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. This is particularly significant this year, following the Corona Virus pandemic which has resulted in school closure and most children staying at home for a prolonged period. 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 authorities. 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 2017, 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 has. 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. 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 life. Successful transitions are associated with school support that enables students to get
used to their new routine quickly by offering information booklets, school tours, virtual school tours and induction or ‘taster’ days. 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.

**Positive Relationships**
Research shows that, before transition, one of the greatest concerns for students is peer relationships and, specifically, bullying. Indeed, students who already have friends or siblings at secondary school tend to transition better whereas students who experience bullying or have trouble making new friends face more difficulties. 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 transition. Secondary school students and teachers believe that good social skills are essential for a good transition, 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 pupils. 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 bullying. 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 support.

**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-esteem. The extent to which students see their environment as hospitable is related to the number and quality of social resources available to them. Furthermore, students that perceive their teachers as supportive are more likely to feel engaged at school, which in turn relates to better academic achievement.

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.

**Emotional Support**
The transition period is often linked with a decline in grades and motivation for many students. However, research shows that this period can be an effective time to carry out interventions to build resilience, self-esteem and motivation. Students with higher levels of emotional and social functioning are likely to cope more successfully at stressful times, such as transition and there are many forms of intervention than can support the development of these traits. For example, studies that have used specific interventions to build ‘emotional intelligence’ and ‘growth mindset’ suggest that the detrimental effects of transition can be ameliorated for year 7 pupils. Anxiety is likely to be heightened this year due to the Corona Virus pandemic. School staff will need to carefully consider resources available to support the emotional needs of students who may be fearful about their health or family members, have experienced trauma, loss or bereavement.

**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 transition. 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 writing. Students have reported looking forward to having new teachers and new academic subjects in year 7. Increasing interest in school and new schoolwork has been linked with successful transition and, over time, an increase in liking school is also associated with better academic attainment.

**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. This year, it will be necessary to consider how these can be carried out remotely.

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.
School Transitions Framework
Rosa Gibby-Leversuch
July 2015

Knowledge of Routine and Organisation
- Effective Communication
  - Teachers at both schools share information
  - Students complete “Passports”

Positive Relationships
- Transition groups – for students needing extra support
- Teachers should be accessible – Students know where to find support and advice
- Accessible peer mentors can offer information, support and friendship – benefits for both mentor and pupil

Child at the Centre
- Extended School Visits – “a day in the life”
- Transition Workbooks – learning about equipment, travel & timetables

Evaluation and Review of the Programme
- Parents are included in the transition – concerns are likely to be similar
- Find out what the specific concerns are for the students – use questionnaires

Academic Skills
- Teachers at both schools share information
- Students complete “Passports”
- Teachers share information

Emotional Support
- Find out what the specific concerns are for the students – use questionnaires
- Transition Workbooks – learning about equipment, travel & timetables

Parents’ views – parent evenings or surveys
- Staff Feedback
- Build increased interest in school and work – emphasise some of the differences between primary and secondary

Self-efficacy should be supported throughout the transition year – a time when many students experience a decline in grades and a decrease in motivation
- Use bridging materials to keep continuity in certain subjects
- Teach students how to use academic resources

Encourage students to join clubs and groups
- Create sub-communities in school e.g. tutor groups & sports ‘houses’
- Transition can be a key time to introduce interventions to build resilience and self-esteem

Use bridging materials to keep continuity in certain subjects
- Teach study skills – management of workload and homework

Create sub-communities in school e.g. tutor groups & sports ‘houses’
The Inclusion Partnership Agreement
The Inclusion Partnership Agreement (IPA) is used extensively in Hampshire to support the transition of children who may be vulnerable at transition, in particular those 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 an IPA for the child.

Person Centred Planning
These approaches are key to the inclusion of the young people’s views and to support motivation and reduce anxiety. Using a strength-based approach, a positive and proactive collaborative meeting with the student, their family and staff from both settings (using virtual platforms if necessary) will be important in facilitating successful transitions, particularly for those students with additional needs.

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 though 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 or who may be homeless. 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.
• 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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References