

Australian Early Development Census

# School Story

## St Joseph's School - Hindmarsh

Improving systems, family engagement and transitions

**South Australia 2020**

### About St Joseph's School - Hindmarsh

St Joseph's School – Hindmarsh is a catholic school situated in West Hindmarsh, an inner city suburb in the City of Charles Sturt. The City of Charles Sturt has a population of 118,163 residents including 7,208 children aged 0-5 years (ABS Census 2016).

In 2016, the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) for Charles Sturt community was 985, indicating a mid range level of disadvantage compared to other communities in South Australia.

St Joseph's School has a multicultural community and caters for children from Preschool to Year 6 (5 to 12 years of age).

### What the results showed

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national measure of early childhood development at the time children commence their first year of full-time school. The AEDC collects data relating to five key areas of early childhood development referred to as 'domains'. The domains are: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills (school-based); communication skills and general knowledge.

The 2018 AEDC results for the Charles Sturt community showed:

- 22.4% of children starting full-time school were developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domains
- 21.7% of all children had Emerging strengths, meaning they 'may be meeting developmental expectations when they start school but they do not demonstrate a high number of strengths', as reported in the Multiple Strengths indicator in the AEDC community profile.

When St Joseph's School reviewed their 2018 AEDC school results they saw a positive trend in the percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on 1 or more domains, which had decreased since 2009. However there were some concerning trends in children considered to be at risk, particularly for the social competence AEDC domain.

## Bringing about change

In 2019 Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) commenced a project to support principals to understand and use AEDC data more effectively. A consultant was engaged to lead the project. Schools with preschools were targeted and reports including their AEDC data were prepared for each site.

The reports included:

- general introduction to the AEDC
- collation of the school data over time
- comparisons to local government, state and national results
- demographic trends in risks and vulnerabilities for each local government area
- collation of teacher impressions of children's progress and family engagement
- domains that were showing higher levels of risk or vulnerability
- the multiple strengths data as reported in their AEDC community profile.

Discussions were held with principals of schools involved in the project about their AEDC results. Principals expressed that through the preparation of reports and meeting with the consultant, their understanding of the value of the AEDC and how it could guide their planning and practice had been deepened. During these discussion principals considered impacting factors that may be contributing to the results and highlighted the following findings:

- Transition programs were not engaging families
- Information sharing between preschools and school required adjustments
- Playgroups and preschool programs are integral for family engagement
- Release time is needed for preschool teachers to meet with parents
- Programs prior to school including playgroups and preschools should be an integrated part of school experience for families and children
- There were high levels of absenteeism in the first half of the school year.

St Joseph's School was one of 11 schools who participated in the project. The school now has a well-established preschool program and a flourishing supported playgroup which have been operating for three years. The school has worked hard to engage early with families during this time. The playgroup is part of CESA's Supported Playgroups in Catholic Education (SPiCE) program which has a focus on engaging families in their children's learning from birth.

The principal, preschool coordinator and playgroup coordinator at St Joseph's School discussed the project findings and agreed to focus on systemically improving transition approaches in 2 key areas:

- Transfer of children's information between preschool and school
- Early engagement with families.

To improve transition planning and strengthen early engagement with families St Joseph's School implemented the following actions:

- Established an enhanced transition to preschool process with children visiting five times prior to starting preschool
- The preschool coordinator is released to meet with all the families of children starting preschool
- Reception (first year of school) teachers are released to meet with families of all children starting school
- Preschool and reception teachers, and the principal meet with families of children with identified needs before their children transition to school
- The principal and preschool coordinator meet regularly to discuss potential support required by children
- Preschool education support officers work between the preschool and reception classes to support and provide children a sense of continuity.

## Looking ahead

The implementation of these new processes at St Joseph's School were relatively simple adjustments. These changes are supporting significant steps forward in the school being able to connect early with families. This is providing a deeper understanding of children's earlier experiences and family context, to better support children's learning and development path.

In response to the 2018 AEDC data which showed higher levels of developmental vulnerability in the social competence domain, from term 3, 2020 the supported playgroup at St Joseph's School will be focusing on supporting children's social development. This strategy aligns with the school's priority of nurturing children's relationships, supporting continuity for children's development from playgroup to preschool and through to school.

## For more information contact

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***"It has been important to develop structures to ensure every family and child is acknowledged and honoured before they begin their formal education at our school. The connection starts at that point as developing relationships and getting to know each child and their family will have a positive effect on their learning. We see this an important beginning".***

Maria D'Aloia, Principal, St Joseph's School - Hindmarsh