

Preparing for the transition



Helping hands: Preschoolers with education expert Prof Kay Margetts, who says the first year of school is fundamental in reaching a child's full potential.

Picture: GREG TOTMAN

By EMMA SHAW

IT'S one of the biggest changes in a child's life, but the transitional process of starting school can be made a whole lot smoother with just a little understanding.

Professor Kay Margetts, from the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education, is an expert in the field and says a positive experience in the first year of school can have far-reaching effects in helping a child to reach their full potential.

"Children starting school are entering a situation significantly different from their previous experience," Prof Margetts said.

"There are new expectations, new rules, a lot of things that are unfamiliar.

"There's a greater demand for them to be independent."

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Prof Margetts was in the Illawarra yesterday to speak to education professionals at Berkeley Sports Club.

She said the ability to cope with the changes of starting school depends on a number of factors.

"It seems to be more difficult for boys. They tend to have less developed social skills than girls and they also demonstrate more of those behavioural problems, such as aggression and hyperactivity.

"Children who have attended child care for more than 30 hours a week have more difficulty adjusting.

"My hypothesis about it is that children are happy and

comfortable being there (in child care), but it doesn't give them many opportunities to meet others and adjust their behaviour.

"I think it's that lack of opportunity on a weekly basis to be mixing with other people. Children who spend a couple of days with granny, a couple of days with mum, one day in childcare, are used to adapting their behaviour."

Mangerton mum Jennine Primmer is already preparing her four-year-old daughter, Violet, for school, with two days a week in childcare.

"I think everyone understands that it's really important," Ms Primmer said.

"Everyone's aware that (children) need to be happy and feel confident when they go to school. You don't want to set up negative feelings (that) stay with them."