

Transition to School

Big Kids at Playcentre is always an exciting time in our children's Playcentre journey. With this in mind we always try to make it fun with lots of valuable learning. Of course one of the big reasons for Big Kids is to help our four-year-olds in their transition to school, we want this to be a time that they look forward to; not one filled with stress of the unknown, we want this transition to be an easy one for our tamariki.

Wharepuhunga Playcentre is located about 15 minutes out of Te Awamutu; we are a farming community, with a wonderful sense of belonging. We have a fantastic reciprocal relationship with the new entrant class at Korakonui School; where every term our Big Kids go across the road for a visit and at least once a year Room 1 make the trip over to us.

Going through our ERO review in November 2012, while having a conversation with one of the reviewers, she enquired about our relationship with the school and we mentioned how strong it was, I mentioned that I had thought about having the older siblings visiting a session, she thought this was a great idea as 'children learn different things from other children'.

A few months later I approached the school principal with the idea of having siblings come over for a visit. While talking she mentioned that if we were interested in something more leadership-based she would approach the year 7 & 8 teacher as

that would fit into the leadership programme they have.

If you ever visit a school you will see that when a child starts at school, it is the older children that look after them, make sure they are alright, always have someone to play with or just give a friendly smile, these are the role models for the younger generation and those at Korakonui school take this role very seriously. We all talked about it at centre and agreed that as a transition to school this would be a wonderful asset to have.

So Room 7 visited for their 'orientation' to see what the Big Kids Team Leader and children did while on session, they enjoyed dress-ups while visiting and the numerous activities available. We went through the term plan and worked out dates that would fit in with the school and our Big kids sessions. Three visits were planned and three different groups of children were sent over to 'lead' an activity. My goodness, when we picked up the children from their first session, they were buzzing and many even had an afternoon nap.

In the three sessions the children watched a puppet show that the students presented (they all LOVED that!) and then the big kids taught them how to make their own puppet show, they made a waka in the sandpit, they had face-painting, mask-making, treasure hunts, they learnt new games like 'sardines' and lots lots more.



It was especially wonderful for my son Jack as during his last term at Big Kids he was the only boy, so during these visits he was always 'attached' to the boys in the group, his relationships with them was a wonderful thing to see.

I was only on duty for one of the sessions, and wish I had been able to make it to all three, what a fantastic opportunity for our Big Kids and for the year 7 & 8 students. The interaction and learning going on was priceless, the talking, the watching, the playing – wonderful!

They formed lasting friendships, going to school visits wasn't such a HUGE deal and the older children weren't at all scary. We hope to make this a yearly occurrence in conjunction with the school, as it has been a wonderful experience for all those involved.

Korakonui School has started their own four-year-olds programme on a Wednesday afternoon, and instead of taking anything away from Playcentre it has complemented what we already have to offer, the children all know each other and it's been a wonderful experience for them. They get to 'catch up' with friends that they have made and you will often find those children from Playcentre Big Kids at home in any one of the classrooms at the school when they are visiting with their parents.

If you have a school close to you I would definitely recommend going to talk to the Principal and starting something like this. The transition to school, the experience and the joy of all those involved is well worth the planning.

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