

# How to Handle New Enrolments

Teamwork

We live and work in a transient society. This brings many enriching experiences for us but can also increase stress and anxiety for both staff and students in schools. Whilst this is now more consistency in the curriculum across schools there are other factors that also affect how smoothly these transitions take place. Acknowledging the inevitability of ever-changing school populations and addressing the challenges these present, can improve the outcomes for everyone involved, especially if a collaborative and systematic approach is used.

For students, research shows that not only can moving schools be detrimental for them socially, it can also have an adverse effect on their academic achievement. This means it is doubly important that schools do everything within their power to make this process as simple and painless as possible.

Some concerns students might have at this time are:

- Will I make friends?
- Will the teachers like me?
- Will I get lost or do the wrong thing and make a fool of myself?

Often, students move schools for reasons beyond their control and sometimes these are traumatic events in themselves (eg. a family break-up). Compassion and empathy are critical tools for school staff to employ when transitioning new students.

It's also important to recognise the additional strain a new student can place on a teacher. Some challenges a teacher may have at this time are:

Nothing diminishes anxiety faster than action.

Walter Anderson

- Ensuring resources are available (eg. there may not be any spare desks or chairs, enough books, printed materials etc).
- Rebalancing the personality mix in the class – positive relationships are critical to student wellbeing and learning; teacher time needs to be invested to ensure this takes place as successfully as possible.
- Assessing the student's learning and social needs and finding ways to meet them – fast (especially if assessment time is approaching).

Being aware of these complexities is critical for schools in supporting both students and staff in this process – it is unwise to rely on the hope that this year, there won't be too many disruptions from new students arriving. Developing systems that **expect** transience is the only way to minimise negative repercussions for all parties involved. The best way to do this is at a school-wide level. Some good starting points are:

1. Have new students commence the day **after** enrolment to allow time for all relevant staff to be notified in advance and promptly begin preparations.
2. Prepare a checklist of requirements and processes to follow for each new student.
3. Maintain a surplus supply of relevant resources (eg. desks, chairs, stationery etc) so that a new student can be welcomed and catered for without delay.
4. When creating population-specific resources (eg class sets of tasks), produce an extra 5-10% so a new student can hit the ground running.

Finally, it is imperative that all school staff (especially those who are 'front-of-house') bear in mind that their impression is going to be the first and therefore the most powerful when families enrol their children. Setting a warm and friendly tone is essential at this time to ensure positive and supportive relationship can develop between the teacher, the student, the family and the wider school community.

## Key points

Society is more mobile than ever – expect new students to enrol

Moving schools can affect student well-being and academic results

Teachers are placed under additional stress when they are under-prepared for new students

Schools need to develop systems that expect and cope with new enrolments

First impressions count – make them positive

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