

Parents do their school homework

By LOUISE TURK

IT will be another eight months until four-year-old Olivia Smith starts school but preparations for the milestone are well underway.

Her mum and dad Penelope and Mathew Smith, of Russell Vale, are among hundreds of parents and carers doing their own homework on how to equip their children with the skills to start school.

The Wollongong Transition to School Network - comprising Wollongong City Council, Illawarra Children's Services and the NSW Department of Education - is staging information expos on the transition from toddler to school.

At last week's northern suburbs expo, the Smiths accessed information on Russell Vale Public School, where they intend to enrol Olivia for kindergarten in 2007. Mrs Smith said she was able to get practical advice at the expo such as when to buy the school uniform, when to submit the enrolment forms, and what orientation activities the

school was proposing.

The mother of two said they were also given tips from professionals on how to help young children become more independent in the lead-up to starting school.

Suggestions included encouraging preschoolers to be able to dress themselves, listen to instructions and wait for their turn, and unwrap lunches and open drink containers without adult help.

"Our main focus is on what we as parents can do to make it easier for Olivia before she starts kindergarten," Mrs Smith said.

"After attending the expo, we feel more comfortable in our decision to send Olivia to Russell Vale Public School next year and we feel more confident in how to relay the relevant information and practical skills to her. It was very helpful."

The expos, which are free of charge and start at 7pm, are at Dapto Ribbonwood Centre tonight, Wollongong Town Hall on May 24, and the Illawarra Yacht Club on May 31.



Well schooled: Olivia Smith, 4, with her parents Mathew and Penelope and brother Jake, prepares for school next year. Picture: WAYNE VENABLES