

Children and Young People Select Committee Scrutiny Review of Transition from Primary to Secondary

Extracts from Research Papers and Reports

What Makes a Successful Transition from Primary to Secondary School?

(Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons and Siraj-Blactchford 2008)

Background to the Transition study

Overview

Two words 'Transfer' and 'Transition' are used interchangeably to refer both to the children's move out of one school system and into another, or within the same school between different years. In this study the term 'Transition' is used to address children's move and adjustment phase from primary to secondary schools.

... [Earlier] studies all present similar findings, suggesting that secondary teachers are underestimating Y7 pupils' academic capabilities and hence this can contribute to the presence of an academic 'dip' during pupils' first year at secondary.

An in-depth review of the literature

A systematic literature review carried out by the University of New Zealand (McGee, Ward, Gibbons and Harlow, 2004) attempted to shed light on what is known about transition between primary and secondary schools. The study highlighted issues found in previous studies relating to the impact of transition both upon children's academic performance and their adjustment to secondary school as well as any impacts on different groups of pupils. Eight themes have been identified: academic attainment, social adjustment, linkages between schools, organisational issues, pupil perceptions, cultural factors, socio-economic factors and gender differences. The summative points below are an indication of the range of issues arising from transition.

Academic attainment

- Following transition to secondary school, pupils tend to suffer decreases in academic achievement.
- Academic attainment in the first year at secondary school seems to be related to pupils' decreased interest in academic activities and an increase in non-academic activities in the middle years.

Social adjustment

- Transition is stressful – having adequate information and social support activities that help pupils to form friendship networks are crucial factors in coping.
- Increased self-esteem can aid academic motivation.

Linkages between schools

- Continuity of curriculum suffers on transition. Few secondary schools have sustained linking arrangements focused on the learning progression of individual pupils.
- Teaching expectations often differ between primary/intermediate and secondary school. Previous experience or achievement is often disregarded by secondary schools.

Organisational issues

- The difficulties some pupils have in moving from the primary to secondary school structure have been found to be temporary.
- Prior to transition, pupils need to be held more responsible for their learning, to be taught about strategies for learning on their own, and to be provided with a more challenging curriculum, with clear goals of academic achievement. Pupils' perceptions
- Primary pupils view transition positively.

- At-risk pupils need intervention prior to transition.

Cultural factors

- Transition can pose specific problems and concerns for pupils who do not belong to the majority culture.
- Teachers and pupils have different perceptions of where problems lie. Pupils tend to think there is a problem with delivery of programmes; teachers tend to think that the pupils bring problems with them.

Socio-economic factors

- SES is a factor that may lead to poor achievement. Secondary schools with low SES pupils generally have programmes in place to support pupils at risk.
- Family support is linked to achievement after transition and the influence of effective parents is cumulative.

Gender differences

- At the time of transition, girls' attitudes towards teachers and learning are different from those of boys. The tendency to 'teach the boys' because they need more help or make more demands is considered unfair and exploitative by some researchers (McGee, Ward, Gibbons and Harlow, 2004).

Finally, the National Assembly of Wales, reported on evidence from the Estyn's Annual Report 7 (2002-03) that confirm that the progress pupils increasingly make at primary school is not always maintained after the move to secondary level. The report stated that there is clear evidence that effective collaboration between primary and secondary schools can bring immense benefits in attainment at Key Stage 3. Schools employ a variety of methods including the introduction of dedicated lead practitioners in literacy or numeracy, regular meetings between leadership teams; better use of specialist teams at KS3. Whatever the method, the effect is to introduce greater continuity between the two settings leading to improved results for 11 to 14 year olds.

The current study attempts to build on previous findings such as the above, in an attempt to shed further light on effective practices and factors that influence transition, and to explore the continuity between primary and secondary school. It doing so it addresses the following aims and research questions.

Conclusions and Implications

This study was commissioned in light of concern about the transition experiences of children moving from primary to secondary school. Most of the children in the study had a positive transition experience, but a noticeable minority did not. For children, parents and schools the factors that identify a successful transition can be summarised as social adjustment, institutional adjustment and curriculum interest and continuity. This report highlights a number of influences that shape children's transfer experiences and the likelihood of a successful transfer.

Social adjustment

The research identified that one important indicator of a successful transition was the extent that children have more and new friendships and higher self-esteem and report greater confidence after their transition to secondary school. The research suggests there is a need to help children develop their social and personal skills (friendships, self-esteem and confidence). Secondary schools could involve older children to help Year 7 children settle and this strategy may alleviate children's and parents' worries as well as reduce incidents of bullying. It is appropriate to develop clear systems to identify bullying and offer guidelines for Year 7 tutors, in order to refer those who appear to have problems after transfer to a support system or a scheme of "buddies". Older children in the school could assume the role of "an older sister/brother" since children with older siblings adjusted better in this regard. Using the PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) curriculum to develop these skills, as well as using the period after the KS2 national assessments as a key period to help prepare children could help both in the transition process as well as the PHSE skills of older pupils.

Institutional adjustment

The survey showed that settling well into school life and getting used to new routines were two important elements of a successful transition. These aspects can be improved by encouraging children in the same class to work collaboratively and help each other even if they are not always together in the same lessons. Most secondary schools are structured around a "form" system. Whilst this is usually used as a "registration" group and as a PSHE group, heads of Year could use this time more constructively to enhance children's social skills and self-esteem. A possible way forward may be to establish smaller "tutor/focus" groups with the "form". The most successful schools, as identified from the case studies, were those with very close links and co-ordination between primary and secondary schools. A variety of opportunities for induction, taster days and visits between schools appear to improve the transition experience for children. Choice Advisors targeting families that may need additional help seems to be helpful in the areas where they have been used, but the initiative was not yet widespread.

Curriculum interest and continuity

A child's curriculum interest and continuity were two further indicators of a successful transition. Children need to understand what is expected of them in secondary school, be prepared for the level and style of work, and be challenged to build on progress at primary school. This helps to ensure a growing interest in school and work. Teachers reported wanting more information and a better understanding of the different approaches to teaching between primary and secondary schools. Parents also want to see schools better preparing their children for the work expected of them in secondary school. Interestingly, the study found that children with health problems actually reported higher curriculum interest and continuity which may be related to focused support for these children at the point of transfer.

The main responsibility of the Local Authorities was the administrative process of admissions. Their major concern was to provide good clear information to parents at an early stage, have statutory deadlines for the process met and have as few appeals as possible. However, where the Inspectorate/Advisory team had a stronger role/interest in the process, there was a higher likelihood of innovative curriculum practices and continuity (such as working on the same texts in Year 6 and Year 7). The Inspectorate/Advisory service had a key role in promoting good communication and sharing good practice between clusters/pyramids of schools. The Inspectorate/Advisory service might be encouraged further in such practices and in taking a more active interest in the pupil's experience of transition. Creating strategies and ideas for the Inspectorate/Advisory service to help promote curriculum continuity could be beneficial for ensuring pupil's interest and avoiding the learning 'dip' associated with Year 7. To ensure that children's transitions are successful (and improved where needed), all three areas (social adjustment, institutional adjustment and curriculum interest and continuity) need to be taken into account when planning transition strategies at Local Authority and school levels.

Links with EPPSE Research

This research brief is based on a report which concentrates on the transition experiences of children who are taking part in the longitudinal EPPSE project. There will be opportunities in the future to follow their progress over the next few years, and relate this to their early years. As the EPPSE project will continue to track children's development into KS3, the findings from the Transition project will complement the model of analyses for children's developmental progress at age 14 (Year 9). This will be achieved by using the current findings on a sub-sample as potential predictors to explore cognitive and socio/behavioural development in Year 9.

The Most Able Students - Ofsted Report June 2013

Transfer and transition from primary to secondary school

The quality of transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 was much too variable in the schools surveyed. Arrangements for transfer and transition were weak in over a quarter of the schools visited. Teachers in Year 7 were frequently unaware of what the most able students had studied or achieved previously in their primary schools. Time was wasted, either because work was repeated or because it failed to challenge the most able students at an appropriate level. Opportunities were missed to extend and consolidate learning because teachers were unaware of

the themes studied in the previous phase of education and the levels that students had reached. Too few schools used the Department for Education's Key to Success website, a resource that has been available for a number of years.

Effective transition from Year 6 to Year 7 (from primary to secondary) can be challenging, especially where secondary schools admit students from large numbers of primary schools. Transition was most effective when it was simplest. For example, it worked well when primary schools sent their pupils mainly to one secondary school or where local cluster arrangements between the feeder primaries and secondary school were of long standing.

In the best examples of effective transition from primary to secondary, schools had ensured that good links were a priority: for example, secondary schools supported the most able students before transfer by providing subject-specialist teaching or providing a range of pre-secondary activities such as workshops, transfer projects or summer schools. Seventy-one of the 76 parents and carers who responded to the question on transition in Ofsted's questionnaire on the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) website either agreed or strongly agreed that the transfer between primaries and the secondary school was handled appropriately.

Although all the secondary schools visited referred to a range of activities that they had provided for their most able students before they started in Year 7, these activities were, typically, available to all students and not arranged specifically for the most able. In addition, too many school leaders did not know how effective their transition arrangements were in helping their most able students to get off to a flying start in secondary school.

In over a quarter of the schools surveyed, students did not get off to a good start in Year 7. This was because teachers' expectations of what the most able students could achieve were not high enough. The most able students spoken to during the visits to these schools reported that work in Year 7 was insufficiently demanding and that they did not feel challenged in the majority of their lessons. One Year 7 student said, 'In geography, teachers give you the information and they do not expect students to find out things for themselves.' Another said, 'We're doing circuits and forces in science and I already know that from primary school.'

Overall, inspectors found serious weaknesses in the transfer arrangements between primary and secondary schools. They did not enable secondary schools to build on the achievements of the most able pupils in Year 6.

What supports successful transition?

The survey visits found some examples of effective transition arrangements for the most able students as they moved from primary to secondary school. These included:

- effective pre-transfer liaison with primary school teachers, which included careful discussion about the most able students
- the gathering of a wide range of data beyond simply the Year 6 national test results. These data were used to inform setting or class groups in Year 7; this was supported by a further detailed assessment of students' skills, knowledge and understanding on entry to secondary school
- identifying the most able students early, and constructing and implementing programmes of support in the secondary school so that students could maintain their academic momentum

Ofsted Annual Report 2013/14

Teaching at Key Stage 3 is failing to build on prior learning

Too many secondary schools are not building on the gains pupils make in primary schools. In underperforming secondary schools, not enough is expected of pupils from the first day they arrive in Year 7. The curriculum lacks challenge and too many children repeat what they have already

mastered in the latter stages of primary school. In contrast, the most successful secondary schools often work closely with their feeder primaries to ensure that they know how well pupils are achieving before they enter secondary school. Some of these secondary schools display pupils' work from primary school to serve as a reminder to staff of what children are able to achieve.

Ofsted Regional Report 2013/14 – North East, Yorkshire and Humber

The gains made in primary schools, particularly in the North East, are lost in the secondary phase, where students make less progress in English and mathematics than in most other regions. Eight of the region's 27 local authorities are in the bottom 25% nationally. This weakness in learning has a profound effect on the opportunities for progress. It closes, rather than opens, doors for young people on the cusp of adulthood. Progress in mathematics is weaker than in English and 13 local authorities are in the bottom 25% in the country. Too many students leave school without qualifications to progress into training, employment or further education, thus becoming part of the region's unacceptably high NEET (not in education, employment or training) population.