

Big step for littlies

■ Mark Taylor

The re-opening of school gates means back to familiar surroundings for most children, but for some, it's a new, exciting transition.

Shontae Kairau and Jack Campbell, of Johnsonville Kindergarten, will each soon turn 5 and make the move to primary school.

Head teacher Vicki Sako says her kindergarten's focus for children like Jack and Shontae is finding the right environment for the child.

She says forming relationships between the families and the local schools, especially the new entrant teachers, is important.

"We have six local schools in the area and want to inform the families what school best suits the needs of their child."

School visits are organised and families with English as a second language are informed on things such as pre-enrolment and zoning.

Assistant teacher Kerrin Reeves says the aspirations of the families and the interests of the child also need to be supported.

This is done in an individual portfolio which is shared with the child's new entrant teacher.

"The interests of the child are really important.

"We treat the children as individuals and try to instil independence and confidence in them," she says.

Dressing themselves, packing away their lunch boxes, having the confidence to ask questions and also being able to recognise symbols and identify their names are all key transitional skills the children are encouraged to learn.

Before leaving kindergarten Shontae and Jack will have a graduation ceremony during which they will wear a korowai (cloak) made by teacher Carolyn Brownie.

Each child who leaves, attaches a taonga to the korowai with little crocodiles, tiki, rosary pendants and toy soldiers keeping past personalities and cultures alive.

Jack and Shontae break tradition a little by donning the cloak for a photo and can't hide the pride in their faces.

The big step is only a week away, but it can be bigger for some.

"It's often the case that the child is the one excited and the parents are the ones daunted," Mrs Sako says.

