



**Entertaining:** Belly dancer Jacqueline Peperkamp performs for the children at Stockland Shellharbour as part of the Big School Expo. Picture: SYLVIA LIBER

# Putting fun back into 'big school'

By PAMELA FROST

CHILDREN are being treated to free entertainment, face painting, craft activities and giveaways throughout this month to help ease their transition to "big school".

The Big School Expos aim to emphasise fun when children start kindergarten.

The expo at Stockland Shellharbour on Thursday gave parents the chance to chat to school principals and health professionals while their children were entertained.

An expo has already been

held at Westfield Warr-awong and another is set down for Dapto Mall on Thursday.

The expos are in their third year but it is the first time the Illawarra Transition to School Program has held the events in shopping centres, something it plans to continue.

Project officer Kath Smith said parents and children felt less intimidated when the expos were held in shopping centres.

"People feel more comfortable in shopping centres than approaching schools," Ms Smith said.

If a child doesn't have a good experience when they first start school it can carry throughout the rest of their school years, she added.

"We start conversations with children on what will happen at big school. We're making it a positive experience. Going to school is a fun thing."

There were 15 schools represented at the Shellharbour expo, plus a speech pathologist, nutritionist and physiotherapist.

"If parents have concerns then they could be pointed in the right direction to get it fixed," Ms Smith said.