My name is Mark Barlow. I'm a current classroom teacher at Corpus Christi Primary School. The purpose of this Transition PSG meeting is to allow all parties of the student to come together and communicate all of the areas of the student’s learning that allow them the best opportunity for a successful transition into secondary school. In the majority of transition meetings, you'll have the classroom teacher, a member of the diversity team from the primary school as well as the high school, and you'll often have the child present either at the start or at the end of the meeting. The majority of the time the parents or guardians are often there as well. But obviously scheduling depends on each individual.

You've done some pretty good stuff with sport this year, both at school and then outside of school as well. He's a pretty good footballer. Won a couple of awards the last couple of years. Did you want to tell them what awards you won at footy? Last year I won Most Courageous.

In preparation for the meeting, it's really important to have all of the student data available to share with the secondary school. So, in most cases, there will be information about the child's report, including their progression points across their report. For some students, there'll be a behaviour support plan and for all occasions there'll be a personalised learning plan or an individual learning plan. These are really important because it shows the secondary school the main areas that are focussed for that particular child and the greatest importance that we need to work on to try and help and to try and improve the child's successes in primary school and then their successes into their transition into secondary school.

In addition to these transition meetings, there's a number of other activities conducted in an attempt to give the student the best opportunity to have a successful transition. So, some of these extra activities include organising extra transition days or extra school visits. School visits are really important for any learner that's highly anxious or highly nervous about the high school that they're going to. This allows them to actually be present in the environment and walk around and see and experience exactly what it's going to be like in the next year.

We also include classroom lessons which focus on transition into secondary school. So, using a diary, using a map, using a timetable. It also allows us to put the kids into groups and get them to research their high school, which helps them improve their researching skills and their investigating skills. It also helps them work with students going to their high school. It helps them work better in groups. And just to start thinking and start using some of their high school's websites and resources that they've got.

At Corpus Christi as well we also invite year seven coordinators to come and visit all of the Year 6s each year, and they get to kind of share their expectations for both orientation day, but then the upcoming year as well. So, at least the Year 6s are getting to hear it from the horse's mouth and they're getting to hear what those expectations are. We also invited some previous Corpus Christi students, so some current Year 7s to come and visit, and they got to have a bit of a presentation on what Year 7 is like. And at both of these events, when the Year 7 students came, as well as when the Year 7 coordinators came, it allowed the Year 6s a perfect opportunity to ask all of the questions that they've been anxious about, to give them as much information as they can before they make their way to high school. Getting to actually see some Year 7 teachers and some Year 7 coordinators also helps because it puts a face to the name. So, no matter what happens, at least when you arrive at your high school, you'll know a face, you'll know someone, and there's always someone that you can go to. So, it's really important that there is that opportunity for students to listen to people from the high school that they going to and ask questions.

We have a lot of learning support officers at MacKillop, we've currently got 20 employed. You're not going to meet all 20. What we will do is have a group of about three or four that will get to know you and your homeroom.

I believe one of the most important traits of assisting a student's learning is to develop a positive rapport with the learners, and it's obviously much easier in the primary school setting where a teacher is with the same class and the same set of students all day, every day. So, there's lots of opportunities to develop a positive rapport with each and every learner. It's much harder in high school where students or teachers might only see each other a couple of times a day or a couple of times a week and students are working with such a larger range of educators. So, it is a little bit harder at high school to develop that positive relationship. However, it is one of the most important things in developing student successes and improving their academics.

The benefits of getting used to and getting to know a student as a person as well as, as a learner allows a positive environment for the student to learn in. And if the student feels that they're in a positive environment and if they feel that they're in a safe place and they're going to have a greater impact on their academic endeavours. Although building this relationship will also allow any staff member to understand the student's strengths and weaknesses, which is of course going to improve on their academics when you know what a student is able to do well and what's something that they'll need a bit of extra support with.

With Year 6 students building relationships for me is about just being honest, being fair and being consistent. It's really important that you show them the same respect that you hope that they will show you. And if you're honest and fair with them, then they'll have really positive expectations or really positive communications back.

In this meeting with this particular student, sport and friends were his two real number one priorities. They were the reason that he wanted to attend school every day, and they were his plans for at the end of school and in holidays and when he finishes school. So, getting to understand that those were the two most important things to him at school meant that I was able to engage in conversations with him about them. So, the amount of times that I would go out of my way to have a conversation with him just as a person, rather than focusing on his learning for that day. So, I would organise times, and he didn't know it, but I would organise times where him and I would just sit down and have a conversation and it might have been about his mates, it might have been about sport, might have been about holidays. Just having conversations with him as a human being allowed us to develop a really positive relationship, and it meant that rapport got stronger and stronger so that when it came for me to sit down with him and help him with his learning or help him with something that was difficult or even start to discipline or hand out consequences, we had already developed a really positive relationship because of all the times that we had just had conversations as two people. So, having all of that first really allowed me to help him as a learner later on throughout the year, and especially with Year 6s as they move towards transitioning into high school.

While you're here, are you happy for Mr. Barlow to share some of your achievements?

Yep.

That would be great. Thank you.

So, like I was saying before, we had the agreement that he was going to do his reading, his writing, and his maths. So, term 3 he did that 79% of the time, which was really awesome. From week 5 in term 3 and onwards, he'd done it about 95% of the time and he's kept up that success rate so far in term 4, which is excellent.

In this meeting we discussed the impact of his low self-esteem that he had about his peers, but then more importantly about his effort and his academics in class. So, knowing how he felt about himself as a person, but then also more importantly as a learner, really allowed me to support him with his learning. I understood that if I gave him learning tasks that were too challenging or that he would feel embarrassed in front of his peers or in front of his friends, then he would completely shut down and disengage because he would rather shut down and do nothing than be embarrassed for his lack of knowledge.

So, my goal was to build up his confidence by making sure that he could complete tasks that were at his level. So, every learning task, I would ensure that they started with tasks or activities that I know he could achieve with ease, and they were easy enough for him to successfully achieve and that way I could slowly then increase the difficulty until he reached a point where he couldn't continue anymore. That allowed me to make sure that no matter how hard I was trying to push him or challenge him with his academics, he was always being successful in his learning.

During a transition PSG it's really important when the child is present that we're still not having a negative impact on his self-esteem, and that's for any student that is present during these activities. So, lots of students won't actually understand why we’re having these meetings or “Some of my friends aren't having these meetings, why does it have to be me?” and it makes them feel worse about themselves as people, but also as learners. So, ensuring that we're honest with the child, but we're also keeping the entirety of that conversation really positive about themselves as a learner and about themselves as a person. And that's why in this meeting in particular, I started with some of the things that he was really successful with, including his sport and the friendships that he had made, which allowed the conversation to kind of start from there. And then we spoke about a lot to the successes that he was having or that he had had throughout the year. So, while the child was present, we ensured that the conversation was always positive and that we spoke about his strengths. And that way we could continue to maintain that self-esteem, and we didn't put him in a negative mindset moving forward.

Any child would be extremely nervous and anxious going into a meeting like that with their parent, with their teacher, and with a member of their high school. It’s quite a foreign environment for them to be in, so making sure that it is a positive experience for them really allows them to have that success moving forward.

He’s had a lot of successes, especially the second half of the year, with some of his learning, which is, I’ve been very proud of, and I'm really hoping he’s pretty proud of that, too.

Yep.

How do you feel about its mate?

I’m proud of myself.

Good. You’ve put in a huge effort.

Yep.

A lot of the adjustments that are being made for learning, or about emotions, or about behaviour, is about understanding the individual and about understanding the learning space as well. So, we can't focus on every single area that needs to be improved on, because that's unrealistic and it's not reasonable. So, we need to focus on more one of the three or four main areas of improvement that we need to identify. So, within the first couple of weeks of school, it's really important that you get to know each and every learner within your space and think about “Alright what are my goals for them as a person?” When those three or four main goals have been identified, it’s then about having a conversation with yourself, but also with the LSO (Learning Support Officer), other staff members that are involved with that student, with previous staff members of that student has had. What are some of the adjustments that we can make to make sure that that child is successful within that learning environment? Obviously, you can't make individual adjustments for every single child, every single minute of every single day because there is only one of you within the classroom. But it's about making sure that you’re finding reasonable adjustments to allow those main three or four goals that that child has to really get them to be successful towards the end of a couple of weeks or a couple of months or a term or a year.

So, I've found that to some students, having closed learning tasks can be really successful. I know that having open and rich learning tasks for the majority of the class brings about lots of academic successes because children are able to extend themselves or you're able to make adjustments and support them. For some students with disabilities and for this student in particular, closed learning tasks were actually the best way to support him in being successful, whether it was maths, whether it was literacy, whether it was something else, I made sure that he had a specific number of problems equations that he had to solve, or he had a specific number of questions to answer or a specific number of sentences or paragraphs that he had to write that I never left his learning tasks open for him because that was unreasonable and he didn't know where to go. So, if I gave him a closed learning task and said “This are how much I would like you to try and complete today” it gave him a goal at the end. And we know that goal setting is so important in student’s development.

I also made sure that one of the adjustments was that started off most of his learning tasks because for some students, just starting can be really, really challenging. So, if I had started it off for him, then he knew where the end result needed to be, that allowed him to have a successful session. The biggest piece of advice that would give for any teacher supporting a student with disability throughout the transition process is communication. So, communicating with the parents, the guardians, the family, the child, the primary school staff, as well as the secondary school staff. This just allows every person involved in the child’s learning to have a clear understanding of the challenges, the strengths, and the goals that that child has moving forward.