

# Compulsory early childhood education: What parents need to know

The transition of Early Childhood Development (ECD) from the Department of Social Development to the Department of Basic Education is now in full swing and will change how the academic development of young children is approached in South Africa.



Source: [Pexels](#)

The transition started this month, and will become effective from next year. Among the changes which will be introduced by the move, is the obligation on parents to send their children to school from Grade 00, as opposed to school attendance only being compulsory from Grade 1, as has been the case until now.

An education expert says parents who now need to consider where they will send their young child from next year must do their homework carefully to ensure the school they choose approaches ECD from a child-led learning perspective. This will ensure they start their academic journey appropriately for their age, that they build strong foundations, and that they have positive associations with attending school.

“Schools have different programmes and approaches, and parents may be seduced by the idea of sending their child to a strictly academics focused ECD institution which will turn their little one into a mini Einstein before they even head to big school. However these good intentions are likely to fall flat, as this is not the correct and age-appropriate approach,” says Lynda Eagle, academic advisor at ADvTech Schools.

“The early years are exceptionally important, but learning should be play-based as far as possible. One of the best approaches to this is contained in the Reggio Emilia philosophy of learning. Bombarding young children with a curriculum more suitable to older students is entirely counter-productive,” she adds.



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Jackie Carroll and Phemelo Segoe 25 Apr 2022



When looking for an early learning campus, parents should search for a school that is not only aesthetically pleasing but more importantly where the student's wellbeing is placed at the forefront.

“Young children learn best when provided with opportunities to ‘play’ - where they can explore, discover, and experiment in order to make sense of the world around them. The school/teachers need to be cognisant of this and facilitate the students' personal learning journey through careful observations and by providing meaningful and relevant learning opportunities,” says Eagle.

Other things to look out for when hunting for the right ECD environment for your child include:

- Teachers who are appropriately qualified to teach in an early learning environment;
- Where teachers have a caring and positive disposition and where a child is viewed as competent and capable;
- Where there is a strong sense of community;
- Where teaching is engaging, relevant and interactive; and,
- Where the school follows a positive discipline policy – students are guided positively and supported as they develop their social and self-regulation skills.

“For parents who may be concerned about the ability of schools to adapt to the new paradigm, they can be reassured that the inclusion of the younger years into their programmes is doable if the right approach is followed. Approaches to teaching and learning in the early years - such as the Reggio Emilia approach - are well documented and provide schools with prime examples of best practice.

“Here the emphasis is not on equipping a school with expensive resources but rather connecting the student with natural elements in meaningful ways, with rich learning experiences, and helping them to reimagine and repurpose available materials – resulting in rich learning opportunities and possibilities,” Eagle concludes.

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