

# **School Readiness Programme – Easing transition into Primary School for children with Mild Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder**

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**Background:** As children enter formal schooling after their early childhood phase, they move from one level to the other in the education continuum and transition takes place. The shift into a more structured learning setting in primary school indicates major academic, social and emotional adjustments in a child's life. Successful transition happens when the child is emotionally, psychologically, physically and intellectually able to settle into primary school (Yeboah, 2002). Research studies have also shown that children who make successful transition are most likely to achieve greater academic performance and social competence. While there are children who struggle to adjust with the transition, it is particularly apparent for children with special needs as they struggle to meet developmental expectations in many areas, further creating barriers to a positive start to school.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to evaluate a School Readiness Programme, which was designed to help Primary One students develop prerequisite skills (e.g. social, emotional and self-help) necessary for positive transition to primary school.

**Methods:** 11 Primary One students with Mild Intellectual Disability and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder were enrolled in the School Readiness Programme at the Association for Persons with Special Needs' Chaoyang School in Singapore. Students completed weekly 1 hour sessions in the class for 6 weeks.

**Results:** The findings indicated that there was an increase in average scores for all targeted skills based on pre- and post-test comparison. There was also an increase in students who were able to achieve greater competence for all targeted skills. However, statistical analysis suggests that the results were not statistically significant. A larger sample size will be required to establish conclusions about the effectiveness of the program. Variability in the students' performance during sessions where they were observed could also have interfered with the results. Interrater reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha. The data showed agreement and internal consistency between 3 raters for both pre ( $\alpha = .996$ ) and post measures ( $\alpha = .992$ ).

**Implications:** These findings suggests the need to further explore specific school readiness intervention programs in order to support children with special needs to maximise their success in starting school. A form of longitudinal study where repeated measures of pre- and post-test are taken over time should also be explored to better understand and determine the trends. Analysis of the trends will assist in establishing program outcomes or re-designing program delivery.

**Keywords:** transition, special school, school readiness, Singapore