

Guidance on Promoting Good Practice in Transition from Primary to Secondary School

Introduction

We know more now than ever about the importance of successful transition throughout life and the purpose of this guidance is to focus on transition from primary to secondary school.

There are many examples of good practice in Hampshire schools and one of the contributory factors is a commitment to improve. To support and encourage this commitment to improve, we will highlight key messages from research and provide some examples of how Hampshire schools are translating that research into practice.

There have been a number of major national reports on transition. For example, the Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 project (EPPSE) reported on its work with six local authorities¹. Some of the detail of this research is summarised below but overall it tells us that we cannot take transition for granted. The EPPSE study, for instance, found that 84% of the children surveyed were prepared for transition to secondary school,

meaning that 16% were not prepared, and 3% were still 'worried or nervous' a term after starting secondary school.

Key Factors in Successful School

Transition

The following draws on a number of research studies conducted between 2003 and 2013, which also links to the mind-map included below. It summarises the evidence for achieving successful school transitions and offers seven key factors to be included in the planning process. The child or young person should be at the centre of this process; their views must be sought and taken into account.

Effective Communication

For the purposes of sharing information and so that each person thinks that their views are taken seriously, effective communication is vital. The EPPSE study suggests that the most successful transitions are in schools with very close links between primary and secondary. Staff at both schools will need to give and

receive information but, equally, students can share information with their new teachers by completing "passports" or "profiles". It is also important for parents or carers to be included in the transition process. Research shows that parental concerns about secondary school are likely to be similar to the concerns their child has². It is possible that there is a causal relationship between the beliefs of parents and their children, so listening to parents and taking steps to ease their worries can also have a beneficial impact on students.

Common sources of worry for students during transition are peer relationships, getting lost and work load^{2,3,4}. However, there is a wide variety of new challenges to cope with and many individual differences will affect student worries. Schools should tailor the transition process to *their* students.

Knowledge of Routine and Organisation

Many schools already make good use of transition days, school visits and induction

periods. Yet, parents and students have said that they would like to see more extended school visits, including experience of secondary school life². Successful transitions are associated with school support that enables students to get used to their new routine quickly by offering information booklets, school tours and induction or 'taster' days¹. Organisational features of the school are a common worry before transition but with sufficient support, concerns such as the size of the school and changing classes quickly become a thing of the past^{3,4}.

Positive Relationships

Research shows that, before transition, one of the greatest concerns for students is peer relationships and, specifically, bullying^{2,3,4}. Indeed, students who already have friends or siblings at secondary school tend to transition better^{3,1,5} whereas students who experience bullying or have trouble making new friends face more difficulties¹. Factors that can lead to a problematic peer transition are feeling anxious, unprepared or victimised. This suggests that reducing anxiety by preparing students for their new peer group could help to improve the transition³. Secondary school students and teachers believe that good social skills are essential for a good transition², the

development of which can be supported through transition groups and suitable interventions.

Teachers, parents and students believe that peer mentors are a valuable method of fostering positive relationships for transitioning pupils². The EPPSE study suggests that student mentors are an effective way for younger students to develop social skills and friendships, alleviate worries and reduce incidents of bullying¹. Mentors can be particularly effective if pupils meet them and ask questions prior to starting at the school. Students also need to be able to develop positive relationships with adults at the school and be able to seek support and advice when needed. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be easily accessible and for students know where to go for support⁵.

Sense of Belonging

Students' perception of their school community can have a significant impact on their school experience. Building a sense of belonging for all students is vital for greater motivation, engagement and achievement in school, as well as for the quality of relationships and self-esteem⁶. The extent to which students see their environment as hospitable is related to the number and quality of social resources

available to them⁷. Furthermore, students that perceive their teachers as supportive are more likely to feel engaged at school, which in turn relates to better academic achievement⁸.

Assets widely available to schools, such as tutor groups, sports teams and school clubs can develop the sense of school community and increase school enjoyment, both of which are associated with better attainment over time^{6,9}.

Emotional Support

The transition period is often linked with a decline in grades and motivation for many students¹⁰. However, research shows that this period can be an effective time to carry out interventions to build resilience, self-esteem and motivation¹¹. Students with higher levels of emotional and social functioning are likely to cope more successfully at stressful times, such as transition¹¹ and there are many forms of intervention that can support the development of these traits. For example, studies that have used specific interventions to build 'emotional intelligence'¹¹ and 'growth mindset'¹⁰ suggest that the detrimental effects of transition can be ameliorated for year 7 pupils.

Academic Skills

Helping new students to understand the academic expectations of them and offering

curriculum continuity can reduce worries about not succeeding at secondary school, which are associated with less successful transition¹. This can be achieved as part of the student induction period, by teaching pupils skills that they may not have developed at primary school. This might include, using reference sources, effective revision, note taking and essay writing¹.

Students have reported looking forward to having new teachers and new academic subjects in year 7². Increasing interest in school and new schoolwork has been linked with successful transition¹ and, over time, an increase in liking school is also associated with better academic attainment⁹.

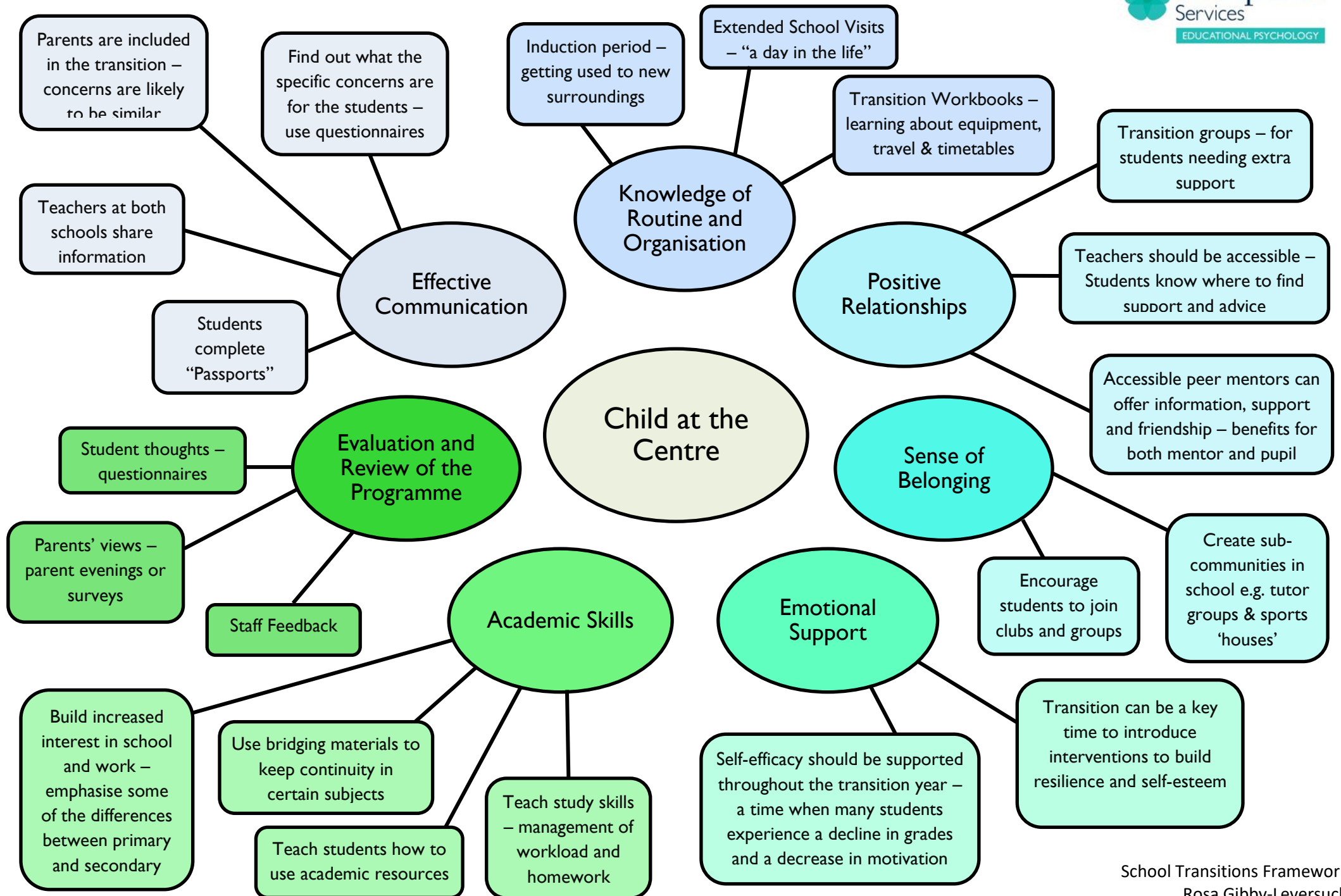
Evaluation and Review

It is important to consider the effectiveness of the transition programme each year and continually to improve the process by using information gathered through evaluation. Evaluation is most effective when it considers a range of perspectives through such methods as questionnaires, tutor group discussions, and parent evenings. Parents, carers, students and staff should all have their say on how the transition programme affected them, what they found particularly useful and where they thought there were any gaps. Once the

feedback is collated, discussion groups can be used to identify solutions and improvements for next year.

Transition is a Year Long Process not a single event: From its survey of practice in secondary schools, the EPPSE project (Evangelou et al., 2008, p41-42) lists activities that all the schools carried out:

1. **Autumn Term** - Evenings for prospective parents. Secondary school teachers visit primary schools to talk to parents and children.
2. **Primary school staff provide** written information about academic attainment, friendship skills and groups, extra-curricular activities and special achievements. Children may write about themselves.
3. **An information pack about transition** is sent to parents and they are encouraged to speak to primary or secondary school staff with any queries. Staff are informed about child or parental worries.
4. **May** - Transition staff visit primary schools. They talk to transferring children and to teachers about each pupil.
5. **June/July** - Teachers in charge of transition meet prospective pupils. Y7 students may go to the primary school to talk about their experience. Pupils ask questions and may be asked to write about themselves and their friends. They are given an introduction pack to take home.
6. **Y6 pupils visit secondary school** at least once for a transition day. They tour the school, may meet new their form group, take part in activities and may have taster lessons. Secondary school teachers may go to the primary school to teach.
7. **June/July** – The secondary school hosts an evening to welcome parents and children. Information is provided through leaflets, school packs, stalls and stands. Parent-school links are promoted by giving parents contact details for any questions or concerns.
8. **Using the information provided**, secondary school staff plan tutor groups and an induction period. New pupils are alone in the school for at least the first half-day and might have a different timetable for a few weeks. The first PSHE module deals with transition.
9. **To ensure pupils are settling**, tutors and teachers provide information to pastoral staff. Some schools arrange special mentoring meeting times for pupils and tutors.
10. **New autumn term** - parents' evening is held to inform parents about how children are settling in.



Transition for Vulnerable Children

The EPPSE project suggests that in general, transition experiences are just as successful for children with SEND or from other vulnerable groups. Although children with SEND are more likely to be bullied, they seemed to have a better experience of curriculum continuity. The researchers suggest that since the children with additional needs in their study, had an earlier, more personalised approach to transition, these children might have been better prepared for secondary school¹.

Children living in low socio-economic backgrounds found it harder to get used to new routines and to settle in than did children from high SES backgrounds although they seem to have looked forward more to going to secondary school. Consequently, this seems to have led to a greater interest in school and in school work¹.

Children who are looked after or adopted

In Hampshire we are particularly concerned about the transition of children who are in care of the local authority. As reported to the Care Matters Board (2010)¹², this group of children is especially vulnerable because of the loss of important attachment figures from

the primary school, changes in friendship groups, and having to meet and adjust to various adults who may not always understand their needs. The process of change can trigger unconscious feelings of loss and abandonment, which can last well into Year 8.

At secondary school these children may not show the resilience that is required to cope. They may lose motivation and have difficulties relating to their peers and adults, which could result in alienation from school and disaffection. If a looked after child also has SEND, this may intensify their difficulties at transition. This is because the academic demands of the curriculum may provoke anxiety, feelings of academic failure and inadequacy, which then may lead to disruption and inattention as one way of avoiding demands that the child sees as being too much.

Additionally, inadequate communication and information sharing amongst teachers can cause vulnerabilities to go unrecognised or incorrectly attributed and subsequently, problems can arise within lessons.

Research carried out in Hampshire (2008-9) by the Virtual School Team and Hampshire and IoW Educational Psychology revealed

that very few children in care moving up from primary to secondary school had a transition plan in place that detailed specific arrangements for the child. Reasons given for the lack of a personalised transition plan varied. Most schools were following routine transition arrangements that applied to all children but there was little evidence that the potential difficulties faced by children in care were being considered.

At times of transition, children who are adopted face similar potential difficulties for similar reasons as children in care. Research with adoptive parents, children and teachers in Hampshire¹⁴ suggested that adopted children might face the following difficulties when they join secondary school:

- Planning, organisation, concentration, including managing homework
- Thinking in abstract terms
- Adapting to change
- Responding in socially appropriate ways, making and keeping friendships
- Learning rules, expectations and boundaries
- Getting about
- Managing unstructured time

What Works in Hampshire

Adopted Children and Transition

Caroline Feltham-King, an educational psychologist and Cara Osborne, a psychology research associate carried out this research. It provides valuable information about what helps transition, through the experiences of adoptive parents, their children and school staff¹⁴.

Some of the parents who contributed to the project reported being offered additional support by their secondary school. Others thought that their child had simply been part of routine transition procedures. Interestingly, this was not automatically viewed negatively, because parents thought that the staff in a school aim to meet individual needs and so treat all children as individuals, irrespective of whether or not a child is adopted.

In general terms, the transition support provided for children was similar to that identified in the EPPSE project. Additionally, one secondary school used older pupils as mentors.

So far as the adopted children themselves were concerned, the following table lists the support that they either did or did not find helpful.

	Things that helped	Things that didn't help
Things I said or did	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Telling teachers I was adopted - Not telling everyone I was adopted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Struggling to get on with teachers - Having a disorganised /messy room

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keeping a map of the school 	
Things my parents said or did	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offering help and encouragement (with homework, organisation, uniform) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complaining about lack of organisation
Things my friends/other pupils said or did	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offering support - Peer mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asking difficult questions about family - Friendship break-ups - Bullying
Things school staff said or did	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holding weekly support meetings - Helping to prepare for secondary school - Encouragement and praise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shouting at me

They also suggested some top tips:

To adopted pupils:

- Secondary school isn't as bad as it sounds – don't worry about it
- Only tell trusted friends about adoption – keep some information to yourself
- Be yourself and smile – be proud and confident
- Talk to your friends and family
- Be nice to your teachers
- Have someone to help you get organised

To an adopted pupil's parents:

- Offer support, encouragement and praise, but not pressure
- Check your child's feelings and progress in school
- Listen to your child

To teachers of an adopted child:

- Talk to child in private and listen
- Offer support if asked for
- Treat adopted children the same as other pupils
- Be sensitive and understanding

The Transition Partnership Agreement

The Transition Partnership Agreement (TPA) is used extensively in Hampshire to support the transition of children who may be vulnerable at transition, in particular children with special educational needs and disabilities, and children who are in care and who are adopted. The Virtual School and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Educational Psychology run annual workshops for those children in care who are transferring to secondary school. The workshop brings together primary and secondary school staff and the child's social worker to discuss potential difficulties at transition and to begin drafting a TPA for the child.

What School Staff Tell Us

Over time, we have spoken with many Hampshire teachers and other staff in schools about transition. These conversations frequently contain a health warning: Transition practices can be context specific. What works in one setting will not necessarily work in another, it is important

to attend to the different needs of different groups and different children.

Thereafter, good practice in transition can rely upon:

- Establishing a strong sense of school community through a culture of caring, valuing, belonging, respecting, promoting participation and emphasising mutual responsibilities.
- Facing up to and challenging behaviours, myths, processes and systems that do not support good transitions.
- Seeing wellbeing as much a part of the standards and improvement process as test and exam results.
- Adopting the best of secondary teaching practices in Year 6 and the best of primary practices in Year 7.
- Considering the use of nurture approaches and nurture groups. Ideally a nurturing approach is embedded in the school ethos but in some settings a nurture group might be invaluable support.
- Assuming that transition is going to take longer than might be expected for some children.
- Being aware of the needs of children living in poverty. Transition times can be very expensive for parents, some of it unexpected.
- Taking care about negative messages about staff, children, parents, groups or sets..
- Helping children to understand teacher differences in expectations, approaches to learning, and communication style. Ask teachers to tell children about their style, approach, expectations as part of a discussion with pupils about 'life in this classroom and this school'.
- Ensuring that children know how they can influence things in school, including to whom they can turn if they have a concern and what will be done about it..

- Teaching children about the cultural 'codes' to avoid being labelled and becoming potential targets for bullying.
- Planning team-building activities to develop interpersonal skills but which respect diverse needs and interests.

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- Mentoring arrangements that take account of what a Y7 child might prefer and what year group(s) might be best placed to provide it.
- Thoughtfully using LSAs to respect the needs and wishes of a child.

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Hampshire Secondary Schools: Case Studies

These case studies are not intended to be representative of all secondary schools in Hampshire and describe practices at the time of the case study.

Case Study 1

Before transition, parents and pupils can visit school and receive a tour from Year 8 students, so they can hear from those who have recently transitioned. The students' perspective, opinions and experiences are highly valued. During the same event, parents have an introductory talk from the head teacher. Further open evenings are held before transition, where all faculties have an activity or demonstration.

Once applications are received, formal information is gathered on each child and a visit is made to every primary school to discuss all children and any additional needs or vulnerabilities they may have.

Challenges are set for pupils in the primary school to prepare them for secondary life. For example, 'the tie challenge' encourages pupils to learn to put on a tie correctly, as this is something that is needed for uniform requirements at the secondary school. Pupils from linked and non-linked schools are also invited to attend events such as Olympic days, to look around science rooms, and to watch plays performed by current pupils. The aim of this is to help children become familiar with the school site as quickly as possible. In the holidays there are additional activity days for those with SEND or who might be vulnerable in other ways.

On the first day of term, the new students are the only year in school. They have assembly and spend two and a half hours with their new tutor group. This gives them a chance to become familiar with their tutor and tutees. They also receive their timetable, learn about lunch routines, and finish the day with the last lesson. On the second day, students spend another two hours with their tutor to give them the opportunity to talk about any concerns that they have, and continue with

familiarisation. Throughout the day, there are team building events and talks about the charity of the year. Two prefects are assigned to each tutor for the first four weeks to support the new students. The prefects will answer questions and help students get around.

Groups are set up for those students with SEND or those who need more support with transition. A list is created based on primary school reports and the SEND register. Each transition group contains five, mixed sex, students. They meet once a week and follow a structured transition programme. The sessions aim to reinforce what a student hears in class. The fundamental concepts are taught and discussed more slowly to assist understanding. Other topics dealt with in the transition groups include: how to use the diary planner, using star charts, praise postcards, timetabling, communication skills, homework and encouragement to join clubs. The intervention programme runs for eight weeks and ends with a visit to a bowling alley and lunch. There is also a weekly lunchtime club for pupils in transition groups and

others that may benefit. During the sessions, everyone has to say something positive that has happened during that week. They can ask the group for advice on a concern that they have but the session must always remain positive. It is an invitation only event, and pupils invite different teachers to join them each week. Pupils bring their own lunch and there are teapots, cups and saucers. One of the aims of the club is to reinforce friendships.

To review transition procedures, the school uses Y7 focus groups facilitated by a member of staff. The groups consist of a random selection of students, invited to talk about different issues such as 'detention'. Simple things have become apparent in focus group discussions that affect the students, which may not have occurred to staff.

Case Study 2

The head teachers of the cluster schools meet on a formal basis to facilitate the successful and smooth transition of pupils. This is now part of a development plan, which is reviewed annually.

In September, prior to transition, the secondary school offers open mornings and

evenings to help parents and children get to know the school. They also hold visit days for primary school pupils to attend as a group. The visitors get a guided tour from a senior member of staff, and they see the school at work on a normal day. These tours are very popular and get booked up well in advance.

Once the applications are complete, staff from the secondary school will visit all children and meet with primary teachers to talk about each child. This happens early on in the process to ensure children are fully prepared and that secondary school staff have as much information as possible about all new students. Visits to primary schools are made by various teachers, including an SEND teacher if a child has an Education, Health and Care Plan or a Transition Partnership Agreement is being considered. Responses to applications for children with SEND are sent early, so that extra transition procedures can be in place to support them. Finally, before transition, in the summer term, students have a taster day where they are given a tour of the college, and meet the teachers.

In autumn, new students join tutor groups that are integrated with old friends and new faces. On the first day, Y7 is the only year

group in school, except prefects, who attend to support the new students. There is one prefect attached to each tutor, so all new students have a friendly, helpful older student they can talk to. A short while into the first term, an evening is held for parents to meet tutors and discuss how their child is settling in. Any particular difficulties can be picked up at this point. Additionally, in the first term, Cognitive Ability Tests and reading and spelling tests are completed on all new pupils. This is to make sure that no learning needs are missed. Later in September, a fun day of team building activities and tasks is organised. It aims to encourage teamwork and consolidate friendships.

Much liaison takes place to ensure that those children with vulnerabilities, including SEND are appropriately supported and benefit from a smooth transition. Children with SEND have additional opportunities to visit the school in the summer term and become familiar with the new environment. Also, vulnerable children are immediately assigned to a pastoral assistant.

Central to SEND arrangements is a tailor-made transition programme, for which primary staff recommend children. Usually, it is for children with vulnerabilities, including

SEND, and those considered anxious. The programme runs for one week in the summer holidays, and is free to parents as it is funded by the school. A mixture of events take place, including leisure activities, attending lessons and day trips such as horse riding and ice skating. Lunch is provided everyday and there is a barbecue on the final day.. This programme is led by a Y6 teacher and managed by the assistant head at the secondary school. Participating children, parents and staff are surveyed so that the programme can be improved for the following year.

Staff at the secondary school view transition as an important change and make every effort to ensure that children know what is expected of them and have the confidence to be independent and challenge themselves.

Case Study 3

The head teachers from the cluster meet termly with the primary-secondary liaison co-ordinator from the secondary school and the transition process runs from July of Y5. These early activity days allow pupils to become familiar with the secondary environment. During Y5 and Y6, there are open evenings

for children and their parents. Sixth formers take them around the school and into classrooms to observe lessons.

Once applications are received, primary staff complete student transfer sheets and informal conversations about every child take place. This process identifies any children that may need special arrangements or are particularly anxious and the secondary school Learning Support Department are alerted so that extra transition sessions can be arranged where appropriate.

Parents are given an information pack in May, which details important subjects such as school uniform and policies. In the summer term, all new students attend an induction day to meet their tutor, head of house, peer mentor and take part in taster lessons. This is followed by a parents' information evening.

A significant transition practice at the secondary school is a maths project, which has been locally created, in collaboration with two other secondary schools This is delivered in the summer term of Y6, and again on the induction day. Primary school staff are given maths books before children transfer, therefore children become familiar with the books for use in Y7. Refinements are made year-on-year and, as part of its development,

it may be extended to other subjects such as science, geography and English. Targets for Y7 are set before the children leave Y6 and then at the start of Y7, students have a three-day induction programme with their tutor group. For the first morning, Y7 are the only students in school, with the exception of Y10 peer mentors. The peer-mentoring scheme is a listening ear service. Mentors are in designated rooms at lunchtime, and if a Y7 student wishes, she or he can go and talk to a mentor. The induction programme includes 'learning to learn' workshops, an introduction to the library and other familiarisation activities. On the fourth day, when, for most students, worries are thought to have lessened, students start their normal lessons. In October, parents meet with tutors to find out how their child is settling in. Additionally, primary teachers visit to spend time with their former pupils, discuss progress and feedback to secondary school staff to help inform the transition evaluation.

Reviewing and improving transition arrangements and curricular continuity is considered essential for future developments. An evaluation questionnaire is given out at the parents evening in October. The responses are collated and used to monitor

and improve transition procedures. Next, in November, members of the parent council discuss the transition experiences of their children. The parent council also meet in the summer to discuss how things are going after nearly a year at the school.

As part of future developments, teachers from the secondary school are going to start visiting more primary schools to look at their curriculum and see how each school teaches KS2. The motive behind this is to further enhance curricular transition by ensuring that teachers are confident in what new pupils have and have not been taught so far

According to staff at this secondary school, starting the process early is essential to effective transition. Early preparation means that children will be less worried and there will be fewer surprises for them when they start. The staff recognise that fear and worry about the unknown can affect transition.