Country Note on Transitions between ECEC and Primary Education JAPAN

March 2016
This report was prepared by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology as an input to the OECD thematic review of policies on transitions between ECEC and primary education.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ..................................................................................................................... 3

Chapter 1: The Transition System and its Organization ................................................................. 4
  1.1 Policy context ............................................................................................................................. 4
  1.2 Goals and purposes .................................................................................................................... 6
  1.3 Current changes in organisation and management of ECEC and primary education ........... 8
  1.4 Distribution of responsibilities for transitions ......................................................................... 9
  1.5 Monitoring transitions ............................................................................................................. 13

Chapter 2: Professional Continuity ............................................................................................... 15
  2.1 Leadership ............................................................................................................................... 15
  2.2 Staff support for transitions .................................................................................................... 15
  2.3 Collaborations between authorities and ECEC/primary school on professional continuity ..... 16

Chapter 3: Pedagogical Continuity ............................................................................................... 17
  3.1 Curriculum framework and development goals ....................................................................... 17
  3.2 Pedagogy ............................................................................................................................... 20
  3.3 Child development ................................................................................................................... 21
  3.4 Collaboration between authorities and ECEC/primary school on pedagogical continuity .... 22

Chapter 4: Developmental Continuity .......................................................................................... 24
  4.1 Common preparation of children for primary school ............................................................... 24
  4.2 Parents involvement in transitions .......................................................................................... 24
  4.3 Collaborations at setting level ................................................................................................ 25
  4.4 Collaborations with early childhood services and other settings, agencies or organisations .. 25

Chapter 5: Challenges and Strategies .......................................................................................... 27
  5.1 Main challenges ....................................................................................................................... 27
  5.2 Strategies to overcome challenges .......................................................................................... 28

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................................. 30
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECEC</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education and Care</td>
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<td>MEXT</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology</td>
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<td>MHLW</td>
<td>Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare</td>
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<td>NIER</td>
<td>National Institute for Educational Policy Research</td>
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Chapter 1: The Transition System and its Organization

1.1 Policy context

Key traditions and values in transitions from ECEC to primary education

1 According to Japan’s Basic Act on Education, which was extensively revised in 2006, the objective of early childhood education is “to cultivate foundations for the lifelong formation of one’s character,” and the objective of compulsory education is “to cultivate foundations for an independent life within society while developing the abilities of each individual, and to foster the basic qualities necessary for those who form our state and society.” Although early childhood education and compulsory education are each prescribed according to stages of development, they are both considered part of an education which aspires to create ideal models for children as individuals and members of society. For this, Japan’s philosophy of education embraces continuity and coherence.

2 In order for early childhood education and primary education to fulfil the roles and responsibilities at their respective stages, and in order to guarantee child development and learning continuity, it is considered extremely important to ensure that structured education is provided to children by ensuring that both stages of education are seamlessly connected and by maintaining continuity and coherence of education.

Recent changes in political and societal attention to the topic of transitions

3 More than a decade ago, Japan experienced the problem of children not adapting well in transitioning from early childhood education to primary education (the so-called “first grader problem”). This led to general awareness of the importance and difficulty of transitions. Furthermore, with the importance of transitions being recognised, the School Education Act was revised, and as a result, the objective of kindergarten education was viewed as “cultivating foundations for compulsory education and subsequent education,” and revisions were made to the Course of Study for Kindergartens and other official guidelines. Taking these developments into account, a consultative council was created by the national government for research and study into the seamless transition from early childhood education to primary education, and to raise the awareness of the importance of such transitions among local governments. This council consisted of various stakeholders, including professors, local government supervisors, ECEC centre leaders and primary school principals.

4 The Central Council for Education is currently proceeding to review such topics as curricula in primary and secondary education, and it has adopted the question of how to promote more seamless transitions from early childhood education to primary education as a matter for discussion. For this reason, the topic of transitions is attracting increased attention.
Important legal revisions or changes in the implementation of the transition policies

5 The School Education Act was revised in response to an increase in awareness in Japan and overseas with regard to the importance of early childhood education. For instance, research findings were presented overseas demonstrating how high-quality early childhood education leads to improvements in subsequent scholastic achievement. Following the revisions to the School Education Act, there was a growing awareness of the importance of transitions, which has led to such developments as revision of the Course of Study for Kindergartens and other official guidelines, encouragement for teachers to obtain teaching licences for both kindergarten and primary school, and support for advanced initiatives.

(1) Revision of the School Education Act, and revision of the Course of Study for Kindergartens and National Curriculum of Day Care Centres, etc.

6 As mentioned above, the 2007 revision of the School Education Act clearly states that the objective of kindergarten education is “to cultivate foundations for compulsory education and subsequent education.” In addition, the new Course of Study for Kindergartens and the National Curriculum for Day Care Centres, which came into full effect in 2009, and the Course of Study for Elementary Schools, which came into full effect in 2011, prescribe that teachers must be mindful of transitions when formulating instruction plans. (The Course of Study and Guideline of Day Care for Integrated Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care, which came into effect in 2015, also contains similar provisions.) The Course of Study for Elementary Schools contains a new provision that schools must consider the connection of some first-year subjects with the content of kindergarten education.

7 Furthermore, while continuing to examine curriculum standards for primary and secondary education, the Central Council for Education is also considering measures for promoting more seamless transitions from early childhood education to primary education.

(2) Encouraging teachers to have teaching licences for both kindergarten and primary school

8 In addition to a recommendation contained in a 2005 report by the Central Council for Education, the Action Program for Pre-School Education Promotion (FY2006–FY2010) called for a target figure to be set for the percentage of teachers holding licences for both levels. Through such measures, teachers have been encouraged to have teaching licences for both kindergarten and primary school.

(3) Support for advanced initiatives

9 In response to the “Report on the Seamless Connection between Early Childhood Education and Primary Education”, which was compiled by a consultative council for research and study in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2010, local governments nationwide have continued to promote the exchange of teachers and children between primary schools and kindergartens/nursery centres.
to facilitate transitions, and to work on formulating transition curricula. MEXT has held meetings for responsible supervisors and others at the boards of education in each prefecture and ordinance-designated city, with the aim of supporting transitions, such as through presentations by local governments that are engaged in progressive initiatives for early childhood education including transitions in order to promote good practices.

Current trends and debates regarding transitions

(1) Review of the Course of Study for Kindergartens and the Course of Study for Elementary Schools, etc.

10 As stated in section 1.1, the Central Council for Education is currently proceeding to review such topics as curricula in primary and secondary education, which is commonly reviewed about every ten years so far. In this process, in order to promote more seamless transitions from early childhood education to primary education, it has taken up for discussion the question of how to revise the Course of Study for Kindergartens and the Course of Study for Elementary Schools. For this reason, the topic of transitions is attracting increased attention.

(2) Formation of an approach curriculum for early childhood education and a starting curriculum for primary schools

11 Based on the present state of transitions in each region, local governments nationwide are proceeding with efforts to formulate unique curricula for the transition period (the period when both early childhood education and primary education are sensitive to transitions; beginning and ending of the period are set by each school and facility based on the children and local circumstances) aimed at a seamless transition from early childhood education to primary education. Examples are an “approach curriculum” for the early childhood education stage (the approach curriculum for kindergartens, nursery centres and centres for early childhood education and care aims to cultivate a foundation for creative thinking and an independent way of living based on the assumption that early childhood education leads to the development of a foundation for life and learning during primary school and beyond) and a “starting curriculum” for primary schools (the curriculum for children entering primary school designed to encourage them to actively demonstrate their abilities and to create a new school life, based on learning and development through play and life at kindergartens, nursery centres and centres for early childhood education and care). These transition period curricula are spurring increased attention to the topic of transitions.

1.2 Goals and purposes

Goals and purposes of transitions from ECEC to primary education

12 As stated in section 1.1, according to Japan’s Basic Act on Education the objective of early childhood education is to form the foundations for one’s character, and the objective of
compulsory education is to develop the abilities of each individual so that he/she can live an independent life within society, and to foster the basic qualities necessary for citizens of our state and society. Although early childhood education and compulsory education are each meant for particular stages of development, they are both considered integral parts of an education that aspires to create ideal paradigms for children as individuals and members of society. To realize this, Japan’s philosophy of education places importance on continuity and coherence.

As also stated in section 1.2, in order for early childhood education and primary education to fulfil their respective roles and responsibilities, and in order to guarantee child development and learning continuity, it is extremely important to make sure that structured education is provided to children by ensuring that both stages of education are seamlessly connected and that the continuity and coherence of education are maintained. Furthermore, the goal of early childhood and childhood education is “to nurture the basic skills of learning.” The aim is to smoothly transition from a “period of awakening learning” in early childhood to a “period of self-conscious learning” in childhood.

During the early childhood education stage, a child’s environment is structured systematically. Children amass experience through life centred around play, and they must be provided with comprehensive instruction tailored to each individual. In contrast, at primary school, children use textbooks and other educational aids to study various subjects based on a class timetable. During early childhood education and primary school, while their daily life and the teaching methods and educational principles applied vary from child to child, given that child development and learning are continuous, we strive for a seamless transition from early childhood education to primary education by aiming to provide appropriate guidance so that children are able to respond to changes in life.

This point has been articulated in nationally prescribed standards for early childhood education, namely the Course of Study for Kindergartens, the National Curriculum of Day Care Centres, the Course of Study and Guideline of Day Care for Integrated Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care, and the Course of Study for Elementary Schools, as well as the respective commentaries written for them.

**Policy and Programs to advance equity goals**

Elementary school tuition is free for all children. In addition, Article 19 of the School Education Act stipulates that municipalities must provide necessary assistance to the parents/guardians of school-aged children for whom attending school is deemed difficult for financial reasons. The aim of this is for municipalities to facilitate the provision of compulsory education. The Act on State Aid for Encouragement of School Attendance of Children and Pupils in Difficult Conditions stipulates that the national government shall provide necessary assistance to municipalities that provide school supplies or otherwise encourage attendance at school for children for whom attending school is difficult due to financial reasons. The subsequent aim of this is for the national government to help facilitate the provision of compulsory education.

Furthermore, for the purpose of guaranteeing educational opportunities for non-Japanese students, the national government runs programmes, etc. supporting local governments
that deploy additional teachers to schools where non-Japanese students are enrolled or which have systems in place for accepting non-Japanese students. The national government provides additional funding for attracting/hiring these teachers.

18 With respect to schools that are attended by children with disabilities, while respecting the views of the child and their parents/guardians to the maximum extent possible, municipal boards of education determine which school these children attend from a comprehensive perspective, based on the condition of the disability, the educational needs of the child, the views of the child and their parents/guardians, opinions from pedagogical, medical, psychological and other professional points of view, the school situation, local circumstances and other factors. Special needs education is also provided, whereby the educational needs of each individual child with a disability is ascertained before providing appropriate guidance and necessary support, and “places of diverse learning” where educational continuity is maintained, such as regular classes, special support services, special classes for children with disabilities and special needs schools. In addition, to alleviate the economic burden on the parents/guardians, etc. of children with disabilities who are enrolled at special needs schools or in special classes for children with disabilities at primary or junior high schools, municipalities also provide assistance to cover expenses incurred in attending school, such as the costs of commuting to school and the costs of school supplies.

19 Furthermore, in order to guarantee high-quality early childhood education for all children, municipalities are increasingly dispensing with fees for the early childhood education stage. For instance, fees are set according to the income of the parents/guardians to alleviate the burden on the parents/guardians of low-income households, and fees for a second child are halved and free for a third or latter child to reduce the burden on the parents/guardians with many children.

1.3 Current changes in organisation and management of ECEC and primary education

20 The Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-Rearing was launched in April 2015. Common benefits through kindergartens, nursery centres and centres for early childhood education and care were created, and municipalities became the implementing agency for the system. The aim has been to increase the quantity and improve the quality of early childhood education.

21 Fees for early childhood education are gradually being eliminated, and efforts are being made to ease the burden on the parents/guardians of low-income households and of households with three of more children.

22 For the purpose of promoting diversification and flexibility of school education, a system of compulsory education schools has been created and will be launched in April 2016, with the aim of implementing an integrated system of primary and junior high schools. Furthermore, in order to resolve the increasingly complex and diverse issues affecting schools and to equip children with the qualities and skills needed in the coming era, schools need to work as teams. Therefore, the national government will make the revisions necessary to achieve the concept of “the school as a team,” for instance, putting systems
in place for specialist staff in such areas as psychology and welfare to be assigned to schools, engaging in a wide variety of duties in cooperation and collaboration with teachers, and reinforcing the school management function such as by strengthening the functions of office staff. This includes the improvement of the training of office staff, and the clarification of supervisors’ functions in the law. In addition, MEXT asked the Central Council for Education to submit recommendations as a basis for undertaking reviews at revising the Courses of Study, which are the general standards followed by schools when drawing up curricula. These reviews that are being undertaken also concern class hours and other topics.

1.4 Distribution of responsibilities for transitions

Current statuses and issues of transitions

23 Preferably, boards of education at prefectural and municipal governments should formulate basic policies and support measures pertaining to transitions, and then each school and facility organises and implements their own transition curricula based on these policies and measures. In November 2010, the national government published the “Report on the Seamless Connection between Early Childhood Education and Primary Education,” which primarily focused on summarising concepts relating to transitions, for the purpose of further promoting initiatives relating to the transition from early childhood education to primary education. As a measure for promoting transition-related initiatives, the report suggests a broad guideline for evolving from “cooperation” to “connection,” from Step 0 to Step 4 below. Surveys are conducted every second year on the state of transitions in municipalities.

Step 0: Plans for cooperation are not yet in place.

Step 1: Wants to make a start on cooperation/connection, but is still at the review stage.

Step 2: Several classes, events, study meetings or other forms of interaction are carried out each year, but curricula which allow for transitions have not yet been organised and implemented.

Step 3: There is a substantial number of classes, events, study meetings or other forms of interaction, and curricula which anticipate transitions have been organised and implemented.

Step 4: Based on the results of the organization and implementation of the curricula, reviews are being conducted to make further improvements.

24 Specific initiatives for transitions are primarily carried out at the municipal level. According to a survey conducted by MEXT in fiscal 2014, 59.6% of municipalities were at Step 2, 17.0% of municipalities were at Step 3, and 9.6% of municipalities were still at Step 0. Compared to the previous survey, the number of municipalities at Step 3 had increased, and conversely, the number of municipalities at Step 0, “No plans yet for cooperation,” had decreased.

25 Some of the reasons given for the lack of progress include: “Making tangible transition relationships is hard,” “There is inadequate understanding and awareness of the
differences in early childhood education and primary education,” and “Scheduling opportunities for interaction and making time for activities is difficult.”

Furthermore, at many local governments, since different departments are in charge of kindergartens and nursery centres, in some cases, they are faced with issues of interdepartmental cooperation. Moreover, since systems in local government for promoting early childhood education are often weaker than those for compulsory education, systems promoting early childhood education need to be established.

**Decision-making responsibilities:**

**- Financial and physical resources**

27 The “Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-Rearing” is designed so that facilities engaged in initiatives for transitioning to primary school receive additional subsidies (the payment of which is divided among the national, prefectural and municipal governments). In addition to initiatives promoted at individual facilities, many initiatives are also being promoted in collaboration with relevant organisations, with the municipal boards of education in charge of public primary schools playing a leading role.

**- Curriculum development**

28 From the perspective of guaranteeing a certain level of education throughout Japan, the national government has prescribed the Course of Study for Kindergartens, the National Curriculum of Day Care Centres, the Course of Study and Guideline of Day Care for Integrated Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care and the Course of Study for Elementary Schools as standards for curricula. In accordance with these standards, each school and facility must organise and implement appropriate curricula suited to the children and local circumstances, and they must evaluate the outcomes of implemented curricula and reflect the results in subsequent curricula.

29 The standards prescribed by the national government stipulate that consideration should be given to the fact that early childhood education leads to development of a foundation for life and learning during primary school and beyond, and that a foundation for creative thinking and an independent way of living should be cultivated through a suitable early childhood. They also stipulate that, to ensure a seamless transition from early childhood education to primary education, cooperation should be promoted, such as by providing opportunities for exchanges between kindergarten and primary school pupils, as well as opportunities for interaction, the exchange of opinions and joint seminars among staff. In addition, commentary on the Course of Study for Elementary Schools recommends that schools should draw up a “starting curriculum” to facilitate children’s adapting to primary school and school life, and that schools should actively provide effective guidance with a focus on life environmental studies. More and more instances can now be seen of local governments actively demonstrating exemplar starting curricula.

30 Furthermore, in regard to child assessments, the kindergarten director is obliged under law to prepare an extract of that child’s Cumulative Guidance Record for Kindergartens and to send it to the principal of the child’s primary school. The handling of the record in
both nursery centres and centres for early childhood education and care is the same as that in kindergartens.

- Initial and ongoing education and training for staff and their strategies

31 At teacher training courses, instructors raise topics relating to transitions in lectures delivered to students seeking qualifications to teach at kindergartens and primary schools.

32 In the case of a teacher already employed at a public school, in-service training and its planning are the responsibility of the relevant board of education, namely, the body empowered to appoint teachers. In the case of a teacher at a national school or a private school, it is the responsibility of that school. Training and planning on continuity between early childhood education staff and primary school teachers is similar. Once employed, both early childhood education staff and primary school teachers are provided with joint training opportunities by local governments, etc. Furthermore, there are some examples of opportunities for staff training aimed at understanding kindergarten and primary school education and children, for instance, through the mutual observation between kindergarten classes and primary school classes within a school district.

- Deciding on transitions to primary education

33 The administration related to starting school is the responsibility of local governments. Administration pertaining to children starting primary and junior high schools is conducted by municipal boards of education.

34 In Japan, pursuant to Article 26 of the Constitution of Japan and Article 5 of the Basic Act on Education, all people are obliged to have children under their protection receive general education. Article 16 of the School Education Act stipulates that children receive nine years of general education, and Article 17 of the School Education Act stipulates that parents/guardians are under obligation for their children to attend school from the start of the first school year beginning on or after the day following a child reaching six years of age until the end of the school year during which that child reaches 15 years of age. Occasions when this obligation for school attendance can be deferred or exempted refers to cases where attending school is deemed difficult due to the child being in poor health, not fully developed or any other unavoidable reason. To receive approval for the deferring or exempting of this obligation for school attendance, pursuant to Article 34 of the Ordinance for Enforcement of the School Education Act, parents/guardians are required to submit an application to the municipal board of education.

- Strategies to support disadvantaged children

35 As stated in “Policy and Programs to advance equity goals” in section 1.2, Article 19 of the School Education Act stipulates that municipalities must provide necessary assistance to the parents/guardians of school-aged children for whom attending school is deemed difficult for financial reasons. As mentioned, this is to facilitate the provision of compulsory education by municipalities. The Act on State Aid for Encouragement of School Attendance of Children and Pupils in Difficult Conditions stipulates that the
national government shall provide necessary assistance to municipalities that provide school supplies or otherwise encourage attendance at school for children for whom attending school is difficult for financial reasons. This again is to facilitate the provision of compulsory education by the national government.

36 In order to guarantee educational opportunities for non-Japanese students, municipal boards of education, which are the establishers of schools, have implemented measures for admitting non-Japanese students, such as informing non-Japanese parents/guardians about school attendance and having preschools or classrooms for initial orientation in primary schools intended for non-Japanese children, etc. prior to them starting school.

37 Regarding the basic philosophy on educating children with disabilities, the national government revised the School Education Act in 2007, resulting in a progressive switch from “special education,” whereby education is provided at special places, to “special needs education,” whereby appropriate guidance and necessary support is provided according to the needs of each child.

38 The Order for Enforcement of the School Education Act was also revised in 2013 with respect to decisions about which school children attend. Under the conventional mechanism for deciding which school children attend, in principle, children with disabilities who satisfy the criteria for starting school would attend special needs schools. This mechanism was replaced with one where decisions are made by municipal boards of education from a comprehensive perspective, taking into account the condition of the disability, the educational needs of the child, the views of the child and their parents/guardians, opinions from pedagogical, medical, psychological and other professional points of view, the school situation, local circumstances and other factors, while respecting the views of the child and their parents/guardians to the maximum extent possible.

39 Furthermore, during the early childhood education stage, in order to guarantee high-quality early childhood education to all children, fees are set according to the income of the parents/guardians, and subsidies for enrolling children at kindergartens are used to alleviate the burden on the parents/guardians of low-income households.

- Stakeholder consultation procedures on transitions

40 “Report on the Seamless Connection between Early Childhood Education and Primary Education” by the government consultative council for research and study on transitions states that transition-related initiatives should start from human collaboration, such as exchanges between teachers and staff where both parties progressively share the educational issues they face, and should, in due course, develop into the organisation and implementation of curricula ensuring educational cohesion from early childhood to childhood.

41 Furthermore, prefectures and municipalities (but municipalities in particular) are required to demonstrate leadership, such as by relevant departments collaborating with the board of education, to provide active support to each school and facility. When doing so, promoting collaboration among several facilities with different establishers requires support of the local government backed by the cooperation of relevant departments,
such as the department in charge of early childhood care, the board of education and the department in charge of private schools. Typically, a prefectural or municipal board of education formulates basic policies on transitions in advance, after which it provides support, such as organising joint training workshops for teachers and staff at kindergartens, nursery centres and primary schools, establishing a transitions liaison council comprised of individual schools and facilities as well as other officials, implementing personnel exchanges, and formulating unique curricula designed for transitioning from early childhood education to primary education.

42 With support from the local government, in addition to developing systems, such as deciding the person in charge of transitions, each school and facility is required to systematically and methodically conduct exchange activities among children and exchanges between teachers and staff, as well as draw up a curriculum facilitating transitions and devise teaching methods.

1.5 Monitoring transitions

43 Kindergartens and primary schools are required by the School Education Act and other legislation to conduct self-evaluations regarding the state of their own educational activities and school management. In addition, each school is obliged to make suitable efforts for the implementation of school stakeholder assessments, which are based on the results of self-evaluation. MEXT has formulated the “School Appraisal Guidelines” (revised 2010), which indicate instructive points for school appraisals undertaken by each school. The guidelines summarise three ways of conducting school appraisals: the self-evaluation performed by each school; the school stakeholder assessment performed by school stakeholders such as parents/guardians and local residents; and third-party evaluations performed primarily by outside experts. In addition to undertaking self-evaluations, the guidelines also suggest taking a survey of the pupils. The mode of monitoring, whether a points-based rating, checklist or other process, is determined by each individual school. In addition, the “Kindergarten School Appraisal Guidelines” (revised 2011) were formulated as a reference for school appraisals conducted at kindergartens. By way of example of evaluation items and indicators, the guidelines point to the state of stratagems for seamless transitions between schools, such as collaboration between kindergartens and primary schools. As a result, appraisals now need to be conducted at individual kindergartens and primary schools, and in the case of transitioning kindergarten and primary school students, parent/guardian surveys are often conducted.

44 Nursery centres are also required to conduct self-evaluations on their day care activities and facilities management. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) has formulated the “Self-Appraisal Guidelines for Nursery Centres 2009,” which indicate instructive points for the self-evaluation work undertaken by each nursery centre. Furthermore, each facility is also obliged to make efforts for third-party evaluations.

45 Centres for early childhood education and care are required to conduct self-evaluations on their own education, care and parenting support programmes. In addition, each centre is also obliged to strongly support stakeholder assessments and third-party evaluations.
46 When conducting evaluations at facilities and schools that collaborate with each other, in general, a plan for exchanges between primary schools and kindergartens/nursery centres is drawn up at the beginning of the school year, and this is evaluated by holding a review meeting at the end of the school year. Efforts are undertaken to carry over any issues to the next school year. Leveraging this practice, each school and facility conducts its own self-evaluation.

47 In order to ascertain the progress being made in transitions, every two years, the national government conducts a “Survey of Early Childhood Education,” targeting all public and private kindergartens as well as prefectural and municipal governments. It publishes the results, and urges local governments to undertake transition-related initiatives. Some municipalities and prefectures designate model schools to investigate and research transitions.
Chapter 2: Professional Continuity

2.1 Leadership

In order for teachers to understand and practice continuity and coherence between early childhood education and primary education, principals are required to demonstrate leadership in their kindergartens (schools), such as by conducting training within each school or facility, conducting exchanges and joint training workshops with relevant kindergartens, nursery centres and primary schools, and organising and implementing curricula that are mindful of transitions.

2.2 Staff support for transitions

In 2009, the national government prepared a collection of case examples pertaining to transitions. In addition to publicising them to relevant departments in prefectural and municipal governments, the national government has encouraged initiatives by local governments and individual schools and facilities, such as by convening a consultative council for research and study and compiling a report on seamless transitions from early childhood education to primary education, and by holding meetings of prefectural officials in charge of early childhood education to share best practices in transitioning from facilities to primary schools. At the National Institute for Educational Policy Research (NIER), a teaching material titled “Education for Transitioning from Early Childhood to Childhood” was compiled in 2005, and in 2015, NIER produced a reference document for primary schools compiling their own starting curriculum, titled “Start Curriculum; Starter Book,” which has since been distributed to prefectures, ordinance-designated cities, municipalities, facilities and primary schools. In addition, some local governments prepare their own training materials, model curriculum and collections of case studies.

From April 2016, the national government plans to implement a programme related to the training and deployment of early childhood education advisors to travel around to each facility providing guidance and advice. It is also conceivable that these advisors will also support transitions.

With respect to children requiring special assistance, the national government has implemented a programme delivering support to local governments that are putting systems in place for proper support, such as the provision of information to those children and their parents/guardians, and guidance and advice to schools. For example, the programme supports a local government that deploys personnel (early support coordinators, etc.) with specialist knowledge on child education and on starting school to collect information, liaise and coordinate with local communities and with relevant departments and organisations in such areas as education, welfare, health and medicine. There have also been examples of some local governments (Yokohama City, for instance) that are assisting smooth transitions by deploying full-time child support teachers. In other municipalities, there are examples of parents/guardians and university students participating in class as assistant supporters.
Furthermore, while the standard class size at primary school is 40 for second grade and older, the standard for first grade has been set at 35, enabling careful guidance to be provided to children immediately after starting at primary school, that is, during the transition period from early childhood education.

2.3 Collaborations between authorities and ECEC/primary school on professional continuity

In training courses for kindergarten teachers, for nursery staff, and for primary school teachers, the curriculum is formulated to deepen understanding of the duties and responsibilities among them.

Currently, the licenses which ECEC staff and primary school teachers should acquire are different (e.g. the subjects to be studied, i.e. those related to the development of children and the process of the learning, and to curriculum and teaching methods, are different. Moreover, those wishing to become kindergarten teachers are required to take part in “teaching practice” for two weeks, while those wishing to become primary school teachers are obliged to take part in “teaching practice” for four weeks.) From the perspective of professional continuity, it is worthwhile for teachers in the two sectors to learn about each other’s jobs. For this reason, the national government has established an exception which allows people to obtain a teaching certificate with fewer credits than usual if they already have experience working as a teacher, thereby encouraging teachers to have teaching licences for both kindergarten and primary school. (Specifically, for instance, a teacher already working at an early childhood education facility can obtain a teaching certificate for working at primary schools, and vice versa.) Furthermore, training courses designed for students to earn the credits necessary for obtaining a teaching certificate under this system have been established by individual prefectural boards of education and universities, and have been approved by the national government.

Training on transitions is also being provided as part of the training at each school and facility and at the training run by local governments. For example, during fiscal 2014, as part of the training for kindergarten teachers with ten years’ experience, training on “connections with primary education (including transitions)” was conducted at about half of all local governments.
Chapter 3: Pedagogical Continuity

3.1 Curriculum framework and development goals

56 The differences and similarities between early childhood education and primary education in Japan are as follows.

(Early childhood education [kindergartens])

57 The School Education Act prescribes that the purpose of kindergartens is to cultivate the foundations for compulsory education and subsequent education, to provide an appropriate environment for the healthy growth of preschool children, and to foster their physical and mental development.

58 Furthermore, with the aim of guaranteeing a certain level of education throughout Japan and to provide a standard for the curriculum drawn up by individual kindergartens, the national government has, pursuant to the provisions of the School Education Act and other legislation, stipulated the aims, content and other aspects of kindergarten education in the form of the Course of Study for Kindergartens (public notice).

59 The Course of Study for Kindergartens is composed of: Chapter 1 General Provisions (basic ideals of kindergarten education, formulation of curriculum, etc.), Chapter 2 (aims and content, consisting of the five areas of health, human relationships, environment, language and expression), and Chapter 3 (points for consideration in educational programmes and in educational activities provided during extracurricular hours).

60 The aim of kindergarten education as designated in the Course of Study for Kindergartens is to nurture the child’s emotional development, attitudes, and other aspects that form the basis for life skills which children are expected to have developed by the time they leave kindergarten. As indicated in such expressions as “to experience...” and “to feel,” the aim emphasises the course of subsequent education.

(Primary education)

61 The School Education Act prescribes that the purpose of primary school is to provide the basic elements of general education, given in the form of compulsory education, according to the physical and mental development of the children.

62 Furthermore, from the perspective of guaranteeing a certain level of education throughout Japan, and providing as a standard for the curriculum drawn up by individual schools, the national government has, pursuant to the provisions of the Basic Act on Education and other legislation, stipulated the goals, content and other aspects of primary education in the form of the Course of Study for Elementary Schools (public notice).
The Course of Study for Elementary Schools is composed of: Chapter 1 General Provisions (general policies regarding curriculum formulation, common points regarding treatment of content, etc.), Chapter 2 Subjects (Japanese language, society, arithmetic, science, etc.), Chapter 3 Moral Education, Chapter 4 Foreign Language Activities, Chapter 5 Integrated Studies Lessons, and Chapter 6 Special Activities.

The general policy indicated in the Course of Study for Elementary Schools is that, in providing educational activities, each school should create specifically tailored educational activities by making use of its originality and ingenuity, in order to foster in pupils life skills, and in doing so, each school should be committed to enhancing its instruction to enable pupils to gain a solid grounding in basic and fundamental knowledge and skills, to foster the ability to think, to make decisions, to express themselves and other abilities that are necessary to solve problems by using acquired knowledge and skills, to cultivate an attitude of proactive learning and to develop pupils’ individuality.

In November 2014, the question of curriculum standards in elementary and secondary education was put to the Central Council for Education for deliberation. Following their deliberation, in August 2015, the “Special Committee on Curriculum Planning: Summary of Arguments” was compiled, indicating the basic philosophy on Courses of Study that are appropriate for the new era, as well as the basic direction for such matters as subjects and curricula and methods for learning, teaching and evaluating. On the topic of transitions in learning from kindergarten to primary school, the Summary of Arguments suggests that, in order to make the most of education from a previous stage in the next stage of schooling, it is important to ensure learning continuity while taking into account the characteristics of each stage of school. In view of the Summary of Arguments and other factors, specific and specialised deliberation is also currently being undertaken on the topic of transitions (as of February 2016). The Central Council for Education is considering what endowments and abilities should be fostered during early childhood education and how they can be related to learning in primary schools.

Educational aspects of the National Curriculum of Day Care Centres and the Course of Study and Guideline of Day Care for Integrated Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care have also been established consistent with the Course of Study for Kindergartens. For this reason, the basic structure is the same as described above.

Integration of curriculum frameworks between ECEC and primary school

The “Course of Study for Kindergartens” prescribed by the national government stipulates that, first, consideration should be given to the fact that kindergarten education leads to development of a foundation for life and learning during primary school and beyond, and that a foundation for creative thinking and an independent way of living should be cultivated through a suitable life for early childhood. In addition, it prescribes points to note for ensuring a seamless transition from kindergarten education to primary education. Specifically, it stipulates that cooperation should be promoted by providing opportunities for exchanges between kindergarten and primary school pupils, as well as opportunities for the exchange of opinions and joint seminars among kindergarten and primary school teachers.
Another official record pursuant to laws and regulations is the Cumulative Guidance Record for Kindergartens. This document serves as a record of a child’s enrolment, the instruction process and a summary of those outcomes, and they are the responsibility of the kindergarten director to complete. They represent a ledger instrumental in subsequent guidance and as certification for outside organisations. In cases where a child goes on to a primary school, the kindergarten director is also obliged under law to prepare an extract of that child’s Cumulative Guidance Record and to send it to the principal of that primary school.

The “Course of Study for Elementary Schools” prescribed by the national government stipulates that, as a provision relating to mutual cooperation and exchange between schools, cooperation and exchange should be promoted between primary schools on the one hand and kindergartens and nursery centres on the other. It also stipulates that, in the subjects of Japanese, music and drawing and crafts, particularly during first grade, consideration should be given to connections with the content of the Course of Study for Kindergartens, and in the subject of life environmental studies, from the perspective of utilising the general learning outcomes of early childhood education in primary education, ingenuity should be used at the beginning of the first grade, such as adopting an integrated approach to instruction focused on life environmental studies.

Regarding language learning in particular, the Course of Study for Kindergartens contains provisions on the aspect of “language.” It states that the aim of kindergarten education is to develop the will and attitude to verbally express experiences and thoughts in one’s own words, as well as to listen to others’ spoken words, and to foster an understanding of language and skills of expression. It is also mindful of teachers fostering in children the ability to communicate in words and developing an interest in and curiosity about written words.

The Course of Study for Elementary Schools stipulates that, when teaching subjects etc., language activities should be enhanced by way of preparing a solid linguistic environment necessary to deepen the pupils’ understanding of and interest in language and to develop their linguistic abilities, and that, for the instruction of Japanese, in terms of designing educational programmes and dealing with the content, particularly during the first grade, consideration should be given to connections with language-related content in kindergarten education.

With regard to early childhood education, educational aspects of the National Curriculum of Day Care Centres and the Course of Study and Guideline of Day Care for Integrated Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care have also been established consistent with the Course of Study for Kindergartens. For this reason, the basic structure is the same as described above.

Flexibility on the curriculum framework adaption

With regard to curricula, to ensure a certain level of uniform education throughout Japan, the national government has prescribed the Course of Study for Kindergartens and other Courses of Study based on the School Education Act and other legislation, as general standards to be followed by schools when drawing up curricula. Prefectural and municipal
boards of education have established regulations on curricula and other basic matters for school management, and while complying with these standards, each school organises and implements curricula suited to the children and local circumstances, making use of their own originality and ingenuity.

74 The national government has also established standards for the National Curriculum of Day Care Centres and for the Course of Study and Guideline of Day Care for Integrated Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care. The basic structure is the same, that is, each facility should, while complying with these standards, provide educational activities that make use of originality and ingenuity.

Considerable changes in ECEC and primary school curriculum

75 A review is currently underway for revising the Courses of Study at the Central Council for Education. (Previously, Courses of Study had been revised about once every ten years.)

76 The Course of Study for Kindergartens, which was revised in 2008, included a new provision that, to ensure a seamless transition from early childhood education to primary education, opportunities should be provided for exchanges between kindergarten and primary school pupils, and opportunities should be provided for the exchange of opinions and joint seminars with primary school teachers.

77 The Course of Study for Elementary Schools, which was also revised in 2008, included new provisions that, in the subjects of Japanese, music and drawing and crafts, particularly during first grade, consideration should be given to connections with the content of kindergarten education, and that, in the subject of life environmental studies, an integrated approach to instruction should be adopted.

3.2 Pedagogy

Pedagogical approach for ECEC and primary school

78 In Japan, the formulation of standards for early childhood education and primary education curricula requires that official notification needs to be made based on the report from the deliberative council comprised of persons with relevant knowledge and experience and other members. Curriculum standards are basically centered around educational content, and specific teaching methods are left to each school and facility, but in the early childhood education stage, for instance, phrases referring to teaching methods such as “instruction through play” and “education through the environment” have been designated. The manual for the Course of Study for Kindergarten illustrates “instruction through play” as follows: “For instance, children should be encouraged to see the leaf of a tree as not only a leaf, but also as a container, money, or ticket. Children not only think and imagine, but also psychologically mature, cooperating with friends.” The manual also describes “education through the environment” as follows: “Including the educational value in the environment, this is education in which children engage in their environment based on their own interests and concerns, and which aims at having children develop and gain, through trial and error, an appropriate involvement in the environment.”
The curriculum standards prescribed by the national government are not based on any specific pedagogical theory.

Main differences between a regular primary school day and last year of ECEC

Given that the prescribed purpose of kindergartens is to function as a place for cultivating the foundations for compulsory education and subsequent education, providing an appropriate environment for the healthy growth of preschool children, and fostering their physical and mental development, instruction is delivered through an emphasis on play so that the aims of each area listed in the Course of Study for Kindergartens can be comprehensively achieved.

The prescribed purpose of primary school is to provide the basic elements of compulsory education according to the physical and mental development of the children. Instruction is provided based on the Course of Study for Elementary Schools (subjects [first grade: Japanese language, arithmetic, life environmental studies, music, drawing and crafts, physical education] moral education, special activities, etc.) Education in kindergartens centers on "learning through play"; on the other hand, primary school education is organized around classes with subjects and fixes a time schedule for classes (45 minutes per 1 class as a standard).

3.3 Child development

Monitoring tools and practices in the transition year

In their capacity as establishers of public primary schools, which are providers of compulsory education, municipal boards of education require children intending to start primary school at the beginning of the following school year to undergo a health check.

Health checks conducted when a child starts school are performed for the purpose of ascertaining the physical and mental condition of prospective students, and identifying recommendations for appropriate treatment, health advice and guidance on starting school for any prospective students with a disease or abnormality.

Where necessary, parents/guardians are also given health surveys and so on for the purpose of ascertaining the prospective student's state of health.

Furthermore, as stated in “Decision-making responsibilities” in section 1.4, the kindergarten director is obliged under law to prepare an extract of that child's Cumulative Guidance Record for Kindergartens and to send it to the principal of that primary school. The treatment of the record in both nursery centres and centres for early childhood education and care is the same as that in kindergartens.
Strategies to address developmental delays of children in the transition year and school

As stated in “Policy and Programs to advance equity goals” in section 1.2, while respecting the views of the child and their parents/guardians to the maximum extent possible, municipal boards of education determine which school that children with disabilities will attend from a comprehensive perspective, based on the condition of the disability, the educational needs of the child, the views of the child and their parents/guardians, opinions from pedagogical, medical, psychological and other professional points of view, the school situation, local circumstances and other factors. Special support education is also provided, so that the educational needs of each individual child with a disability are ascertained before providing appropriate guidance and necessary support, and that diverse places of learning with educational continuity are maintained, such as regular classes, special support services, special needs education classes for children with disabilities and special needs schools.

3.4 Collaboration between authorities and ECEC/primary school on pedagogical continuity

As stated in “Integration of curriculum frameworks between ECEC and primary school” in section 3.1, the “Course of Study for Kindergartens” (public notice of March 2008) prescribed by the national government stipulates that kindergarten education should lead to development of a foundation for life and learning during primary school and beyond, and that a foundation for creative thinking and an independent way of living should be appropriately cultivated during early childhood. In addition, it provides recommendations for ensuring a seamless transition from kindergarten education to primary education. Specifically, it stipulates that cooperation should be promoted by creating opportunities for exchanges between kindergarten and primary school pupils, as well as opportunities for discussions and joint seminars among kindergarten and primary school teachers. (There are similar provisions in the National Curriculum of Day Care Centres and for integrated centres for early childhood education and care.)

The “Course of Study for Elementary Schools” (public notice of March 2008) stipulates that cooperation and exchanges should be promoted between primary schools on the one hand and kindergartens and nursery centres on the other. It also stipulates that for the subjects of Japanese language, music and drawing and crafts, particularly during first grade, attention should be paid to connections with the content of the Course of Study for Kindergartens, and for the subject of life environmental studies, creative methods should be used at the beginning of first grade with the aim of utilising the general learning outcomes of early childhood education in primary education, such as adopting an integrated approach to instruction focused on life environmental studies.

Furthermore, as stated in “Current statuses and issues of transitions” in section 1.4, the national government has indicated steps in the transitions from early childhood to primary education. In a fiscal 2014 survey, the most common response was Step 2 “Several classes, events, study meetings or other forms of interaction are carried out each year, but curricula which allow for transitions have not yet been organised and implemented,” or about 60% of all municipalities. Compared to the previous survey though, there had
been an increase in Step 3 “There are substantial classes, events, study meetings or other forms of interaction, and curricula which allow for transitions have been organised and implemented” and, conversely, a decrease in Step 0 “Plans for cooperation are not yet in place.” The same survey also examines initiatives at kindergartens for collaboration with primary schools. The following is a sample of some specific initiatives.

- Based on the starting curriculum at a primary school, the kindergarten has also formulated a transition curriculum, and has prepared educational programmes for children starting primary school.

- A training workshop was held on the topic of “learning continuity from early childhood to childhood.”

- A kindergarten-primary school liaison committee has been organised to address transitions together. Within the committee, kindergartens and primary schools share with each other their priority issues, for instance, lifestyle-related matters such as listening to others and greeting people.

- Research themes are kept the same at kindergartens and primary schools, and efforts are made to enrich the talent of teachers and staff through participation in study meetings.

- Discussions are held on how kindergartens and primary schools each perceive ideal child development. This is positioned in a research plan, and efforts are made to promote educational activities that are mindful of transitions, such as establishing opportunities for staff exchanges and training aimed at understanding kindergarten and primary school education and children, including holding open classes and day-care experiences, as well as conducting exchange activities among children.

90 In part based on the above report, there is an increasing number of local governments that are endeavouring to promote transitions by, for instance, formulating unique curricula designed for transitioning from early childhood education to primary education while taking into account such factors as the current state of collaboration in the respective district.

91 In addition, within MEXT, a document drawing together methods for forming and promoting starting curricula was produced in January 2015 by NIER, and distributed to prefectures, ordinance-designated cities, municipalities, facilities and primary schools. Entitled “Start Curriculum; Starter Book,” it is used by individual primary schools as a reference document when compiling their own starting curriculum. Efforts are being made to popularise the document, such as giving details about the book at local government training sessions for supervisors. (* “Starting curriculum” refers to the curriculum for children entering primary school encouraging the active demonstration of their abilities and the creation of a new school life, based on learning and development through play and life at kindergartens, nursery centres and centres for early childhood education and care (excerpt from Start Curriculum; Starter Book).)
Chapter 4: Developmental Continuity

4.1 Common preparation of children for primary school

92 As described in the previous sections, the School Education Act prescribes the purposes of kindergartens, and the “Course of Study for Kindergartens” stresses the relationship between kindergartens and learning during primary school and beyond as well as prescribes recommendations for the seamless transition from kindergarten education to primary education. It specifically emphasizes the importance of exchanges between kindergarten and primary school pupils and among kindergarten and primary school teachers. In addition, in consideration of children entering primary school, it stipulates additional instruction should be provided so that children are able to listen to the teacher and act together with the rest of the class and observe rules (specifically, exchange events between primary schools and kindergartens/nursery centres, reviews of practice days at primary school, reading picture books on life at primary school, class discussions, and setting cooperative activities).

93 The Minimum Standards for Child Welfare Facilities prescribe that nursery centres should promote ingenuity in the content of day care, based on continuity in child life and development. In addition, the “National Curriculum of Day Care Centres” recommends that active cooperation with primary schools should be promoted, such as by providing opportunities for exchanges between nursery children and primary school pupils as well as opportunities for exchanges, information sharing and mutual understanding among staff.

94 Educational aspects of the Course of Study and Guideline of Day Care for Integrated Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care have also been established consistent with the Course of Study for Kindergartens and the National Curriculum of Day Care Centres. For this reason, the basic content is the same as described above.

95 While maintaining a curriculum and environment suitable for the transition period, kindergarten teachers and nursery staff provide instruction geared toward school life at primary school and based on an understanding of the children's development and interests. In fact, children’s views are considered very important. For instance, when exchanges between kindergarten and primary school pupils take place, kindergarten pupils have an opportunity to ask questions of primary school students and teachers.

4.2 Parents involvement in transitions

96 We understand that various initiatives are being implemented in order to deepen the understanding of parents/guardians about transitions. For instance, individual boards of education, schools and facilities provide opportunities to explain about the significance of transitions; information is provided on school life and learning at primary schools; opportunities are provided for parents/guardians at early childhood education facilities to
exchange opinions with parents/guardians from primary schools; and opportunities are provided for parents/guardians to observe joint kindergarten-primary school lessons, etc.

In addition, with regard to kindergartens and primary schools, according to the need of each school, “school stakeholder assessments” are also being conducted by school stakeholders, such as parents/guardians and local residents, for the purpose of promoting mutual cooperation among the school, families and community by deepening their shared understanding about the current school situation and issues, and for the purpose of promoting cooperation in the improvement of school management. Furthermore, with regard to public kindergartens and primary schools, the system of “school management councils (community schools)” is being introduced, whereby parents/guardians and local residents participate in school management.

4.3 Collaborations at setting level

In view of the emphasis on transitions in the Course of Study for Kindergartens and the Course of Study for Elementary Schools, although their approaches may be different, individual communities, schools and facilities have implemented a wide variety of initiatives for facilitating transitions. Specific examples include: the teachers and staff of kindergartens, nursery centres and primary schools meeting together under one roof to undertake joint training; early childhood education staff, primary school staff and university teachers collaborating together with support of the local government to formulate transition curricula; and teachers endeavouring to put a transition curriculum into practice based on a transition curriculum and a collection of practical case studies prepared by the local government. Some boards of education are also establishing organisations like a liaison council to promote personnel exchanges between kindergartens and primary schools and to promote an integrated system of kindergartens, primary and junior high schools that includes transitions. Many municipalities make a specific effort in a school district unit.

4.4 Collaborations with early childhood services and other settings, agencies or organisations

Individual boards of education, schools and facilities undertake a variety of actions to address the concerns of parents/guardians and to deepen their understanding about transitions. These include: holding information sessions; providing information on life and learning at primary schools using pamphlets from local governments designed for families; and providing opportunities for parents/guardians to exchange opinions with each other.

Furthermore, with regard to seamless transitions from early childhood education to primary education for all children with disabilities, including developmental disabilities, measures are taken in collaboration with families and with medical, welfare and other relevant local organisations, and with early support coordinators or similar officers acting as the point of contact.
101 In addition, some nursery centres and centres for early childhood education and care also focus on cooperating with after-school children’s clubs by sharing information about the children and holding children and staff exchanges.

*After-school children’s clubs are a service to pursue sound upbringing of primary school children whose parents/guardians are absent from home during the daytime due to work, etc., by utilizing children’s recreational facilities or other facilities after finishing lessons and giving adequate opportunities to those children for playing and daily life activities.
Chapter 5: Challenges and Strategies

5.1 Main challenges

102 Transitions from early childhood education to primary education are regarded as a common issue throughout Japan, and standards for curriculum-oriented education in this area are the subject of consideration at the national level.

103 Furthermore, although the importance of transitions is recognised by almost all local governments, and many facilities conduct exchange activities between children and between teachers and staff, according to the results of a survey conducted by MEXT in fiscal 2014, 77% of municipalities had not yet organised and implemented curricula which allow for transitions. Little progress has been made on specific initiatives.

104 Kindergartens come under the jurisdiction of MEXT, nursery centres come under the jurisdiction of MHLW, and centres for early childhood education and care come under the jurisdiction of the Cabinet Office. There are often several departments in charge at the local government level too, and so these need to be coordinated before undertaking efforts. Moreover, since systems in local government for promoting early childhood education are not necessarily adequate compared to those for compulsory education, systems promoting early childhood education need to be built.

- Ensuring professional continuity

105 In training courses for kindergarten teachers and for primary school teachers, a number of subjects are permitted to be offered jointly (joint lessons). In addition, a certain number of credits obtained in one course may also be allocated to the other. However, an outstanding issue is the small number of specialised subjects on transitions.

- Ensuring pedagogical continuity

106 With regard to early childhood education and primary education, there are considerable differences between the Course of Study for Kindergartens and the Course of Study for Elementary Schools, which serve as standards for educational principles, methods and curricula. And in some respects, it is difficult for both sets of teachers to understand the distinctive features of each other’s education. However, in considering the current curriculum revisions, with respect to transitions in learning from kindergarten to primary, from primary to junior high, and from junior high to senior high school, in order to make the most of education from a previous stage in the next stage of schooling, it is important to ensure learning continuity while taking into account the characteristics of each stage of school, and as such, ongoing work is needed on transitions.
Ensuring developmental continuity

Although the importance of transitions is acknowledged, issues between different facilities remain, such as “making tangible transition relationships is hard” and “there is inadequate understanding and awareness of the differences in early childhood education and primary education.” Now, however, there are some local governments implementing initiatives whereby, separate from the Cumulative Guidance Record, facilities and families are working together to produce a written record that summarises the points to do with child development and life which require attention, and are forwarding this record on to the primary school.

Although work on promoting transitions is being undertaken nationwide, research on the actual results of those efforts for children’s development reveals that issues remain.

5.2 Strategies to overcome challenges

In Japan, curriculum standards in kindergartens and primary schools are currently the subject of an ongoing review by the Central Council for Education. On the topic of transitions in learning from kindergarten to primary school, the Central Council for Education suggests that, in order to make the most of education from a previous stage to the next stage of schooling, it is important to ensure learning continuity while taking into account the characteristics of each stage of schooling. Specifically, a report issued in December 2015 stated clearly that in order to promote more seamless transitions, kindergarten teachers, nursery staff and primary school teachers need to deepen their mutual understanding of teaching principles and methods through joint training workshops. Specific and specialised consultations will be undertaken on the topic of transitions, and based on these consultations, revisions will be made to the standards for kindergarten and primary school curricula.

As stated in section 2.3, from the perspective of professional continuity, it is worthwhile for teachers working at early childhood education facilities and teachers working at primary schools to learn about each other’s jobs. For this reason, the national government has granted an exception which allows for people to obtain a teaching certificate with fewer credits than usual if they already have experience working as a teacher, thereby encouraging teachers to have teaching licences for both kindergarten and primary school.

In order to improve the quality of early childhood education, the national government has decided to launch a new course starting in fiscal 2016. Titled “Training for Leaders in Early Childhood Education,” the course primarily targets supervisors in charge of early childhood education at prefectural governments. In addition, with the establishment of a unit within the training course relating to transitions to primary education, the hope is to enhance efforts for transitions. Furthermore, encouraging the participants in this training course to disseminate the outcomes of the course within their respective prefectures or regions is expected to enhance the efforts for transitions nationwide.

In order to deepen awareness and understanding among teachers and staff, training on transitions is provided as part of the training at each school and facility and at the training run by local governments. For example, during fiscal 2014, as part of the training for
kindergarten teachers with ten years’ experience, training on “connections with primary education (including transitions)” was conducted at about half of all local governments.

113 For the purpose of building systems in local governments for promoting early childhood education, the national government will implement a model programme, starting in fiscal 2016. The aim is to establish “Centres for Early Childhood Education” as community bases of early childhood education, to conduct investigation and research related to the training and deployment of “early childhood education advisors” who travel around to each school and facility providing guidance and advice, and to disseminate those outcomes. Building such systems will lead to the construction of centres that address transitions.

114 Opinion among stakeholders is certainly undivided when it comes to the importance of transitions. However, at the early childhood education stage and at the primary school stage, educational objectives and goals have been established based on the relevant stage of development, and the content of education has been established based on these objectives and goals. As a result, since the actual educational activities of each school and facility and the actual curricula at the teacher training stage are different, there is currently not enough understanding and awareness of the differences with each other’s education. Additionally, at the early childhood education stage, there are several types of facilities, such as kindergartens, nursery centres and centres for early childhood education and care, and although consistency has been guaranteed when it comes to educational content, the point has been raised that, since the legal status and jurisdictions of the facilities and the licences and qualifications of the teachers and staff are different, there are differences in philosophies between the different facilities.
REFERENCES

Acts
Act on State Aid for Encouragement of School Attendance of Children and Pupils in Difficult Conditions
Constitution of Japan
Basic Act on Education
School Education Act

Curriculums
Course of Study for Kindergartens (English Ver.)

National Curriculum of Day Care Centres

Course of Study and Guideline of Day Care for Integrated Centre for Early Childhood Education and Care

Course of Study for Elementary Schools

Other Links
Collection of case examples pertaining to transition


Kindergarten School Appraisal Guidelines"(revised 2011)

Report on the Seamless Connection between Early Childhood Education and Primary Education


Self-Appraisal Guidelines for Nursery Centres 2009

Start Curriculum; Starter Book

Survey of Early Childhood Education