Goonellabah Transition Program: final evaluation plan

Sallie Newell
*Southern Cross University*

Kimberlii Austen-Baker

Anne Graham
*Southern Cross University*

Mary Ward

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Goonellabah Transition Program

Final Evaluation Plan

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Prepared By:

Dr Sallie Newell
Assoc Prof Anne Graham
Centre for Children & Young People,
Southern Cross University

Ms Mary Ward
Ms Kimberlii Austen
Community Health Education Groups Inc.
(CHEGS)
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Abbreviations used throughout this plan:
  BRTP    Box Ridge Transition Program – the program on which the GTP is based
  CCYP    Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University – the local evaluator
  CDEP    Community Development Employment Program
  CHEGS   Community Health Education Groups Inc. – the Invest to Grow fundee
  DET     Department of Education and Training
  DoCS    Department of Community Services
  GTP     Goonellabah Transition Program – the Invest to Grow program
  NCAHS   North Coast Area Health Service
  PS      Primary school
  SES     Socio-economic status

Note: Throughout this document, the word Aboriginal refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Program Information

Program Rationale

National and international evidence

An extensive national and international body of literature has demonstrated that the early years of life have a substantial impact on a child’s social, emotional, physical and cognitive development and wellbeing throughout their life course. Similarly, it is clear that various aspects of a child’s environment, from socioeconomic factors (eg: poverty), through to community factors (eg: violence, social cohesion) and family factors (eg: parenting styles, intra-family conflict), all impact greatly on educational outcomes and are vital determinants of a child’s long-term health and wellbeing.

There is clear evidence that well-founded and well-implemented universal and targeted prevention and early intervention programs, starting early in life, can lead to improved cognitive, social and emotional functioning of preschool-aged children. This results in a positive influence on readiness to learn in the school setting and improves educational, social and health outcomes throughout the life course. Cost-effectiveness analyses have demonstrated that such programs more than pay for themselves, by reducing the later need for government-funded services. As well as these positive outcomes for children themselves, there are also “ripple” effects across a range of outcomes for their families and communities generally.

Consequently, major international reports [Start Right: Importance of Early Learning (UK), Rethinking the Brain: New Insights into Early Childhood Development (USA) and Reversing the Real Brain Drain: Early Years Study (Canada)] have identified the need for early childhood development programs, that improve educational, health and behavioural outcomes, thereby improving children’s transition into Kindergarten.

Needs & local experience

Unfortunately some children do not get the best possible start to life. Aboriginal children and children from lower SES groups, in particular, have markedly poorer health, social, mental, emotional and educational outcomes throughout their life course. These children are less likely to have access to early childhood education and more likely to enter the school system ill-prepared.

Therefore, a need for such a program was identified in 1997/1998, through a round of community and stakeholder consultations, initiated by DoCs, as part of the Far North Coast Area’s Integrated Community Services Planning process. While appropriate preschools were available, Aboriginal and other disadvantaged children were identified as also needing a more structured, multidisciplinary and intensive program to help them prepare to enter Kindergarten on a more level playing field. However, the importance of children also attending preschool, which assists them in a number of other areas, was acknowledged – hence the Box Ridge Transition to School Program (BRTP) was set to run for two days/week, leaving the children free to attend preschools on the other three days. The BRTP served children and families living in Coraki and Box Ridge communities.
The Goonellabah Transition Program (GTP) developed from expressions of concern from some principals in the Lismore/Goonellabah region that many Aboriginal and low-SES children were entering their schools at a significant disadvantage compared to most other children. Aware of the positive responses from families and school staff, these principals liaised with BRTP staff regarding establishing a similar program for their students. Therefore, the GTP also draws on the experiences and lessons learned during the development, ongoing refinement and evaluation of the BRTP.

**Program Description**

Based on the BRTP, the GTP is an early learning program developed to support children and their families during the transition period from the home and preschool settings to the formal school setting of Kindergarten. It aims to provide a holistic, flexible early learning program that builds on the strengths of children and their immediate environments. It will provide a strengths-based, early intervention program, using a developmental, health, linguistic and social framework. It will identify factors impacting on each child’s ability to learn and interact socially in order to implement individualised support programs. It will work in partnership with and across sectors to provide a culturally-sensitive program within a culturally-sensitive, family-friendly learning environment. It is located within the grounds of the Goonellabah Primary School and will work with lead agencies to secure enrolments and refine the holistic approach to addressing the educational and health needs of the children attending.

The GTP will target children and families needing additional support with their transition into Kindergarten. Many, but not all, of these children and families will be Aboriginal. It is anticipated that approximately 10 students, aged 3.6 to 5 years, will commence the program in September 2005 (Term 3). Another 20 children will be enrolled at the beginning of each of the 2006 and 2007 school years. Children will attend the GTP for two days per week during school terms in 2005.

The GTP’s staffing will consist of one Coordinator/Teacher, a second Teacher, Aboriginal Support Assistants and an Administrative Assistant. A Management Committee will oversee the financial management of the program. A multidisciplinary Advisory Group will oversee and support program implementation and a Working Party will provide operational support to the Coordinator.

**Program Objectives**

The GTP aims to:

- Provide developmental, linguistic, health and social support through a strengths based approach within an early learning environment;
- Identify factors that impact on children’s ability to learn and socially interact before they enter Kindergarten, in order to put in place individual programs to support those in need;
- Work in partnership with families in identifying and meeting the needs of the individual children attending the program;
- Work in partnership with other services and sectors that support early intervention;
- Develop positive partnerships and networks with staff of local Community Preschools, Day Care Centres, Community Playgroups and Families First Supported Playgroups; and
- Provide a culturally sensitive program in a family friendly learning environment.
How GTP Targets National Agenda for Early Childhood Key Action Areas

Healthy Young Families
The GTP will focus on this key action area by:

- **Using Individual Health Plans for children** (developed through the BRTP) – to record a family’s identified goals and priorities in relation to their child’s health needs, using a strengths-based, family-focused approach that actively involve parents/carers and acknowledge the integral role they play in the management of their children’s health.

- **Using existing and developing additional culturally-appropriate health resources** (developed through the BRTP) – which are used as a visual guide to provide information to Aboriginal families and children about local health services. Photos of local resources and health professionals make up the core component of the books, supported by explanations using Aboriginal English.

- **Providing an introduction and / or access to health services** within the GTP setting – as a non-threatening environment in which families can be introduced to health professionals and services.

- **Implementing health programs as developed by Community Health Therapists** – who will train GTP staff in implementing programs developed for individual students, as well as working directly with children, either individually or in small groups, within the GTP setting.

Early Learning and Care
The GTP will focus on this key action area by:

- **Developing further and implementing the ‘School Talk’...Transition Language Program** (developed through the BRTP) – which is a strengths-based approach that views Aboriginal English as a language with its own linguistic, semantic & syntactic structure, while acknowledging that the language of schools is Australian Standard English.

- **Using Early Literacy and Early Numeracy program and resources** (developed through the BRTP) – these were recognised with a School’s National Literacy Award (1999) and included in Department of Education and Training ‘Specialised programs to support learning in Mathematics’. These resources seek to move beyond the symbolic representation of Aboriginal culture to reflect the contemporary local Aboriginal communities, its members and culture within the literature and resources used within the GTP.

- **Using Early Literacy and Early Numeracy bags** (developed through the BRTP) – which are fun learning tools that provide parents/carers with an opportunity to expand their knowledge of early literacy and numeracy development. Each bag contains a supply of games and books based on early literacy and numeracy outcomes. Each child takes home a bag for a week and parents are encouraged to play and read with their children. The games and books are created using digital photographs of the children enrolled in the GTP.

- **Using Social Stories: An Introduction to the Routines of Kindergarten and the People we Find in our School!** (developed through the BRTP) – which use sequencing games involving digital photographs of GTP children and school staff to introduce children to the staff of Kindergarten and the routines of school.

Supporting Families and Parents
The GTP will focus on this key action area by:

- **Basing all programming on Individual Family Service Plans**, otherwise known as Family Team Meetings – a family-based planning process, whereby the family’s goals and priorities for their child are discussed at the beginning of each school term regarding a range of learning areas – including cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, expressive language, receptive language, early literacy, early numeracy and social skills.

- **Visiting children’s homes once every fortnight** – to provide an informal opportunity to develop the relationship between families, school and Transition staff, by creating a ‘yarning’ or narrative type of interaction through which information can be verbally shared.
Program Logic

High level outcomes
Children transition into Kindergarten more happily and successfully
Children perform better academically during Kindergarten and Year 1

Medium level outcomes
- Improved social outcomes for children
- Improved behavioural outcomes for children
- Improved health outcomes for children
- Improved developmental outcomes for children
- Increased parental participation in children’s health & education
- Improved school culture

Low level outcomes
- Children attend regularly
- Parents participate in planning
- Parents happy with GTP
- School & GTP staff happy with GTP
- Improved parental attitudes
- Improved school & GTP staff attitudes

Implement Goonellabah Transition Program

Outputs
- Run classroom programs
- Conduct family-based planning
- Conduct home visits
- Implement individual health plans
- Ongoing resource development
- Ongoing staff training

Develop Goonellabah Transition Program

Processes
- Recruit & train staff
- Renovate & furnish building
- Consult with relevant agencies / establish partnerships
- Establish management processes
- Finalise & produce program materials
- Recruit families & children

Establish Goonellabah Transition Program

Inputs
- ITG funding
- Goonellabah PS In-kind
- DET In-kind
- NCAHS In-kind
- Community & staff In-kind
- Other agency support (eg: CDEP)
Program Evaluation

Evaluation Aims

Performance Monitoring & Process Evaluation
Comprehensive performance management processes and process evaluation will monitor:

- The quality of implementation and delivery of the program – including ongoing reflection about factors (positive and negative) impacting on the program’s success, implementation quality, efficiency, consistency with program logic and adequacy of documentation.
- Children’s and families’ participation in the program, overall and in the various program components – this will include assessing its success at reaching the target group and how any barriers are addressed.
- Families’, students’ and GTP and school staff members’ attitudes towards the GTP, with the aim of incorporating constructive criticisms, wherever possible.

Impact and Outcome Evaluation
Comprehensive impact and outcome evaluation will assess the GTP’s impact across the following broad range of indicators and target groups:

- School staff members’ attitudes towards, understanding of, and perceived confidence in meeting the special needs of Aboriginal students’ and families’ within the education system.
- Students’ families’ attitudes towards, and confidence in dealing with, the health and education systems.
- Children’s attitudes toward, and confidence in dealing with, the health and education systems.
- Children’s developmental, educational, social, behavioural and health outcomes throughout their transition to school and their early school lives.

Evaluation Design & Methods
As many of the children and families involved in the GTP will be Aboriginal, our evaluation has been designed to make use of routinely-collected data, wherever possible – in order to minimise the need for direct question and answer processes and/or written surveys for children and their families. Where we feel a need to gather additional information that only children and their families can give, we will be using less formal, more narrative methods to gather that information.

Performance Monitoring & Process Evaluation
A comprehensive Access database has been developed to manage the following information about each child participating in the GTP:

- Their families’ / carers’ contact and demographic details.
- Details about any other preschool / day care services they attend.
- Dates and reasons for absences from the GTP.
- Their developmental progress assessments – throughout their time at the GTP.
- Their parents’ participation in their regular program planning.
- Details about any referrals made – and their outcomes.
- Details about any assessments / reports by the school counsellor.
- Details about any hearing assessments.
- Details about any assessments / reports by the Itinerant Support Teacher.
- Details about any reports made by their teacher.
In addition, The GTP Coordinator will keep an ongoing reflective journal throughout the program’s
development and implementation – providing a detailed record of the successes achieved, the challenges
faced, the lessons learned and the changes made to the program. The minutes of the regular Working Group,
Management Committee and Advisory Group meetings will also provide information about the program’s
development and implementation.

Between them, the Access database and the Coordinator’s reflective journal will provide the data to answer
the questions raised in Tables 2 and 3 of the Invest to Grow Local Evaluation Framework.

Finally, detailed feedback about the GTP will also be collected from the children, their families and GTP and
school staff. These process data will be collected during the interviews and surveys described below.

**Impact and Outcome Evaluation**

**Children’s Outcomes**

This evaluation is quasi-experimental and will involve prospective assessment of participating children’s
preschool development and comparison of their early school transition and achievements – as detailed in the
table summarising the evaluation tools. These results will be compared against those of two comparison
groups of students drawn from the partner primary schools: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children enrolled in
Years K – 2 at the schools during 2006, without having attended the GTP.

While it is yet to be developed, a children’s survey process will be developed, using novel, narrative
techniques (eg: using pictures of GTP activities, puppets, etc) – this will be used to gather children’s feedback
about the GTP and about their attitudes towards and transition into school.

**Families’ Outcomes**

Families’ outcomes will be assessed in two ways. Firstly, ongoing feedback will be collected regarding their
expectations, likes & dislikes about the GTP, their suggestions to improve it, their knowledge and attitudes
about the health and education systems, their level of engagement in their children’s health and education and
their perceptions of the GTP’s impact on their children, themselves, other family members, school staff and the
overall school culture. This information will be collected, using semi-structured feedback sheets, during the
GTP staff’s visits to families’ homes and conversations during family members’ visits to the GTP.

Secondly, parental interviews will be conducted at the end of the first and last school terms. These interviews
will explore parents’ perceptions about their children’s transition into the school setting and how the GTP may
have helped or hindered this. The interviews at the end of the first school term will also ask parents for their
feedback about any of the feedback sheet themes where they have no comments recorded.

To enhance cultural sensitivity, Aboriginal Health Promotion Officers from the North Coast Area Health Service
will conduct the parent and child surveys. They will be familiar to families as they will be helping with the home
visiting component of the project. Results from the BRTP demonstrated that, within such a process, parents
were willing to comment about improvements they would like to see, as well as about aspects with which they
were satisfied.
Staff Outcomes
There will also be a pre-post evaluation of the GTP’s impact on GTP and partner primary school staff. Staff will be interviewed regarding their experiences, understanding and confidence in dealing with families identified as requiring additional support during their children’s transition into the school system. As teachers are often rotated across school Years, baseline school staff surveys will be collected from all teachers across the five partner primary schools. However, the follow-up school staff surveys will be collected from only those teachers and support staff working directly with children in Years K – 2.

Data Management
A comprehensive Access database has been developed to manage and allow cross-referencing of all child-related data collected – during children’s enrolment in the GTP and in any of the five partner primary schools. Additional Access databases will be developed to manage all parent-related and staff-related data collected.

Ethical Approval
Ethical approval for the entire project will be obtained from both Southern Cross University and Department of Education and Training Ethics Committees. Both approvals will be sought in stages – addressing the annual data collection needs. For example, the initial ethics applications will primarily address the data to be collected through the GTP itself, with only the children’s aggregate and school staff survey baseline data covered in relation to school-provided data. Consequently, a two-staged consent process will be used – whereby, initially, parental consent will be sought for only the GTP-collected outcomes. Then, at the end of each year of the GTP, additional parental consent will be sought for access to children’s school-collected data.

Evaluation Tools
The table overleaf summarises the various evaluation tools proposed for use in assessing the GTP’s acceptability to all target groups and its impact across the broad range of outcomes detailed in the Evaluation Aims section above. As indicated, most of the data will come from tools already routinely collected by the GTP or the partner primary schools. School data will be provided by the five partner primary schools named in the funding application – Goonellabah Public, Lismore Heights, Lismore Public, Albert Park and Wyrallah Road. These schools have the largest numbers of Aboriginal child enrolments in the Lismore/Goonellabah region. Negotiations are underway with these partner primary schools and may result in some adjustments to the actual measures collected, or their scheduling.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Evaluation Tool</th>
<th>Collected By?</th>
<th>Collected When?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children's Education / Development Outcomes</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy (reading &amp; writing)</td>
<td>Child Observation Record-2 (COR-2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Starting With Assessment (SWA)</td>
<td>Schools (K)</td>
<td>Early Term 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concepts About Print</td>
<td>Schools (K)</td>
<td>Early Term 1 &amp; Late Term 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syllabus Outcomes - English</td>
<td>GTP &amp; Schools (K – 2)</td>
<td>End of each Term</td>
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<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>COR-2 &amp; Count Me In Too</td>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Continually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SWA</td>
<td>Schools (K)</td>
<td>Early Term 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule for Early Number Assessment</td>
<td>Schools (1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>Early Term 1 &amp; Late Term 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syllabus Outcomes - Maths</td>
<td>GTP &amp; Schools (K – 2)</td>
<td>End of each Term</td>
</tr>
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<td>Language skills (expressive &amp; receptive)</td>
<td>Preschool Language Assessment Instrument-2</td>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Early Term 1 &amp; Late Term 4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SWA</td>
<td>Schools (K)</td>
<td>Early Term 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positions &amp; directions</td>
<td>COR-2</td>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Continually</td>
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<td>Measurements</td>
<td>COR-2</td>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Continually</td>
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<td>Fine motor skills</td>
<td>COR-2</td>
<td>GTP</td>
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<td>WAI</td>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Early Term 1 &amp; Late Term 4</td>
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<td>Gross motor skills</td>
<td>COR-2 &amp;/or Assessment, Evaluation &amp; Programming System for Infants &amp; Children</td>
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<td>Learning Support needed</td>
<td>Individual Education Plans</td>
<td>Schools (K – 2)</td>
<td>Start of each Year</td>
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<td>School counsellor reports &amp; referrals</td>
<td>Schools (K – 2)</td>
<td>End of each Term</td>
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<td>Problem solving skills</td>
<td>COR-2</td>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Continually</td>
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<td><strong>Children's Social Outcomes</strong></td>
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<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>COR-2</td>
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<td>Self-control</td>
<td>COR-2</td>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Continually</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social cooperation</td>
<td>COR-2</td>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Continually</td>
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<td>Social skills</td>
<td>COR-2</td>
<td>GTP</td>
<td>Continually</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-help skills</td>
<td>COR-2 &amp;/or AEPS</td>
<td>GTP</td>
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<td><strong>Children's Behavioural Outcomes</strong></td>
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<td>School attendance</td>
<td>Daily Class Rolls</td>
<td>GTP &amp; Schools (K – 2)</td>
<td>Average each Term</td>
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<td>Student engagement</td>
<td>COR-2</td>
<td>GTP</td>
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<td>Student behaviour</td>
<td>Behaviour Reports &amp; Suspension Records</td>
<td>Schools (K – 2)</td>
<td>End of each Term</td>
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<td><strong>Children's Health Outcomes</strong></td>
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<td>Individual Health Plans database</td>
<td>GTP</td>
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<td>Paediatric Coordination Team records</td>
<td>Paediatricians (K – 2)</td>
<td>End of each Term</td>
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<td><strong>Children's Transition Outcomes</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback about GTP</td>
<td>Children's survey</td>
<td>CCYP / GTP</td>
<td>Late Term 4</td>
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<td>Feedback about children's transition into school</td>
<td>Children's survey</td>
<td>CCYP / GTP</td>
<td>Late Term 2 in Kindy</td>
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<td>Parents’ survey</td>
<td>CCYP / GTP</td>
<td>Late Terms 1 and 4 in Kindy</td>
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<td>School staff survey (Kindy only)</td>
<td>CCYP</td>
<td>Late Term 4 in Kindy</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family Outcomes</strong></td>
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<td>Expectations of &amp; feedback about GTP</td>
<td>Parental feedback diaries</td>
<td>GTP</td>
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<td>Parents’ survey</td>
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<td>Late Terms 1 and 4 in Kindy</td>
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<td>Parental attitudes re: health/education systems</td>
<td>Parental feedback diaries</td>
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<td>GTP Staff and Parents’ survey</td>
<td>CCYP / GTP</td>
<td>Late Terms 1 and 4 in Kindy</td>
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<td>Parental participation in children’s health/education</td>
<td>Parental feedback diaries</td>
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<td>Parents’ survey</td>
<td>CCYP / GTP</td>
<td>Late Terms 1 and 4 in Kindy</td>
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<td><strong>Staff Outcomes</strong></td>
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<td>Feedback about GTP</td>
<td>GTP and School Staff survey</td>
<td>CCYP</td>
<td>Late Term 4 in 2006 &amp; 2007</td>
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<td>GTP Coordinator’s Reflective Practice Diary</td>
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<td>Knowledge &amp; attitudes re: needs of high-risk children; expectations of GTP</td>
<td>GTP and School Staff survey</td>
<td>CCYP</td>
<td>July 2005 (baseline) and Late Term 4 in 2006 &amp; 2007</td>
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**Evaluation Time Line**

The table below outlines the data collection schedule for each intake of children to attend the GTP during the study period. The actual tools to be used are those described in the above Evaluation Tools table.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Routinely Collected Data</th>
<th>Project Collected Data</th>
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<td>GTP data</td>
<td>School data</td>
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<td>October</td>
<td>Intake 1 – 10 children</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>Intake 2 – 20 children</td>
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Final analyses and report preparation
Program Reporting

Regular Progress Reports
The GTP Coordinator, with help from the Working Group and the CHEGS Coordinator, will prepare and submit the regular progress reports – addressing the program’s performance management and process evaluation aims.

Interim Evaluation Report
The CCYP, with help from the GTP Coordinator and Working Group, will prepare and submit an interim report – addressing the program’s performance management, process, impact and outcome evaluation aims during the period September 2005 to December 2006. The draft interim report, incorporating relevant feedback from the GTP Management and Advisory Groups, will be presented to the Department of Family and Community Services by 15th June 2007, with the final interim report presented by 21st September 2007.

Final Evaluation Report
The CCYP, with help from the GTP Coordinator and Working Group, will prepare and submit a final report, building on the interim report – addressing the program’s performance management, process, impact and outcome evaluation aims during the period September 2005 to December 2007. The draft final report, incorporating relevant feedback from the GTP Management and Advisory Groups, will be presented to the Department of Family and Community Services by 18th April 2008, with the final final report presented by 30th June 2008.