

Matthew's starting school

*Last year, in Edition 10 of **Mater Dei Matters**, we featured the story of Matthew Hunter who attended the Bethany Early Intervention Program at Mater Dei. Since then, Matthew has made even more progress. His mother, Linda shares this with us ...*

This year, Matthew has been attending Rainbow Playhouse Preschool in Tahmoor two days a week and attending Bethany Early Intervention one day a week. He has fortnightly home visits from Mater Dei's Occupational Therapist, Karen and Speech Therapist, Pam. In May, I spoke with the Education Department who explained that Matthew needed to be reassessed before the end of Term 2, so we could decide on a school placement for next year. I had always wanted Matthew to attend the School Starters Program at Mater Dei so my husband, Billy, and I met with their Assistant Principal, Pamela Templeton, and she told us enrolment would be dependant upon Matthew's diagnosis, but that it looked like Mater Dei was the right school for Matthew. During the wait for his assessment I had an interesting phone call from Pamela who said she he had a vacancy in School Starters for Term 3 and since Matthew had his name down for next year she wondered if we would like to start him early. She had already spoken to everyone involved with Matthew at Bethany and they all agreed that Matthew needed to be stimulated more and that beginning School Starters would be ideal for him. Jenny McDonald, a local paediatrician, and her colleagues were very helpful during the long and tiring process assessment. Jenny and I discussed Matthew's options and she agreed with me that the School Starters program would be an advantage for Matthew. I am a big believer in fate so I felt that this was the right decision for Matthew, but as the days and weeks went by I started to doubt my decision. Billy told me that everything was going to be all right, as did Pamela, but I still didn't feel right. Matthew's first day arrived and all my doubts were dissolved. He looked so grown up in his school uniform. I did have trouble on the first day getting him dressed as he was only used to wearing tracksuits, but once dressed he put his bag on his back, got into the back of his taxi and waved goodbye. Of course, I followed like most mothers do, sat in the car park and watched him be lead off to school by Wayne, his buddy in the taxi. I cried all over Pamela and CEO/Principal, Frank Pitt, and then went and snuck a look at him in class. His teacher, Jenny Dayhew, came out and told me that it was like Matthew had been coming all year. He just fitted in and followed all the directions like the other children. The changes we have seen in Matthew are amazing. He is so independent now. His communication skills are improving. He holds his pencil properly and he is colouring in pictures more frequently. He has a longer attention span. I now know that this was the right decision for Matthew as he has taken to school like a duck to water. The transition to school would not have been so easy for Matthew if he had not attended Bethany Early Intervention and preschool. They did a great job of preparing him for school and I cannot thank them enough. For Matthew now, it's full steam ahead.

Linda
Matthew's Mum

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Matthew arriving in the taxi on his first day at Mater Dei's School Starters Program.