have started down the process and then because they're transient people working with them can't find them to continue their assessments or give information. So there's pockets of information but there's no clarity. They've shifted to another place so the person hasn't been able to get them so they've dropped them and then they show up at our school. We've got one right now, so you try and find people and they say oh yes I started the assessment on that and they disappeared and we couldn't do anything.

Occasionally Ministry staff, ECE staff and school staff referred to continuity challenges in transitions where parents preferred the school not to have full information about the child. This appeared to be more often an issue when children had less-challenging needs.

There is a tension between wanting children to start school with a new slate, so they aren't labelled, and passing on useful information. (ECE)

… because the only information you get generally is from the parent when they're coming and you'll ask them are they having any extra work and they'll say, oh well no they're good now. They had speech and it's all good but they're very reluctant to actually to share … so then what happens is the child starts school and then you might find out that actually OK there was a little bit more. They actually have a real speech problem ... and we've had a few little ones with some speech and one was quite difficult, we need to know that, it's good to have that information a bit more in advance. (School)

We found very little evidence of the above issue in the case studies for this research. In one case study, there was a slight suggestion that parents were concerned about the child being labelled when starting school. In another case study, parents were concerned about the child being bullied, also when starting school. However, the withholding of information was clearly an issue that school staff had concerns about in other cases outside this research. Some EI staff also struggled with how best to share information with a school when family and whānau did not want that information shared.

Planning and timing

Planning and timing were important dimensions of transition and to achieving continuity. There were clear views about the need for an early start to transition planning, and for planning to involve key stakeholders.

What worked

The last IP in the ECE centre was often referred to as a critical part of the planning process. Ideally, this last IP meeting set out the plans for transition, and had parents, Ministry staff, ECE staff and school staff attending. Frequently, however, there had been early conversations, between these four players in different combinations, before this meeting, about schools, funding and general transition processes.

The importance of taking time to plan a graduated transition to school was raised across almost all case studies. A 6-month window for planning was specifically mentioned in a number of case studies. This time would allow the school to learn about the child, and to ensure any equipment was prepared or property modifications made, such as fencing to help with safety concerns. Sufficient early planning also allowed ORS applications to be completed and processed (if required), teacher-aide support decisions to be made, and teacher aides to be employed, all in time for when the child began school.

Early planning was a feature of fully effective transitions.

> It would have to have been one of our better transitions because we started quite early. (Ministry)

> The first contact was 6 months in advance of the transition so that was good. … 6 months is not too soon … Especially with children with complex needs. It's good to be able to get your head around those needs before you're dealing with them at school … we were able to set up the transition because I had the IPs—so that went smoothly. (School)

Many schools noted more school visits for children in these case studies than was the case for standard transitions to school. The case studies also revealed a range of staggered starts to schooling. Aside from the two cases where parents felt the transition to full-time school took too long, parents were generally happy about a staggered start to school.

> Jennifer visited school every Thursday for 6 weeks before she started school—each time increasing the time by herself. (Parent)

> ... worked out a timetable ... on Monday … came in the afternoon. Then … 9 until 1… we kept it quite flexible until the end of the year. (School)

> I think it's really important that the children visit school quite frequently …it's children who have special needs moving in to a classroom situation that is completely foreign to them and it's really nice that they know what to expect. (ECE)

> Staggered /staged start to school—gradually increasing the length of time Jack stayed at school over a period of several weeks, until they were sure he could cope with a full day. (School)

> Our school is usually quite prescribed about the number of school visits children make before starting school—with Samantha there were more because of her special learning needs and these were worthwhile—there were 2 or 3 extra visits. (School)

In some cases even the time of day was considered in planning transition visits to school.

> The school prefers afternoon visits prior to starting school. I found that he's so tired and because of my experience of when he started kindy, they need to know what happens at the start of the day. Just to turn up in the afternoon then he'd be clueless what was happening in the morning and I wanted at least the morning so he could see what happens then. I really emphasised that with the school that I wanted a morning session for him to go visiting [which they permitted]. (Parent)

There was careful thinking evident in many about the actual age at which a child should begin school. In one case, the school delayed the start by 2 weeks to allow another child with special learning needs to transition into the class before the second child began. In other cases, the transition to school began quite a bit later; some families chose to delay the transition until well after their child's 5th birthday to maximise developmental opportunities at the ECE centre. In three cases the families would have much preferred their child to stay on at the ECE centre because they were uncertain about what changes school would bring.

> He was more than 5 years old when he started school, and the reason being … he was starting to develop skills that should have been developed earlier whilst he was at day care … So we thought well let him settle in [at day care] and rather than shift him again. … it was a balancing act 'cause we thought well we don't want to leave it till his 6th birthday to shift him because I think that … he would have then been behind the eight ball with regards to development or learning at school. (Parent)

> Mum was reluctant for Zac to come to school on his fifth birthday. She wanted to delay the start … The kindergarten thought they had done as much as they could and Zac was ready for school. (Ministry)

> [Dad] would have loved her to stay at kindy but we all agreed that it was better for her to move on with her peers. (ECE)

Parents making timely choices about the school they wanted their child to attend was mentioned frequently by Ministry and school staff as an important precursor to effective transition to school.

> Having Danny's mum know what school she was going to send Danny to so we could get the ball rolling early [helped]. We know before the end of Term 1—did our observations in Term 2 and he came to school Term 3. (School)

While timing of planning, and staggered transitions to school, were main themes, other striking themes were the depth in planning in a number of case studies, and the high number of meetings or communications, or both, required to achieve an effective transition process. In-depth planning covered social learning goals (e.g., routines; boundaries; safety; medical, hygiene and personal needs; and social learning for others in the classroom) and learning goals.

> Sorting out his spaces and general safety concerns at playtime and lunchtime. (School)

> I always give a pack to the school with everything I know about the child, the ORS application. Mum also made a special book about Damien too. That book was all about his medical needs, photos etc. (Ministry)

> We also worked on strategies that looked at settling her when she became upset ... it was mainly about Samantha being anxious about things that weren't familiar to her. (ECE)

> Quite a long time before he went to school, I would have said probably about six months before or even earlier. Things like this one was term one 2011 and his birthday's in July so he was four years two months

and they're already talking about Thomas to start getting his own lunchbox out at lunchtime. All those sort of skills that he would need when he goes to school so the idea at the very beginning, you know things like for Thomas to start feeding himself from his own lunchbox. (ECE)

Challenges

When plans were made later than anticipated (when parents found their school of choice discouraged enrolment of the child, or when later referral to SE meant a more limited window of intervention at the ECE centre), or when school choice changed at a late stage (as it did in one case study due to family changes) this put pressure on the transitions planning process.

In one case study, we could find little evidence of transition planning with the family. There appeared to be no visits to the school before the child began school. The parent did receive advice to enrol her child at a primary school when she turned 5, and did enrol her. There appeared to have been misunderstandings about details of needs for that child, which meant that she was not placed in the most appropriate classroom when she started school. Her teacher had little knowledge of the kind of support she required. However, from the parent's perspective her child was doing well at school. The child had more moderate needs and appeared to be able to cope with the initial school experiences. Appropriate resources and support were in place a few months after she started school.

In two case studies, the careful transition planning did not eventuate into the anticipated staged start to school. The two children, who were on the autism spectrum, objected to leaving school earlier than their peers at school, so they were changed to full-time attendance very quickly.

Views on how long the actual transition should last (from the first school visit to attending full time) varied considerably. As noted already two families felt the child's transition period was too long. In a small number of other case studies, the parents or teachers would have liked even longer transitions than they experienced. These wishes related to teachers wanting to get to understand the child in the school context more before they fully transitioned, or to parent concern about the fatigue levels of the child.

> I would like to see that transition period being a lot longer … so much to take on board when they start school without having to take on board all the other things as well. Most of my "everyday" children take 6 weeks. If you have additional issues it can take you a lot longer. (School)

In some cases, not all the key people were involved in the key planning meetings. Where children were receiving school-age services from a range of services not all providers were at the meeting (e.g., RTLB; RTD; Outreach teachers; private providers of specialist services).

In a couple of instances where the transition to school occurred quite late in the school year there was some reflection about the value of the transition plan and work with the teacher when there would be a new teacher in place the next year. Also mentioned was the challenge of transitioning children in Term 4 who needed high levels of order and structure when there were a lot of different activities such as class trips, prize giving and the like.

Communications

How people communicated came up frequently in interviews. Communicating was important if handover planning processes were to be successful. Communication might rightly be regarded as part of relationships, but communications are an important component of handover systems. Good communication systems have the capacity to enhance relationships and maximise the impact of good planning for the transition.

What worked

Clarity and frequency of communication was appreciated by parents, the school and the ECE centre.

> Good communication ... we first got an email from [the EIT] with information that he might be coming to us, what his needs were and wanting to arrange a meeting. (School)

> Prior to him arriving we had clear information and understanding on some of the challenges he would face in transitioning to school ... (School)

> Plan clear ... plenty of opportunities to ask questions ... simple plan with clear action points.
> (Parent)

In some case studies there was evidence of Ministry staff taking time to work out the best way to keep contact in a way that met the needs of parents.

> ... if she couldn't get a hold of me she would just show up or come to Mum's .... she would let me know about things that were coming up like the meetings and remind me because I've got a really bad memory. She'd remind me and tell me to put it on my calendar. [She] brought heaps of information pamphlets about what she does and explained it all. I'm more a visual person and prefer someone talking to me about what they do rather than reading it. (Parent)

> They'd ring and say this is the report I'm sending out. They'd give me just a brief thing over the phone so I felt that way they were very good with their communication, both the written and verbal almost at the same time really. They gave a brief sort of summary before sending. (Parent)

> ... I personally physically go there to ask anything rather than relying on phone or emails. So that makes a big difference when you meet a person face to face and you hear a person because my accent is different, that I always keep in mind. So I don't give any opportunity for any miscommunication to take place so I just go extra miles to do that .... (Ministry)

We also noted in some files quite clear changes in styles of communicating with different parents to meet the differing needs of parents. In the files there was evidence, too, of staff sharing Ministry pamphlets with families during the transition period (e.g., starting school pamphlets).

A few parents commented positively on ORS information sessions that one Ministry office in the study held for parents of children who had just been funded though ORS. Ministry staff also acknowledged the importance of these information sessions as a communication approach.

> But what we try to do is have a meeting for ORS-funded parents twice a year so we capture the ones being verified and it's interesting how many actually go 'ahhh', but then they've had a few months for their child to settle into school and then they're ready to get that information. EI provides it, then our lead workers provide

it, but the penny doesn't always drop until they're ready to receive it, and also meeting other parents and talking about it. (Ministry)

Discussions with some Ministry staff and analyses of some of the case-study files also indicated that a number of staff took some time and care to make sure that schools had full and clear information in writing about the children transitioning to school.

Challenges

Face-to-face meetings between parents and Ministry staff did not always happen.

> Got a letter when Danny got ORS to say that X was going to be his lead worker, but that was all we had. (Parent)

There was also occasional irritation when communications did not result in promised visits.

Not all schools were aware of the Ministry material available for parents about special education resourcing. Schools sometimes did not know how or what to ask.

> I find also—you do not always know what to ask. People say why did you not ask—but you do not know who or what to ask. (School)

Lack of communication was an issue in a few case studies also.

> ... not knowing that Jennifer was on the waiting list ... or how long the waiting list was ... (Parent)

> … little notice about [Ministry staff] changes new ones just turn up at the term IEP meetings. (Parent)

There was also an acknowledgment that even though the communication was clear it might not always be fully absorbed.

> There was fairly clear communication, but it was such an overwhelming time. (Parent)

Jargon was an issue from time to time.

> The [Ministry] psychologist used medical terms and psychologist speak that was hard to understand. (Parent)

School staff sometimes felt they did not have enough of the paperwork supplied to them.

> ... up to date information about all the services that the child is working with so if they have been under Occupational Therapy and what that looked like. So I think that's very important and again the paperwork, the copies of paperwork. Sometimes you can be missed out on the loop or people think that perhaps, you don't need that. The case is closed but if you know like we know that X did have OT but it had been closed, but we had concerns about [how] he always slumped .... (School)

> So, I spent quite a bit of time trying to work out what we were dealing with. It was not until I received a copy of a paediatric report, probably at the beginning of this year with a possible diagnosis. I had not had that prior to her starting, I had just been told what her issues where. I know a label is just a label but it clarified it for me, helped me make sense of what some of her issues were .... Especially with her physical skills; it did not

> come up until her second IEP about toileting. .... No-one ever told me that. I had 2 terms not knowing that. I could have done with that info earlier. There are things that fall through gaps. (School)

General comments

We noted the use of the range of recent Ministry publications for parents and schools about starting school, and about Ministry specialist services. We also noted there was not full permeation of those publications in schools—even where schools had experience of transitioning children with special education needs into their school.

> I don't know if there is anything written that helps you advise parents as well. Documents—how the process works—you do find you have to talk through with parents. For example I have been talking to a parent whose child is coming next year. I have talked through that they will leave EI and find a gulf with ORS funding. It would be useful to have a document that talks that through and describes it. (School)

Role clarity

As previously noted, the children in these case studies had many different specialists working with them, whether they were in the same teams with the Ministry, in different teams within the Ministry, or across a range of different agencies. An important feature of effective transitions was making sure there was role clarity for key people in the transitions process.

What worked

Across many case studies, there was often a valued role ascribed to an EI worker who coordinated meetings and wrote IP notes, or transition plans, or both.

We asked about service agreements for transition. Sometimes there were service agreements, and other times there was an IP instead. The lack of a service agreement per se did not necessarily detract from the effectiveness of a transition. The planning process was more important than a particular form of documentation. More importantly, someone took the responsibility of coordinating those IP and transition meetings, and made sure that all key people were involved in the transition planning and had the key IP and transition-planning materials.

In some case studies it was clear that roles within a team were given attention; there were strong formal and informal mechanisms for the exchange of information. The specialist staff were clear that they each had a role as a member of a team.

Challenges

The expectation that Ministry staff would continue to have an organisational role at school for resource coordination—when they did not—created confusion for some interviewees.

Some parents were confused about who should let them know about IP meetings after transition to school.

> ... it's nothing personal but I find that [EI lead worker] was a lot better in letting me know what was happening and stuff than [school lead worker]. I mean one time there was a meeting, an IEP [IP] meeting and I had no idea about it, I just happened to be at school, I can't remember what I was doing but I just happened to be there and she said oh, are you here at the meeting? And I said what? She goes oh are you here for the meeting? And I said I don't even know what you're talking about ... see that's something that I feel special education should be telling me, not the school. (Parent)

Several Ministry staff mentioned that the EI leadership of IP processes would change with the "roll out" of the new publication *Collaboration for Success*—a revised approach to IPs. There would an opportunity for parents to run the IP process at ECE more. Given the current widespread parental and ECE expectations of the EI role in leading IP processes, and the existing confusion for parents when this role alters at school, this change will need careful attention.

As already described in the relationships section, sometimes there was confusion of role between different providers working with the same child.

And occasionally the school could not see the value of the Ministry roles. One SENCO commented on the situation for a teacher at a school.

> And there didn't seem to be any outcome. There wasn't any extra support. There wasn't any anything to help her at that particular time. It was just they were coming in, they were observing, they might talk to the teacher aide and talk with her, but nothing changed. …She still had to teach. So it made the job harder really for her. It would be nothing for her to have two or three people in. (School)

Another issue we noted in a small number of case studies was confusion about who was doing what tasks within a team when staff picked up a specialist role from someone else. In these instances, it was more likely that not all tasks were fully picked up or followed through. In a couple of case studies there were examples of assumptions being made about the extent of a task that was done (or not done), or assumptions about the extent of the parental understanding of roles.

There was initial confusion and comment in another case study about the RTD's role in the organisation of IP meetings. Previously this function was included by the school in its ORS specialist teacher role. In a recent realignment of resources ORS funding for deaf children now goes to the Deaf Education Centres who provide itinerating specialist teaching through RTDs. However, the RTD role does not include organising IP meetings.

General comments

Schools did not always find roles clear. In one school where they did have experience in transitioning children with special needs and where the case study experience they were describing was successful, a staff member still noted difficulty.

> [Ministry staff member] is someone who's been working with them and I'm not sure, she is proactive in letting us know and supporting us but I don't know who should call that transition meeting. I don't know who should say these children are coming, we need a sit-down transition meeting. Who makes that call and what's the criteria. That would be key for me to understand. Because I think some protocol should sit around that and it should be clear whose responsibility; is it ours, is it the psychologist involved, is it the early childhood teacher or the leader of that facility, I don't know. I don't actually know who that is, so at the moment it seems to be whoever takes a proactive approach does that. (School)

The kaitakawaenga interviewed during this study talked about their particular challenges in terms of clarity of role. They acknowledged they had a number of roles within the team and that sometimes this presented challenges for their role in supporting case work and transitions.

> Kaitakawaenga has multiple roles—cultural supervisor, behaviour specialist support worker and kaitakawaenga, and coach te reo for Ministry poipoia. Sometimes colleagues can't separate these roles, and so don't recognise the role of a kaitakawaenga as a profession of its own

One kaitakawaenga spoke about recent work completed in the Ministry that made the kaitakawaenga role clearer:

> The service pathway for access, engagement and analysis, the book shows kaitakawaenga should be involved in these stages and then not for the rest.

During transition, however, there was the possibility for staff to not always include kaitakawaenga in what was a new period of access and engagement in the case. Additionally, there was an acknowledgment that difficulties could occur at a number of stages in the client pathway.

> Sometimes I am only brought in for the first stages of a transition, and the team forget that the kaitakawaenga needs to be working alongside them through the client pathway. The kaitakawaenga when something falls to pieces—for example the whānau plays up and I've got to go in and do damage control.

Summary comments

Ensuring appropriate continuity was a major component of the handover systems we encountered—especially since about half the case study transitions involved children on the autism spectrum. Staffing continuity was greatly valued by schools. Where Ministry teams supported children from 0–8 years of age there was capacity for a great continuity in staffing. However, staff turnover or changes in staff owing to children transitioning across geographic patches sometimes still meant a change of staff for children during transitions, even where there was a 0–8 team structure. The other option that worked was when EI staff stayed in the transition longer than usual—this was also an effective support to continuity. When there were the same staff in ECE and in the first term or so the child was at school there was a much greater opportunity for full information sharing and a longer period of support from staff who knew the child well. We also noted considerable effort in a number of case studies to ensure sufficient continuity in surroundings and routines for the child to be able to make a smooth transition.

Planning and timing was also important. Planning for several of the case studies began 6 months in advance of the child going to school. Generally the most effective planned transitions were staggered with multiple school visits. Late diagnoses and late changes of school hampered planning.

Communications systems and modes were important. Good communication could enhance relationships and had the capacity to maximise good planning processes and handovers. We saw some good examples of communication being adapted to meet the needs of different parents.

Finally, role clarity was important. Each child had a number of different specialists working with them: specialists within Ministry teams, specialists across Ministry teams, and across different organisations. They all needed to understand one another's roles. Families and whānau and schools also needed to understand those roles, and there needed to be someone to take responsibility for overseeing the transition.

5. Resources

Not surprisingly the discussion of resources was a significant component in many interviews, especially with school staff. Resources are broadly defined in this section of the report. They include: funding; people skills (and delays in accessing key people); professional development; and schools' experience.

> Resourcing is something that has a big influence on how a transition goes. (Ministry)

Funding

What worked

Eight of the case studies involved children funded from ORS (which meant nine children, as one of the case studies involved twins). There was some acknowledgment of the issues for parents in the ORS funding application process. Parents faced a potentially challenging and overwhelming time when they saw their child's needs written up as part of an ORS funding application. But often there seemed to be good Ministry, parent, school and ECE processes for completing ORS applications. One child was part of the ORS short-form application trial, and that process had gone smoothly.

Almost all schools in the study reported "topping up" the teacher aide funding for the case-study child when they were funded through ORS; this ranged from 3 to 8 hours extra a week.

Some school staff commented positively on the practice of children getting additional ORS teacher aide funding during transition to support smooth transition processes. One school mentioned positively the consumables part of ORS funding:

> We get target funds to purchase some ... things like the timer and little activities, little things that support George … (School)

On occasion there was just straight appreciation of resourcing.

> Amazed at the support she received from … Ministry. It was good that this continued at school (ECE).

> [Ministry staff member] was extremely creative in getting him the help at school that he needed because he's not eligible for ORS… (School)

When children were not funded through ORS there was a range of ways schools managed support for the children. One school organised and funded an extra teacher aide in the classroom when the transitioning child visited the school. Another school was able to use a teacher aide funded through another child's ORS funding to provide support sometimes to the case-study child. Some students were receiving behaviour teacher aide funding, or had the promise of that funding if needed. For example, one child being supported through transition who had severe behaviour support was allocated 1.5 hours teacher aide funding a day.

Funding challenges

We did note a small number of different issues in three case studies about ORS applications. In one case study, there was a differing view between parent and Ministry staff about whether ORS had been applied for. (It had not. The parent thought the application had proceeded, but then been declined.) In another case, the parent noted on many occasions during her interviews that she did not understand the ORS funding. In a third case, the team secured ORS funding after a reapplication process. (The EI team stayed in the transition for this reapplication process.)

While most schools with ORS-funded students in the case studies were "topping up" teacher aide funding, there were exceptions to this. There was frustration about the funding challenges when schools were attracting a high number of students with special education needs. In one school there were a number of ORS-funded students and the "topping up" was placing stress on the school budget. Because the school financially felt unable to top up the teacher aide resourcing, and felt the case study needed full teacher aide cover, the child was not able to attend school full-time for several months. Some schools talked about the cumulative pressure of having an increasing number of students with special learning needs enrolling in their school.

> When you have 6 ORS kids and are also a magnet school for students with ASD ... we get more special-needs students than other schools .... poor funding means we have to subsidise these students, which puts us at a financial disadvantage. (School)

Another school talked about having to "fight" for sufficient ORS teacher aide funding. Parents also reflected on this issue.

> He's got a full time teacher aide because the school pushed for it … [the teacher] would stress out trying to focus on Joseph. (Parent)

> The school has fought for funding for Jennifer. (Parent)

In two other schools, the staff raised the issue of having two or more students with complex high needs in the same class. This meant there was "piggy-back" teacher aide funding. School staff had difficulties with this.

> .... both children are complex individuals who need full time one-on-one help and should not be piggy backed. This type of funding means we need to decide if we keep them in the same class. If we don't there will be more of an issue with teacher aide funding but having two complex special needs children in the same class is also challenging. (School)

Managing discussions and conflict about teacher aides and resourcing in a transparent manner, with parents involved in the contestation, was sometimes challenging. It was clear that, in some case studies, school and Ministry discussions or disagreements about resourcing—usually specifically teacher-aide funding—impacted on the parents. After a transition meeting, one parent noted that:

> ... they [school] wanted more hours so that was quite stressful ... left thinking it was quite a strange meeting and it hadn't really been fully resolved.

There were issues also noted for children funded through Severe Behaviour and Severe Communication. Specifically, there was concern about that funding finishing.

> It's a transition funding and that continues at the moment and I think he still has some for next year. The great concern is what will happen like when he no longer can come under that transition thing or whatever it is that [Ministry staff member] is accessing. (School)

For a few parents in the study, funding allocation processes and outcomes did not seem clear for them. In one case, a parent worried quite a lot about the support she felt her child required at school—the child was not funded through ORS. As it turned out, this funding had been allocated but she had not been told.

> I found out by accident a couple of weeks ago that the school found some money and the same person is helping out now in the afternoon with the Special Education people, she is there for an hour and a half in the morning to help him on his writing and learning things that I was concerned about that wasn't happening when he went for his visit. So he's getting help now in the morning as well, so someone has obviously found money somewhere. (Parent)

One frequently recurring theme was funding for release time for the new-entrant classroom teacher, or the SENCO, or both, to attend multiple transition meetings. Most of the SENCO we interviewed had many responsibilities (for example, they were the assistant principal or the deputy principal and managed other areas of the school life as well, such as teacher appraisal, junior literacy, and so forth). Release time varied; sometimes they had very little or no release time. This meant that there was only limited opportunity to attend the frequent ECE centre and school meetings that were valued by so many in the interviews.

Schools wanted more support for meeting with key people to ensure effective transitions

> … support for schools to spend longer visiting children—so we can get release getting to know the children. At this school we don't get a lot of release so I have to find time. I have time to go once, but I need to go more than once. Even if you just sit and observe you can grasp a lot of what the needs of the child are. (School)

Pasifika perspectives

Two of the three Pasifika families seemed to have initially not seen the value of specific resources for their child during the early childhood years—for example, consistent use of hearing aids. One parent felt she had let her child down by this approach. In these families there were sometimes communication gaps between Ministry staff and the family. Again—good relationships and communication are prerequisites for effective use of resources.

General comments

In a few interviews there was some general confusion and frustration about funding and how difficult it was to find information about various funding streams.

> ... honestly getting your head around [the funding], we didn't know. We had a child last year who arrived hugely at risk ... We didn't know, we should have known but we didn't know the interim fund existed. (School)

People

What worked

In many case studies the specialist skills of Ministry staff were highly valued in the transition process. They were bringing skills the classroom teachers, schools and parents did not have.

> There were good advice and strategies. (School)

... obviously psychologists and speech language therapists have expertise in things we don't. We are generalists. I have specific skills in lots of things but I rely on their knowledge in terms of things like the sensory issues and things like that. I don't know the ins and outs of all that stuff. (School)

The material resources Ministry staff supplied were also valued—transitions booklets about and for the children transitioning, and sensory materials for children diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum.

In two case studies, the school had employed Outreach teachers to undertake the specialist teacher role with the .1 or .2 ORS specialist teacher funding. These approaches had worked really well and were positively commented on by a range of stakeholders.

Challenges

Many Ministry staff felt that they had insufficient resources to do full and comprehensive work for every transition. It's not possible to quantify this, as comments were often made outside the formal interview setting and in conversations with staff who were not able to participate in the research.

A number of schools commented on the infrequency of Ministry of Education staff visits.

They have been helpful but one or two visits a term isn't always ideal. And I know it's an hours and a money funding based thing for GSE, but basically they come in, observe, give you a bit of feedback and a possible programme and leave you to it, so it's been also my job to kind of interpret that programme, all those suggestions and make it fit for the classroom teacher and the teacher aides. Oh they're all lovely, great people and it's just the limited time I guess and presence within... always there for the IPs as are the OTs and the PTs. (School)

In many case studies there were delays and missed opportunities for specialist support and material resources.

when the referral was done the speech therapist lady got in touch and said there's quite a long list of children in the [AREA] ... so she did explain that but then I thought but that's what delays children in their development at school you know. And it's not just me I know a few other people in the [AREA] that have not been ... seen too. (Parent)

Sometimes the parents felt this delay had a marked effect on their child's progress.

I wish she had got speech therapy, because maybe she'd be talking now. I'd like to have a conversation with her. (Parent)

Staff turnover and caseload pressures led to delays and to times when the child missed a service completely. Some participants were generally frustrated by the time things took.

To me I think you know this is me, that things could be speeded up but maybe it can't be, maybe it's just the process is, the way things are. (Parent)

In a few cases where the child was not ORS funded there was no one as a coordinator. School staff felt that absence very keenly.

I do spend a lot of time both as classroom teacher and as a SENCO trying to put all the bits into place. With Jennifer who had only had some support so she did not have a key worker that came with her. You don't

always know what to ask or who to ask—we are only teachers. [It would be good to] have a list of people you are meant to contact or a key worker that contacts you for the year after the child starts school. (School)

General comments

In a small number of cases, schools did not value Ministry support for the issues they were facing with children outside the case studies for this research.

… have another child ... he's right up there hurting and hitting, stamping on his teacher's foot and the skin sort of stuff but even so … there's nothing practical that that teacher has been able to access that really will make a difference but there is funding for the teacher aide and she will ask for an increase of the funding. (School)

… limited expertise of Ministry staff. We are seeing specialists less and less. More and more we are seeing generalist case workers … don't want to beat up people but they do promise the parents things we can't deliver … (School)

Concern was also raised in one area about the dearth of specialist staff able to provide specialist support in te reo Māori.

General delays to services came up in a number of interviews. One Ministry staff raised the issue of missed support resulting in poorer outcomes for children as they transitioned through the school

Quite a few of our Māori children have missed out on services from EI into schools, mainly because they haven't been picked up. They miss out on the services of an SLT, so they go into the schools and the behaviour will escalate and then they become the behaviour child and they get referred to behaviour, all because they missed out on a service like a speech therapist. (Ministry)

One kaitakawaenga also raised the issue of kaitakawaenga support being rejected by whānau because they did not understand the value of that support.

From experience if you give whānau the option they say no because they don't understand what it is and because they just want the thing that is wrong fixed for example speech language therapy ….. (Ministry)

Schools' experiences

What worked

The skills and experience a school brought to the transition process were noticeable in some interviews. Schools that had teachers and leaders in place who were familiar with transitioning children with special education needs into school were able to draw on those skills when children with special education needs enrolled at their school. They knew what some of the processes and indeed some of the issues would be.

> [X] school is particularly good. They transition many ASD children. It's very inclusive. (Ministry)

> We [EIT and I] went for interviews with a couple of schools but a lot of them tried to get us to turn away from them and I don't know if that's because they didn't want the responsibility. But then we found [X school] and it was like all my prayers were answered because the principal has support [other schools and Ministry staff] networks. They told me what they could do, what would and could happen. (Parent)

Challenges

Sometimes teachers in new entrant classes had less experience in transitioning children with special learning needs into schools and this appeared to impact on the effectiveness of the transition. In three case studies this issue came up quite clearly in interviews. The case-study children transitions took longer as teachers needed to spend time sorting out the best approach to the children's learning programmes and the most appropriate use of resources for the child. In two of these three cases the schools also generally had less experience and so teachers had less experience to call on from others in the school.

General comments

Some schools took particular care about placement of children with special needs with teachers who had the necessary skills and experiences. The experiences of the schools led them to think carefully about student placement.

> We have experienced teachers. We don't place children with inexperienced or teachers that are not going to cope. It is very carefully considered and we do things like people teach such children two years in a row, so we don't have transition issues at times and people see that as desirable, they're not keen to pass on these children to get them out of their hair. (School)

Professional learning, and workshops targeted to specific children

What worked

There were three children with hearing loss in these case studies. In one, there was support provided to the school to make sure staff were able to use the resources effectively. In two other cases this support was less timely. Early staff confidence in the use of the systems made for a more effective transition.

Some schools looked to Ministry staff to provide professional learning (courses, networking and visiting with other schools) and others sought it independently.

> At IP meetings we talk to the lead worker. Sometimes they know of another child that we can visit. Networking also happens vice versa and we have teachers visit us. (School)

> It's been a long time since I've done any course specific to Down syndrome so at the beginning of this year I went on a course ... and the two teacher aides. I was the one that pushed for both the teacher aides to be there also .... Possibly ... I didn't really need it but it was kind of like I wanted to hear what content they were going to be hearing and what they were going to be doing in the school with it so that I could match it up with my directives and that kind of thing and of course, you surprise yourself and you learn some new tricks and some strategies. It was really worthwhile and good to be able to go. (School)

Ministry staff sometimes provided professional learning at transition.

> EI offered to staff at ... school an information sharing evening about autism. The school accepted our offer. This was really Mum's first time of coming to learn and understand autism. The principal and management came as well as most of the staff from the school. During discussion time, a number of staff voiced that they had a neighbour or knew someone in the community with autism and tried to reassure the Mum ... The school response was great. (Ministry)

> I've had one transition—was a really good transition—where we were invited to the staff meeting and the child and mum took part. The child had a cochlear implant. Normally I would take the equipment in to show staff, but this time the child took over—took the equipment off and passed it around and was quite happy for everyone to look at it, and to ask him questions. One of the staff said, "What if we don't put it back on right?" And he answered, "My gran puts it on upside-down all the time, don't worry!" The child was answering the questions—an opportunity like that is really good. (Ministry)

Two of the children in these case studies were eligible for Language Learning Initiatives. That opportunity was highly valued.

> [It] involved teachers, teacher aides, staff, parents—[they have] been quite focused and that's been fabulous. First time I have used it ... liked the model—everyone involved with Claire worked together … three families involved and we worked through specific goals for these those children. Really nice ... timely specific smart goals in place with teacher aide and SLT hours—targeted and really helpful. Much more targeted assistance than in the past and it worked really really well. (School)

Challenges

School staff opportunities for professional development were varied. Sometimes opportunities were not offered. At other times the offers were not taken up either because teachers felt their skills were already sufficient in that area, or because of time pressures.

Summary comments

Resourcing was most often talked about by school staff in our interviews. While resources were important in effective transitions, when transitions were less than effective sometimes it was not just resourcing that was an issue.

When resources worked well, there was a mutual understanding about the funding available and how best to use it. Where there was conflict about the quantum of resourcing it had been actively managed by Ministry staff. Schools were happy with the quality and type of support provided by Ministry staff. Additionally, many schools used their own internal skills and experience developed during the transitions of other children with special learning needs into their school.

Where resources were an issue it was sometimes about the funding (for teacher aides). At other times it was about the Ministry's specialist staff skills, or about the timeliness of that support.

Ministry staff formally and informally mentioned the pressures on their time and the difficulties of caseload.

6. Making sense of the findings

This research focused on the Ministry role/s in supporting transitions to school and the associated transition from EI to school-age specialist support.

In this series of case studies, some of the students with the most challenging needs have had very effective transitions. Some (but not all) of the children who appeared to have less-challenging learning and social needs at the time of transition have had less-effective transitions. Sometimes less-effective transitions were related to less time available to plan and undertake the transitions. Less-effective transitions were also characterised by one or more of the following:

- less-effective relationships between Ministry provides and other providers

- less-effective relationships between Ministry staff and the school, or Ministry staff and ECE, or school and ECE, or a combination of all

- issues in planning and timing

- continuity issues

- role clarity and communication issues

- funding issues

- perceptions of Ministry staff skills

- less experience within the school

- issues with timely support of specialist staff and resources.

Transitions require relationships, systems and resources. Now we summarise the interactions between these components and reflect on:

- What do effective transitions look like?

- What factors might help less-effective transitions be more effective?

What do effective transitions look like?

Effective transitions have early planning, parent engagement, strong relationships between school, ECE, parent and Ministry staff. There is clear communication across all stakeholders, and planning takes account of the needs for continuity for the child. There is a clear and shared understanding about resources.

In effective transitions, Ministry staff had ongoing positive relationships with the school the child was transitioning into. The Ministry staff had had strong relationships with parent, family, and whānau at EI and there was still an ongoing relationship as and where appropriate when the child was at school. Parents, family and whānau were fully engaged with Ministry staff, the school and the transition process. Where there was a handover to other Ministry staff at the time of transition, there was work done to ensure the relationship with the family was still effective. Ministry staff had, however, fostered a strong relationship between the school and parents, family and whānau. Where the relationship with the school which the parents initially chose did not go well, Ministry staff actively supported relationship development with the selected alternative school.

Relationships with other specialists, outside the Ministry, who were involved with the child were frequently mutually respectful and set the scene for full and timely information exchange.

In many effective transitions there was an existing strong relationship between the school and the ECE centre. This enhanced Ministry work on the transition because the school and the ECE centre already had formal and informal information exchange mechanisms about children moving through from ECE to school. Transitions were also often enhanced when the child was moving locally—from the ECE to the local school. There were often existing relationships between the ECE and the school, and there were already familiar peers for the children as they moved on to school. The existing continuity supported the detailed planning for transition by the Ministry, staff, parents, ECE and school.

Particular attention was paid to sufficient continuity. This included:

- planning by the school to create continuity of environment

- sufficient information exchange to ensure social and learning needs of the child were fully understood by the school

- attention to how school visits were planned (the ESW accompanying the child on school visits was often remarked on favourably)

- Ministry staff staying the same across the transition, or

- the EI staff staying in the process according to need rather than the time specified, or

- sufficient handover planning and preparation where there was a change

- preparation of "social story" booklets that prepared the child for school and, sometimes, the school for the child.

Planning for transition began early; in most of the fully effective transitions formal planning began 6 months out from the time the child was expected to start school. There was detailed planning, and all the key stakeholders were generally involved with that planning.

With small numbers of case studies within each team structure, this study cannot determine the overall value or otherwise of various team structures. What we did note was that where Ministry specialist staff stayed the same for the first term or so at school, school staff appreciated this and there was much more detail about the child and the resources available to school staff. The 0–8 team structure made it more likely the staff would stay the same, but this did not always occur because of staff turnover or geographic patch arrangements. Where EI staff stayed longer than usual in the transition this was equally appreciated.

Communication channels were clear, frequent and shaped to meet family need. Where contact with families was more difficult, Ministry staff had a range of approaches they could use. In one of the effective transitions the kaitakawaenga accompanied the lead worker on key occasions, and was also involved in making and keeping contact with the whānau. In another case the use of phone texts at critical moments in transition was noted.

There was a clear coordinator of the transition, and when the transition was finishing family and school both were clear who they should contact for any issues that arose. There were communications channels "open" should challenges arise. Parents were clear about who does what and who they could contact if something was an issue—and that contact has successfully transitioned from being a Ministry contact to a school contact (for example, in one case study the parents knew that they could call the deputy principal. And, indeed, the deputy principal called them for a catch-up from time to time.)

While even in effective transitions schools often wanted more funding resource than they received, there was an understanding and acceptance of the quantum of funding in these transitions.

In effective transitions, school staff valued and used effectively specialist Ministry skills. Schools' experience was also important—they had learned from previous transitions. Often, the new-entrant teacher was experienced. When the new-entrant teacher was less experienced there were factors that mitigated against that, such as the use of team teaching, the availability of proactive and skilled wider school support, or the use of Outreach specialist teachers.

In some transition case studies the schools availed themselves of Ministry specialist professional development or courses recommended by Ministry staff. In two transitions, the Language Learning Initiative was highly valued by both staff and family.

Timely support was also important; prompt support and advice meant the child did not miss out, frustration was avoided, and stress levels of school staff were reduced.

In effective transitions there were still differences of opinions or perspective, and unexpected "glitches". There could still be differing perspectives or glitches about timing, about funding, and the occasional misunderstanding about role clarity. Where there were differences and potential conflict, in effective transitions Ministry staff stayed involved and contributed to discussion and mediation about issues.

What makes for less-effective transitions?

In another group of transitions there were many positive aspects evident, but there were also a range of issues that arose.

Sometimes issues arose outside the control of Ministry staff which disrupted transition efforts. For example, late diagnoses impacted on timing, or family changes meant changes of school at the very last minute. These issues could be ameliorated somewhat if the child was able to go to a school where there were existing strong relationships across key stakeholders, and where there was role clarity and good coordination with other providers. These factors resulted in timely support for the child at transition. Conversely, if there was delay to services, or other providers did not receive key information in a timely manner, or the school had less experience, or there was a poor Ministry–school relationship—or a combination of these factors—then stress levels began to rise for schools and the child did not experience such a smooth transition.

Issues that were more in control of the Ministry staff were related to challenges in establishing strong family–Ministry relationships (for example, we noted there were not always smooth systems for connecting to different members of extended families where a range of family members had a direct involvement in the transition); or when there where assumptions made about the family's views, or methods of communicating, or both. Sometimes there were difficulties with the change of staff from EI to school teams, or because of geographic patch changes or staff turnover. Families were not clear about roles and were not sure who to contact when there were issues. In one case, for example, the family felt that Ministry staff should be contacting the family about school decisions such as setting IP meeting dates. In less-effective transitions issues began to compound; if there were unmanaged differences in views, or if there was conflict, then stress levels of parents and schools began to rise. That conflict might be about the length of the transition, or the quantum of funding, or delays to service provision for the child, or a combination of these areas. In these transitions we saw, in some instances, less evidence of Ministry staff managing conflict or potential conflict.

What next?

These case studies represent a transition picture for just 15 children. However, the commonality of themes, and the additional information gained from interview participants' general comments indicate some areas that need consideration. Below we outline some suggestions developed from the findings in this study.

Ministry policies and practices and professional learning opportunities

- Ministry staff often emphasised the need for transitions to be tailored to the individual family and whānau contexts. We agree that this was an important component to transitions. Alongside this individualised approach, a list of key elements that need to be checked or covered might be useful. This list might include:

  - the range of different relationships (including with other providers and school–ECE relationships) so that Ministry staff have a chance to reflect how they might mitigate against any "weaker" areas, and also to ensure they have covered off all aspects of the transition;

  - key timing and planning activities;

  - communication channels;

  - whether all key parties are clear about roles; and resource allocation.

  There may be value in regions sharing their more detailed protocols to develop a kit using existing good practices in checklists and protocols. This report could be used as a further check on critical elements for effective transition, and also some of the case study examples from this report could be used to highlight those critical elements.

- Supporting increased school–ECE partnership in the transition process by encouraging school staff to observe the child at ECE before school entry. This is likely to result in increased understanding of the child and the child's IP goals.

- Investigate further how to enhance links with other specialist providers.

- Support Ministry staff, who are working with schools who have less experience of inclusive practices, to build skills in relationship and conflict management.

- Provide professional learning and development opportunities for schools that have less experience and understanding of transitions and inclusive practices.

- At the time we planned for this project we discussed how we might best connect with Pasifika families in this research. We understand the Ministry has recently commissioned other work in this area about supporting Pasifika families who have children with special needs. Our view is that more professional support for Ministry staff working with Pasifika families is required.

- We noted that, in one area, Ministry staff held ORS meetings for parents of children newly receiving ORS. This practice was favourably commented on, and helped clarify any confusion and reinforce other communication.

- Given the repeated need for continuity of staff at the critical time of transition, consider extending the time EI and ESW staff are involved with children in the school context, or the benefit of team structures that reduce the likelihood of staff changes because of transition to school.

- Consider how office practice and protocols can minimise the disruption of staff turnover at the time of transition to school.

Are there learnings for the Inclusion task force?

- In the study we found that relationship between ECE and schools are very important. How might the system further support ECE–school relationships to enhance transitions from ECE to school?

- How might ECE centres be supported to earlier recognise the need for EI for some of the children in their centres?

Making links to other related research and development

- NZCER is currently developing the Inclusion Smart Tool under contract to the Ministry. Links could be made to the final version of this report on the resource section of the Inclusion Smart Tool website. Alternatively, the Inclusion Smart Tool could link to summaries of the sections relating to schools and school–ECE relationships. Small vignettes could also be drawn from the report to highlight examples of inclusive practice.

More questions

- Are there some more questions that can be asked in the client satisfaction survey to test some of the initial findings in the study?

- NZCER will shortly be developing the primary National Survey (which runs on a 3-year cycle). It may be possible to include a couple of key questions arising from this research for wider investigation, for example around schools' experiences of transitions.

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Appendix 1

Interview*	Transitions from EI to school-focused specialist support – revised draft questions
School teachers and principals (or the staff member the principal delegates)	• Thinking about [name of child], what went well in their transition to school-age services? What would you change?
	• What expectations did you have for the transition of [x] from EI to School Focus services? (Prompts…. Why did you have these expectations; was there communication from SE teams; was there a service agreement?)
	• What went well in the transition from EI to school-age special education services for [name of children]? Prompt: Why do you think this went well? When did planning for the transition begin?
	• What didn't go well in the transition and why? Prompt: How could this have been improved?
	• How are the individual needs of the child taken into account in the services provided? Prompt: Was there an analysis of what was needed in the school setting before they started school? Who did that analysis? How was the analysis done? Was it a helpful analysis in your view? What happened after the analysis was done?
	• What services are provided? How do you use them? Prompt: Are the special education services utilised in withdrawal teaching or are they focused on helping the child access the New Zealand Curriculum in class? Do you have a SENCO (special education needs co-ordinator)? How is [x] doing now?
	• Have there been any delays/waiting times in accessing special education services? What impact (if any) has that delay had on the transition? What impact (if any) has there been on the progress of [x] at school? Do you have an example? Does anyone keep a record of that?
	• How much communication has there been between you, the special education services, the parents/caregivers and the ECE centres? Was there sufficient communication? What would you have preferred? What is the Ministry SE role in that communication? What is the school's role in the communication?
	• How do you think schools and special education services should work together? What is the responsibility of each?
	• What opportunities have you had for professional development in relation to the needs of [name of child]?
	• How would you define a successful/unsuccessful transition?
ECE teachers	• Thinking about [name of child], what went well in their transition to school-age services? What would you change?
	• What expectations did you have for the transition of [x] from EI to School Focus services? Probes: How did you think the transition would be handled? What did you think was particularly important for [X]'s transition? How was that handled?
	• What discussions did you have about [name of child] transition?
	• When did that discussion begin? (i.e. how long before [child's name] moved to school?
	• Who did you talk to about [name of child] transition?
	• How would you define a successful/unsuccessful transition?
Parents/ caregivers	Prompt : Your kōrero will help us to build pictures of parents and whānau who are taking part in our research project , to deepen our understanding about what different groups of whānau say have been important for their tamariki moving from EI to [x] kura/school.

Interview*	Transitions from EI to school-focused specialist support – revised draft questions
	- Ko wai koe/ Ko wai au?
	- Who is in your whānau? (ages of tamariki?)
	• How did you find the whole experience of moving from early childhood education to school
	Prompts
	- Who spoke to you about what would happen when [x] goes to school? Who of these people were from special education teams?
	- What did they say would happen?
	- Did you understand what they said?
	- Who would you ask if you couldn't understand what was said?
	- Did you get a service agreement (written document) explaining what would happen/what support there would be for [X]?
	- Were the special education services [x] got the ones you expected?
	- Were there special education services at school for [x] when they said there would be?
	• What special education services has [x] had at ECE
	• What special education services has [name of child] had at school?
	• When [x] started school were the special education team members ones you already knew or where there new people? Were you told about any new people in the team? How did you fi8nd out about any new people??
	• Were there any delays in accessing the school-age services?
	• What involvement/input did you have into [name of child]'s transition from EI to school-age services? Prompts: Was there clear communication? Was it written communication and/ or face to face? Did you have an opportunity to contribute to the individual goals for your child? When did planning for the transition begin? Did you talk to others, besides the SE teams (e.g., members of the community/aiga or other parents)?
	• Thinking about [X] what went well in their move to school? What would you change?
	• Do you know any other families who have had the services of special education teams as their child moved from ECE to school? Have you had the same services as them? If not, what was different?
Children (will use visual prompts and adapted approaches as required – these are questions to encourage talking from the child)	• What do you like about kura/school?
	• What don't you like about kura/school?
	• What do you remember about [insert name of early childhood education centre]? What did you like there? What didn't you like?
	• Can you remember talking to people about moving from [name of ECE] to school? Prompt: Did you have a story book about going from ECE to school?
SE staff	• Thinking about [name of child], what went well in their transition to school-age services? What would you change?
	Prompts:
	• What worked the best and why?
	• What did not work and why?
	• Why do you think this transition went well/not well?
	• What systems are in place to support children in the transition from EI to school-age special education services?
	• How are the individual needs of the child taken into account in the services provided?
	• Think of a time when a transition between EI to school-age services went well for a child. What did this look like? Why do you think this was a successful transition? What contributed to this being successful?

Interview*	**Transitions from EI to school-focused specialist support – revised draft questions**
	• What protocols/systems are in place to communicate with schools and parents/caregivers? What sort of follow-up occurs in communication? What has been your experience of the willingness of schools and parents/caregivers to engage in communication around transition?
	• What are some of the challenges involved for you in this transition? (e.g., resources, time frames)
	• Do you see different patterns for children with different special needs?