



Prep: first step to schooling

From 2007, the Queensland Government will have a statewide Preparatory Year. It will be an exciting first step for students in the crucial early phase of learning. Like preschool, the Prep Year will not be compulsory.

The introduction of Prep will be followed in 2008 by a six-month increase in the school starting age. To start Year 1, children will have to turn six by 30 June (instead of 31 December) in their first year at school.

Increasing the starting age for Year 1 will bring Queensland's education system more into line with other Australian states and territories. This has significant

benefits for families who move between states during their children's education.

It will also increase the age at which young people leave school so that school leavers have the benefit of a greater level of maturity when they embark upon work, traineeships or further study.

The introduction of the Prep year in 2007 will be the biggest change in school education in Queensland for many years. In order to ensure a smooth transition it is necessary to gradually phase-in the new Prep year.

When can your child start Prep?

Children who turn five in the first half of 2007 will be eligible to attend Prep in that year. This will align Prep with the six-month increase in the school starting age from 2008.

Children who turn five between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2008 will be eligible to attend Prep in 2008.

Children who turn six in 2007 will start Year 1 in that year. Those who turn six in the latter part of 2007 may be eligible for Prep if an assessment of their educational need indicates they will be disadvantaged by starting Year 1 before 2008. Educational need will be assessed by looking at the learning readiness and physical and social development of the child.

Community kindergartens and other early childhood education and care providers will continue to offer programs for children not enrolled in Prep. Preschool will finish at the end of 2006.

From 2008, children will need to be six by 30 June the year they enrol in Year 1.

The benefits of Prep

The years from Prep to Year 3 are known as the Early Phase of Learning. This vital phase lays the foundation for the rest of a student's schooling years.

Mark Cooper, an early phase of learning education specialist in the Department of Education and the Arts, said the early phase of learning concept challenged schools to look holistically at children's education from Prep to Year 3.

"Prep is being introduced as the starting point to this phase," he said. "It builds on what students learn at home and in early education services before they start school.

"It helps children acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to be successful in Year 1 and during school.

"The more confidence children have when they start, the more likely they will enjoy learning throughout their school years."

Ninety-six schools across the state are currently offering a Prep program in the lead-up to its statewide introduction in 2007.

Prep students important part of school community

At Hilder Road State School, the Prep program is in its second year and the school is embracing the concept of an early phase of learning.

Principal Jo Bottrell says the school has created an early phase of learning precinct.

"The school runs programs that give Prep students a chance to join older students in Years 1 to 3, so they can become a part of the wider school community."

Ms Bottrell said a "teddy bears' sleepover" held this term highlighted this approach.

"All Prep to Year 3 classes celebrated the fifth birthday of Victoria and Oliver — the Year 1 class' literacy and numeracy mascots," she said.

"The children brought their own teddy bears to school for afternoon tea with Victoria and Oliver and the teddies then stayed on for a 'sleepover'.

"The students learnt so much, preparing afternoon tea, making hats, games and illustrations and writing sleepover invitations.

"When the students went home, teachers took photos of the teddies' overnight 'antics', much to the delight and surprise of the children the next day.

"The students then addressed assembly, to tell the rest of the school about their teddies' activities.

"The exercise was lots of fun and it helped our Prep children to feel part of the whole school and to see the continuity of learning through to Year 1 and beyond."

Meanwhile, St Saviour's Catholic Primary School in Toowoomba has started a 'Swaps' program, to help Prep students meet other students in the early phase of learning and feel part of the school.

"Students from the Preschool, Prep and Year 1 divide into four mixed groups and each week spend an hour with a different teacher in a different classroom," Prep teacher Anne-Marie d'Abadie said.

"Swaps has been a great success. The Prep students are becoming more familiar and comfortable with their school environment and the other teachers.

"The students are also looking forward to Year 1 next year and this will make the transition easier for them."

Birth date:	Eligible for Prep Year in:	Eligible for Year 1 in:
1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001	Eligible for Preschool in 2006	2007
1 January 2002 to 30 June 2002	2007	2008
1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003	2008	2009
1 July 2003 to 30 June 2004	2009	2010
1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005	2010	2011