The transition experience: Are we getting it right?

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Contents

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1. Abstract

This research looks at transition from primary to secondary school, for pupils transferring within a trust, and for those transferring from primary schools outside of the trust. Transition is found to be a potentially difficult time for pupils, not only socially and emotionally, but also academically. However, the schools in question have developed successful transition programmes to ensure that pupils are supported throughout this time. Good practice is identified, which can be shared between schools so that all pupils are able to make successful transitions. This includes training year 10 pupils as peer mentors, providing pupils with opportunities to make new friends, identifying vulnerable pupils through emotional literacy screening and making support available to them in the form of nurture groups and buddies. Secondary schools are also encouraged to collaborate fully with all primary schools, extending opportunities to pupils transferring from outside of trusts, sharing best practice and initiating a two-way exchange of information, as this can ensure pupils continue to make progress throughout transition.

2. Introduction

Throughout their lives people make transitions, moving from one place or phase to another; from home to school, primary to secondary school, secondary school to university, or into work. This research project concentrates on the transition from primary to secondary school, which is widely recognised as a stressful and difficult time for pupils (Zeedyk *et al*, 2003, Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008, Howard & Johnson, [no date]). It can also be a valuable learning experience, enabling pupils to become more resilient to change and, if managed well, build their self-esteem and confidence (Lucey & Reay, 2000). Therefore, it is imperative that pupils going through this change in schools are given the utmost support from both primary and secondary schools, to enable them to make successful transitions.

Since 2007 schools have been able to form trusts, consisting of a secondary school with partners in the local community such as local primary schools, businesses, public sector and "higher and further education institutions" (Sutherland *et al*, 2010, p.33). Trust schools are able to employ staff, and manage their own admissions and assets, while still being maintained by the local authority. Schools within a trust have a unique opportunity to work together to perfect the support they offer pupils in transition programmes. A secondary school can work closely with the primary schools in the trust, sharing best practice and giving teachers opportunities to mingle and find out how children are taught in other schools. Nevertheless, it is also important that these secondary schools offer the same transition experience to pupils who are transferring from outside of the trust (Sutherland *et al*, 2010). This research project looks at pupils transferring from two primary schools (one large, one small) in

the same village in northern England, to two secondary schools, one on the edge of the village and the other, a larger school, in the next town.

3. Review of the Literature

In this section it is intended to look at the social and emotional aspects of transition, as it is a time of great change where some friends are lost and new ones made, and children begin to grow into adolescents. The academic aspects of transition are then explored, as moving to secondary school presents a change in both curriculum and pedagogy. Following this, pupils' fears prior to, and the difficulties faced by them during, transition are investigated to enable researchers to look at ways to alleviate these. Finally the strategies and support systems that are being used by other schools are examined, to allow these to be taken into account when assessing the strategies used by the schools in the research.

3.1 Social and Emotional Aspects of Transition

3.11 Adolescence

The majority of literature on this transition period regards it as "one of the most difficult in pupils' educational careers", with future academic success, "general sense of well-being and mental health" all depending on whether it is experienced positively or negatively (Zeedyk *et al*, 2003 p.68). Nicholls & Gardner (1999) point out that "pupils experience a degree of trauma in changing schools" (p.14), and Lucey & Reay (2000) describe it as a huge "emotional burden" (p.191). Many high school

problems such as "truancy, school failure, non-compliance and inappropriate behaviour" (Howard & Johnson, [no date], p.1) have been credited to the changes that take place in pupils lives during transition. Indeed, Humphrey & Ainscow (2006) suggest that it is at this point of transition, between primary and secondary, that pupils "are at their most vulnerable" (p.327). It could be that it is the vast quantity of adjustments taking place at the same time which have such an unsettling effect on pupils (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008), as it is often around this stage that children become adolescents and begin to go through puberty, with all its associated emotional and physical changes (Hutchings & Mortimore in Howe & Richards, 2011 p145).

The transition "from childhood to adulthood" (Gross, 2010, p.589) that is made during adolescence brings a multitude of changes, as everything the child has come to know and trust is challenged and questioned (Erikson, 1959). Adolescents begin to understand that others have different ideas and viewpoints to themselves (Kegan, 1994). They begin to acquire new emotions and feelings and learn how to control these, gradually developing the skills required to interpret them in others (Richards in Howe & Richards, 2011). Dopamine activity in the brain increases and causes adolescents to take more risks and become disinhibited (Harris, 2008). This can lead them to challenge authority (Akos in Jindal-Snape, 2010), or become involved in "smoking, drinking or drug taking" (Richards in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.45). Conversely, adolescents can feel awkward, highly self-aware and easily humiliated in social situations, as they feel that they are the centre of attention and "are hypersensitive to being 'different' in any way" (Dawrent, 2008, p.69). The emotional turmoil adolescents experience can create problems such as depression, suicide,

teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and violence. Disturbingly, Compas *et al* (1995) point out that "adolescent morbidity has increased" over recent decades, whereas that for other age groups has decreased (p.266).

According to Anderson *et* al (2000), most research prior to 1990 primarily attributed problematic school transitions to "developmental changes" (p.326). However, Coleman's theory suggests that it is not adolescence which is traumatic but the transitions children are going through at the same time (Gross, 2010). Changes in social environment and roles at this time can be challenging for adolescents as they rely on others' reactions to mediate changes in behaviour and emotions (Compas *et al*, 1995, p.268). The body may have developed sufficiently to resemble that of an adult, bringing with it others' expectations of adult thinking and consideration (Kegan, 1982), but the adolescent has not yet been "awarded adult status", creating a gap from which some believe "the bulk of adolescent delinquency results" (Compas *et al*, 1995, p.276). A new social environment also results in an increase in competitiveness, as pupils re-evaluate their competencies in relation to others, which can lead to a loss of self-esteem and disengagement (Wigfield *et al*, 1991 in Galton *et al*, 1999, p.20). Girls in particular have been found to be more vulnerable to depression at this time, perhaps due to the importance they invest in friendships, which change during transition (Compas *et al*, 1995, Anderson *et* al, 2000). Nevertheless, all pupils are susceptible to worry, uncertainty, insecurity and disaffection during transition (Howard & Johnson, [no date]), with poor transitions risking "future potential and life chances" (Sutherland *et al*, 2010, p.11), triggering irreparable losses (Boyd, 2005), and possibly "mental health problems, with

accompanying feelings of loss, loneliness, stress and depression" (Topping, 2011, p.280).

On the other hand, it could be that the changes in school life reflect those taking place in adolescence and, in doing so, one eases the other (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999). The problems caused by transition running concurrently to adolescence may help children to learn how to "block off experiences or feelings which are just too difficult to take in" and enable them to get on with their lives during difficult situations (Lucey & Reay, 2000, p.195). It seems that the challenge of transition gives equal opportunities for either the development of new competencies, or that of depression and stress (Compas *et al*, 1995). As Lucey & Reay point out, it is essential that transitions are well managed to ensure a positive emotional and educational outcome (p.202). Although some pupils will struggle to settle in and will need a watchful eye kept on them (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999, p.15), it is worth noting that the majority of children do go through adolescence and school transition "without major psychological or behavioural problems" (Compas *et al*, 1995 p.285).

3.12   Identity & Autonomy

Moving from primary to secondary school reflects a change in the developing identity of pupils, beginning with the choice of school (Shaw, 1995). Although Sirsch (2003) found that taking an active part in school choice had no effect on whether a child viewed transition as a threat or not, it can mean choosing which friends to stay with and which to leave behind. Adolescents draw on friends for self-comparison, making

"judgements about their competence" (Akos in Jindal-Snape, 2010, p.126) and testing them for reactions and boundaries "as part of the socialisation process" (Richards in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.47). Erikson (1959) also found adolescents had a preoccupation with how others saw them and were "primarily concerned with attempts at consolidating their social roles" (p.94). In addition, Topping (2011) refers to Marsh's work, which emphasizes the significance "of social comparisons on children's self-judgements" (p.275). Moving from a small school to a larger school can be beneficial in identity development, as it provides a diverse selection of friends to enable adolescents to choose people who "confirm their identity and enable them to grow into their new roles" (Richards in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.64). Social networks are, therefore, essential to the formation of identity and the disruption of these through life changes "and having to adapt to new circumstances" (Richards in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.57) can cause identity crises.

The move from one school to another can challenge the way children see themselves and encourage them to explore the construction of "established identities" (Topping, 2011, p.272). During adolescence, pupils begin to re-assess their identities, gaining autonomy and control over their own lives (Compas *et al*, 1995). However, when moving from primary year 6 to secondary year 7, pupils go "from being the oldest and most experienced...in primary school" (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008, p.6) to the youngest, least experienced in secondary. Pupils expecting to gain autonomy, be given more responsibility and be treated like a more mature adult are often disappointed by the move to high school (Galton *et al*, 1999). Instead of being in control they are made to feel self-conscious and gauche, as the youngest newcomers, when they are "desperately wanting to project a more adult

image" (Rudduck, 1996, p.21). They have to fit in with the rest of the school, with its social and academic structures already in place, offering them less scope for responsibility (Boyd, 2005).

Relationships with adults are renegotiated during adolescence as pupils strive for independence (Gross, 2010). Lucey & Reay (2000) found that pupils radiated to places in the school where there were no adults present, in order to develop their independence and autonomy. It seems that this need for more autonomy comes at a time when "the school environment becomes more controlling" (Harter *et al*, 1992, p.779). Kegan (1982) points out the difficulty parents may have in supporting their child to develop their identity and "to hold without constraining" (p.162). It may be that "the school is ready to hold exactly the individual the child has become" (p.163). In order to develop autonomy, pupils need support from adults other than their parents and may look to their secondary teachers for this. However, they may find secondary teachers do not provide the same personal support that primary teachers did. Jindal-Snape & Foggie (2008) draw attention to a difference in expectations of independence in primary and secondary schools, where primary schools fail to make children independent and secondary schools expect them to be independent (p.12). In addition, parents may feel that their children are becoming more grown up at this time and become less involved in their education (Boyd, 2005). Conversely, this withdrawal of support could leave adolescents with more responsibility than they are prepared for, as Erikson (1959) points out, pupils are quite quickly pushed into making decisions which will affect their future as, through school and subject choices, adolescents define and refine their identities. This is something of a

dilemma for adolescents who find themselves in the situation of having to give up adult protection in order to achieve a level of autonomy (Lucey & Reay, 2000).

3.13   Self-Esteem & Anxiety

The presence of protective factors is thought to increase the likelihood of a positive transition, as these "negate the impact of risk factors, leading to resilience" and the ability to cope with change (Jindal-Snape & Miller in Jindal-Snape, 2010, p.21). Support and protective factors can be provided by a strong social network and structure between primary and secondary schools, which can help to increase self-esteem (Richards in Howe & Richards, 2011). Erikson (1959) states that self-esteem is achieved when children compare themselves favourably with role models, and is strengthened by the realisation that they are moving "toward a tangible future" that they can understand (p.95). Harris (2008) also reports that sound self-esteem is achieved when children feel that they are understood by those around them. Accordingly, self-esteem is realised by feelings of being worthy of others' respect and competent to face challenges (Jindal-Snape & Miller in Jindal-Snape, 2010, p.11). This can be jeopardized by transition, as peer groups, friendships and environmental structures change (Cotterell, 1992) and, as Humphrey & Ainscow (2006) point out, United States research suggests that self-esteem is lowered at this time.

There are many issues during transition that could have a negative impact on self-esteem. As children move from a secure environment to an insecure one where

everything is new, including peers, teachers and the curriculum, they may doubt themselves and their ability to perform (Harter *et al*, 1992). It is not surprising, therefore, that anxiety levels rise at the time of transfer (Galton *et al*, 1999), along with stress and worry (Zeedyk *et al*, 2003). This "sensitive period" in a child's education could have long-term effects on both academic and psychological well-being (Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006, p.320). Indeed, changes in motivation have been related to "changes in perceived competence across the transition" (Harter *et al*, 1992, p.777) along with correlations with depression in later life (Galton in Jindal-Snape, 2010). Those who experience unsecure or low self-esteem prior to transition seem to be the worst affected as the transition process may further lower their sense of self-worth and competence, resulting in disaffection (Jindal-Snape & Miller in Jindal-Snape, 2010), truanting (Howard & Johnson, [no date]) or anti-institutional behaviour (Alves-Martins *et al*, 2002).

Even though, as Topping (2011) points out, most children find transition a disappointing, problematic and fearful time, some view it "as a positive natural transition" (p.269). Foggie & Jindal-Snape (2008) found that high levels of worry and anxiety may help children to develop "appropriate coping strategies" (p.6). Although transition is a difficult time, which may potentially have a negative effect, it has also become a "normative life event" (Sirsch, 2003, p.385), with the potential to increase self-esteem through its successful navigation (Jindal-Snape & Miller in Jindal-Snape, 2010). Nicholls & Gardner (1999) identify the beneficial effects of discontinuity in transition, suggesting that it is important to encourage children to be adaptable (p.5). The sense of loss experienced by some children in the move to secondary school can be used, along with anxiety, to help them build their self-esteem and coping

strategies (Lucey & Reay, 2000). Successful transitions can be made by ensuring pupils are prepared psychologically, through resilience and self-esteem, to adjust to their new environment (Adeyemo in Jindal-Snape, 2010). Evangelou *et al* (2008) advise that pupils should "enjoy the transition and have the confidence to believe in their ability to cope" (p.34). Indeed Rudduck (1996) found that some pupils were taking the mature view that change would be difficult, but they would get used to it.

3.14   Social

The move from primary to secondary school presents a social upheaval as children go from a secure base to one that is strange and unknown. Small primary schools can encompass what Tönnies (1955) calls 'Gemeinschaft' "all intimate, private, and exclusive living together" (p.37), and children may struggle in the move from this "unity of being" (p.48) to the 'Gesellschaft', "public life" (p.38), of the larger secondary school. Lucey & Reay (2000) observe this as a move from "the 'family' ethos" of primary to an "impersonal and fragmented" secondary (p.195). Moving on from the primary school's "familiarity and security" can provoke a sense of loss in some pupils (Rudduck, 1996, p.20), which in turn can result in loneliness, depression and stress (Topping, 2011, p.272). In primary school, children have one teacher who is primarily concerned with fostering a good relationship with pupils (Shaw, 1995). The secure attachment a pupil can have with primary teachers or head teachers can be difficult to recreate in secondary school due to the greater number of teachers each child comes into contact with in a day (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). As Shaw (1995) points out, "no one at school cares for you like your parents" (p.48) and friends are the next best thing.

At the time of transition, adolescents often begin to reject their parents' authority and peers become more important to them (Akos in Jindal-Snape, 2010). As Kegan (1982) indicates, it is during adolescence that children begin to provide one another with a "culturing environment" where "embeddedness is, in part, peopled by age mates" (p.166). However, maintaining friendships can be difficult during transition as, depending on the choice of secondary school, some friends may be left behind and even those that move alongside the child may be dispersed among a much larger student body (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999). Evangelou *et al* (2008) found forty percent of pupils considered staying with friends to be the most important factor when choosing a secondary school.

New peer groups may not be a satisfactory replacement for old friends and these feelings could be reciprocated, with some pupils being rejected by their new peer group or perhaps given unwelcoming messages (Jindal-Snape & Miller in Jindal-Snape, 2010). As puberty begins to change the body, a child's developing sense of identity becomes threatened and young people begin to stereotype themselves and form cliques to protect against identity confusion (Erikson, 1959, p.98). It may be that bullying is one of the ways these new friendships are managed (Topping, 2011), as young people who fail to make friends in secondary school and lack the security found in groups are often those who are bullied (Galton in Jindal-Snape, 2010).

Those who make successful transitions often have strong friendships (Akos in Jindal-Snape, 2010) as these provide a high level of social support (Galton *et al*, 2003). Strong social support networks have also been found to improve well-being and motivation (Pietarinen *et al* in Jindal-Snape, 2010), with some pupils also relying on their peers for academic support (Galton *et al*, 2003). This may be due to the effect good friendships have on pupil perceptions of school (Cotterell, 1992). Topping (2011) found friendships to be one of the biggest worries for pupils in transition. There are, however, a number of children who look forward to moving on from their contemporaries (Lucey & Reay, 2000), and perhaps from their own reputations (Rudduck, 1996).

3.2   Academic Aspects of Transition

3.21   Curriculum

As mentioned previously, the discontinuities between primary and secondary school are extensive, and changes in curriculum are thought to augment the problems that pupils may already be experiencing (Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006). Attempts have been made to ensure that the curriculum flows smoothly from primary to secondary using "cross-phase" teachers (Fuller et al, 2005, p.11), and bridging units. The introduction of the National Curriculum with its subsequent Key Stages was intended to establish curriculum continuity between primary and secondary or key stages 2 and 3 (Galton *et al*, 1999). However, Witt (in Howe & Richards, 2011) explains that pupils at different primary feeder schools may yet have followed diverse pathways in their learning, which leads to difficulties in both curriculum and pedagogy when these pupils converge in year 7.

3.22   Performance Dip

Research suggests that there is often a dip in attainment when pupils move from primary to secondary school "in Germany, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, Spain and Tasmania (Australia), as well as in England" (Sutherland *et al,* 2010, p.11). Anderson *et al* (2000) found that in the United States most pupils' grades fell following transition, as did Akos (in Jindal-Snape, 2010). Galton *et al* (1999) report on Ofsted data, based in the UK, which shows a performance drop during transition, and state that "two out of five pupils [are] failing to make expected progress" (p.17). Nevertheless, Boyd (2005), writing in Scotland, found insufficient evidence that this would have a "serious long term effect on pupil achievement" (p.9). This is confirmed by Topping (2011), who found that performance usually recovered after a few years. In order to sustain progression, both Nicholls & Gardner (1999) and Jindal-Snape (2010) suggest that the dip can be eradicated through "effective transition practice" (p.236).

One reason that has been suggested for this drop is the misjudgement of pupils' academic ability by secondary teachers (Evangelou *et al,* 2008). On entering secondary school, teachers have to decide at what level to teach the children and this is often determined using SATs test scores and primary teacher assessment levels to ensure it is set close to pupils' needs (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999). These levels can be wide ranging, particularly when there are numerous primaries feeding into one secondary school, perhaps pushing secondary teachers to teach at the

lowest level in order to include all pupils. Secondary teachers often underrate pupils'

capabilities and children have reported repeating work, working at the same level as

primary or doing work that is too easy (Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006). Some pupils

who reached level 4 in the end of primary tests were given level 2 standard work at

secondary school (Oxford Brookes University, 2006). Galton *et al* (2003) also found,

in relation to mathematics, that children described repeating work in year 7 that they

had done previously in years 5 and 6. Some feel that the teaching of science in

primary schools has improved so much, following the introduction of the National

Curriculum, that it has intensified the achievement dip at secondary school (Davies &

McMahon in Howe & Richards, 2011). Secondary schools frequently give pupils a

fresh start, where primary school levels are forgotten (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999), or

children are re-tested when they enter secondary school because primary school

assessment data is thought to be unreliable (Topping, 2011). Perhaps this is also

because it is sometimes thought that primary schools label pupils incorrectly, which

may give them an unfair advantage or disadvantage, or have "expectancy effects"

(Galton *et al*, 1999, p.26).

Nicholls & Gardner (1999) report that secondary schools do not trust primary

assessments, believing primaries to have "lower standards" when marking, so that a

"Level 5 performance" in primary would not be equal to a secondary Level 5 (p.6).

This is supported by a quote from a teacher, in work by McCallum, "levels 3 and 4

don't mean the same thing at primary and secondary" (Oxford Brookes University,

2006, p.2). Sutherland *et al* (2010) found an unhelpful "lack of trust and common

language" between primary and secondary schools, in relation to assessment (p.6),

and Galton *et al* (1999) report that teachers from both phases "hold certain

stereotypical views about '*what goes on in the other school*'" (p.26). It could be that, although primary teachers strive to help pupils achieve high levels of achievement in order to keep schools high in league tables, secondary teachers find it difficult to add value to these levels and therefore claim that they have been "artificially inflated by intensive revision or generous marking (Davies & McMahon in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.77). Another suggestion is that the results of end of key stage, high-stakes tests are being compared with attainment in low-stakes tests taken in year 7 (Galton *et al*, 1999, p.17).

3.23   Consequences of Testing

Due to what Harris (2008) calls the "Government focus on assessment and league tables" (p.11), primary schools are now judged according to pupils' SATs results. This leads many year 6 teachers to teach to the tests, concentrating lessons on the revision of literacy and numeracy at the expense of more creative aspects of the curriculum (Galton *et al*, 2003). Year 6 becomes a focal point, taught by the school's most experienced teachers, with not only a reduced curriculum but an increase in support staff (Topping, 2011). Secondary schools often feel that this "cramming" leads "to higher results being achieved than truly reflect the general attainment level of some Y6 pupils" (Fuller *et al,* 2005, p.15).

Once SATs tests are over, learning is often relaxed and the final two months of the school year spent on less regimented lessons (Witt in Howe & Richards, 2011). However, pupils may not keep up the same level of skill required to achieve high

SATs levels in the core subjects during this period, which is followed by six weeks holiday. It is unlikely that pupils will be able to produce the same results when tested at secondary school three months later (Galton *et al,* 2003). This could, perhaps, be the cause of the dip in achievement at secondary school.

The change in learning styles in year 6, from primary school's customary focus on "children's own enquiries" (Davies & McMahon in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.73) and practical activities, to regimental preparation for tests, can also mean that the move to secondary school is "not sufficiently challenging or different" (Topping, 2011, p.276). Another possible consequence of SATs could be that poor performance leads to lower self-esteem and therefore a more difficult transition (Witt in Howe & Richards, 2011). One Portuguese study found a correlation between achievement levels and self-esteem in seventh grade, in that the lower the achievement the lower the self-esteem, this reduced as the pupil moved to eighth and ninth grade (Alves-Martins *et al*, 2002). Other studies have shown that children who achieve higher levels worry more about transition, perhaps because it may be a threat to "their higher achievement status" (Sirsch, 2003, p.386). Topping (2011) also reports on "a more competitive learning environment" (p.272) having an adverse effect on self-esteem, resulting in low levels of motivation. This may become a vicious circle with poor academic performance generating low self-esteem, which in its turn produces low motivation and lower grades.

Another problem that stems from testing is that pupils often regard the years between tests, such as SATs and GCSEs, as "less important", rather than

appreciating "that working hard during these periods can have pay-offs later" (Galton *et al*, 1999, p.6). Pupils become interested only in the rewards they gain in tests rather than in the learning itself, and pupils with low levels of self-esteem, believing they will fail anyway, have less motivation to learn (Harter *et al*, 1992). These tests have meaning in modern culture and, as Erikson (1959) identifies, achieving good grades can strengthen developing identities. On the other hand, Harris (2008) points out that it is a positive attitude to learning that gives rise to success and not high exam grades. It could be that pupils need to be made aware that they all have the capacity to "grow and develop" their brains (Boyd, 2005, p.113). Perhaps a focus on pupils' "role as active and autonomous managers of their learning" (Fuller *et al*, 2005, p.13), rather than on test results, would encourage children to believe that they can "keep learning and growing [their] intelligence" (Dawrent, 2008, p.12).

3.3   Fears and Difficulties of Transition

3.31   Social & Communication

The pressure to achieve higher grades in order to get a good job often compels parents to make sure their child goes to a "good school" (Lucey & Reay, 2000, p.199). This can often mean going to a different school to friends, even in a separate locality, and this unfamiliarity can be frightening for young people. Research has shown that one of the biggest worries for pupils at transfer is their ability to keep old, and make new, friends (Howard & Johnson, [no date], Evangelou *et al*, 2008). In fact, Jindal-Snape & Foggie (2008) report that this fear was realised for several children in their Scottish study, who found it hard to move on. The move

from primary to secondary, with the introduction of a new and different social domain, involves gaining the acceptance of a new group of peers (Sirsch, 2003). Good social skills are imperative during transition and can mean the difference between making new friends and being ridiculed and rejected (Howard & Johnson, [no date]). Friends from primary school can provide security and support at this time, particularly when coming into contact with older children (Topping, 2011).

For some groups of pupils the most worrying aspect of transition was bullying (Zeedyk *et al*, 2003). This was not without foundation as bullying has been found to increase during transition (Topping, 2011), with parents of secondary school pupils reporting that around 3 in 10 children had been exposed to it (Evangelou *et al*, 2008). Howard & Johnson [no date] found that year 6 pupils were "anxiously aware" (p.4) of bullying, despite the occurrence of it being rare at primary school. This was in part due to "horror stories" they had heard from older pupils, which could make them concerned about their own vulnerability (Lucey & Reay, 2000, p.198). Pupils may also find it more difficult to report bullying to teachers at secondary school, as relationships with teachers change at this time (Rudduck, 1996).

3.32   Academic

While academic concerns were not among the most common worries for pupils at transition, some were anxious about how they would cope with the workload at secondary school (Zeedyk *et al*, 2003), particularly the increase in homework (Evangelou *et al*, 2008). Others were nervous about receiving lower grades, due to

higher standards and teacher expectations (Anderson *et al*, 2000, Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). This can be exacerbated by the confusion caused by the vast increase in numbers of teachers (Rudduck, 1996), as each can have different views about amount of homework and behaviour, among other things (Shaw, 1995, Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006). Boyd (2005) points out that it takes "between 12 and 15 teachers to teach the same range of the curriculum" as in primary school (p.2). It also increases the level of responsibility pupils need to have in order to get to the right classroom at the right time (Harter *et* al, 1992).

3.33   Familiarisation

One major cause of anxiety for children was the increase in school size, and amount of pupils and teachers (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). For some children, transferring from small primary schools, the secondary school can appear to be "huge and enormous" (Lucey & Reay, 2000, p.196), adding to fears about getting lost, being late for lessons or not being able to find them at all (Rudduck, 1996). Indeed, Cotterell (1992) found that pupils transferring from large primaries "experienced less anxiety and more enjoyment than those moving from small primary schools" (p.37). Pupils also face the responsibility of bringing the correct resources to each lesson and often worry about their personal property (Boyd, 2005), being used to having a base in primary school, they find that "they have to plan whole days at a time and carry everything with them" (Harris, 2008, p.13). This gave rise to complaints about aching legs and backs because of the distances the pupils have to travel around school, up and down stairs, carrying heavy bags (Howard & Johnson, [no date]). Many pupils were given maps and timetables to

help them find their way around, however, Howard & Johnson found that children of 11 and 12 years of age have not yet fully developed "the ability to think abstractly and symbolically" (p.6) and struggled to read these.

Lunchtimes were another common concern, with where to go, what to do with bags and how to buy dinner being familiar troubles (Topping, 2011, Galton in Jindal-Snape, 2010, Howe in Howe & Richards, 2011). A further worry was travelling to school, with independent travel being seen as a heightened risk (Lucey & Reay, 2000). Shaw (1995) reveals that 80% of primary school pupils travelled to school independently in 1971, reducing to 9% in 1993. Nevertheless, despite these widespread fears about secondary schools, Akos (in Jindal-Snape, 2010) points out that most pupils adjust and quickly become familiar with the size and "procedural aspects" of their new schools (p.137).

3.4   Strategies and Support Programmes

3.41   Social

Schools have put many schemes in place to improve the social aspects of transition, including buddy systems where older pupils are matched with the new intake in order to provide support (Zeedyk *et al,* 2003). One thing that was extensively appreciated by the new intake was visits made by older pupils to their primary schools (Fuller *et al*, 2005). Dawrent (2008) advocates year 7 pupils questioning year 6 pupils on their concerns about transition and putting together a presentation to help alleviate these.

Another suggestion was using year 10 pupils as peer mediators to "act as go-betweens for issues between pupils: in the playground and elsewhere" (p.69). It is believed that this social support can make a vast difference in successful transitions (Anderson *et al*, 2000), allowing younger "pupils to ask about things they don't understand" (Galton *et al*, 1999, p.8) and giving older pupils more responsibility. Further links were made by year 7 pupils producing newsletters and "personal accounts" (p.30) of their transition, for year 6 pupils to read. Evangelou *et al* (2008) report that this system could, not only reassure parents and children about the transition but, "reduce incidents of bullying" (p.v), and Topping (2011) states that pupils who experienced "interactions with older students at transition displayed fewer failing grades" (p.270).

Pupils who make transitions alongside their peers from primary school are thought to settle into secondary school more easily (Lucey & Reay, 2000, Topping, 2011). In order to take advantage of this settling effect, some schools ask for information on existing friendships from primary schools so that pupils can be put into classes together with their friends (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999). However, secondary schools with a large number of pupils feeding in from many different primary schools may find it difficult to collate and use this kind of information (Galton *et al*, 1999). The emphasis is then put upon making new friends quickly at secondary school, which can have a positive effect on transitions (Sirsch, 2003), with some schools focusing on "intensive social bonding events" to enable new pupil groups to come together as a team (Lucey & Reay, 2000, p.25). Occasionally, further initiatives are put in place to carry the social nurturing and family atmosphere of primary school through to

secondary school, such as nurture groups for pupils who had been identified as potentially finding transition difficult (Akos in Jindal-Snape, 2010).

Research also suggests involving parents in transition as far as possible as their "knowledge of their children had much to contribute to their successful transition" (Topping, 2011, p.272). Suggestions include having "an open-door policy or internet forum" (Howe in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.156), holding parents meetings and open days prior to transition (Galton in Jindal-Snape, 2010, Nicholls & Gardner, 1999), and even counselling for parents (Galton *et al,* 1999). Building strong partnerships between primary and secondary schools has been found to be beneficial (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999). Although this can also create barriers for pupils transferring from schools that are not in the partnership, as some may feel that secondary schools favour pupils who transfer from primaries within the partnership (Howe in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.156). Currently there has been an increase in all-through schools, giving pupils the opportunity to continue their education without the social upheaval of transition to secondary school (Paton, 2009). This also allows staff to nurture pupils through "knowing them and their academic, social and personal needs throughout their academic careers" (Chance in Harris, 2008, p.27).

3.42   Curriculum & Pedagogy

Howe (in Howe & Richards, 2011) notes the "excellent reputation of Finland's education system" (p.160) and suggests that this may be because their schools are all-through schools. The advantages of all-through schools could be fostered

through improving links between primary and secondary schools, such as trusts, academies and federations (Sutherland *et al,* 2010, p.5). Schools with strong links and "effective collaboration" between primary and secondary have been found to be more successful, particularly "in attainment at Key Stage 3" (Evangelou *et al*, 2008, p.5). Anderson *et al* (2000) suggest that support is made available for pupils in transition, ensuring that they are prepared for the move to secondary school both academically and behaviourally. This could consist of a team made up of counsellors, teachers, teaching assistants, parents, administrative staff, special needs co-ordinators and students, made available to pupils should they need the support (Akos in Jindal-Snape, 2010). Pietarinen *et al* (in Jindal-Snape, 2010) report that more schools are employing "specialized experts...to deal with the problems of well-being, and disturbing behaviour, and to guide pupils through transitions" (p.153). However, it is thought that support from both primary and secondary is required for successful transitions, so transition teams would need to be made up of staff from both settings, liaising together prior to transition (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008, Nicholls & Gardner, 1999).

Other strategies include team teaching, involving both primary and secondary teachers working together to teach a year 6 class (Davies & McMahon in Howe & Richards, 2011). Often, year 7 teachers visit primary schools to teach the year 6 classes, prior to transition, not only giving pupils a taste of secondary school teaching but allowing the secondary teachers themselves to ensure "closer curriculum liaison" (Galton *et al,* 1999, p.27). Moreover it has the effect of raising secondary teachers' expectations of their new pupils, as Davies & McMahon

mention, during one project, the secondary teacher was surprised "at the autonomy given to pupils by their primary colleague" (p.82).

Research by Oxford Brookes University (2006) suggests that curriculum continuity is "of paramount importance" (p.1) in transition. They point out that the National Curriculum ought to have provided continuity from key stage 2 to 3, nevertheless, this does not seem to have been the case, necessitating the introduction of transition units, to allow for consistency, continuity and progression (p.3). Planning these bridging units can involve both primary and secondary teachers working together, which in itself is beneficial for transition (Witt in Howe & Richards, 2011). However, not all primary schools use the same transition unit, which leads to problems for pupils who have not done the first part of the work at primary. This is particularly evident for secondary schools where the new intake comes from a large number of feeder primaries (Galton *et al*, 2003). It can also be a problem for pupils who want to leave primary school work behind and get on with secondary school work (Galton *et al*, 1999). For these pupils, the discontinuity in curriculum draws a line between their experience of primary school and the next stage of their lives, at secondary school (Galton *et* al, 2003). This can be overcome by ensuring that work done in primary school is further developed at secondary, using higher "levels of practical skills and ... concepts" (Galton in Jindal-Snape, 2010, p.117). Children who took part in one project found that it was familiar and comforting to continue with this in secondary school, and they also pointed out that "the Year 7 elements were complementary and covered new ground" (Davies & McMahon in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.79). On the other hand, primary teachers criticised bridging units for continuing the emphasis on numeracy and literacy into the final term of primary school, which was traditionally

a time to cover more "creative activities" (p.79). This could be overcome by ensuring that bridging units are "cross-curricular" (Howe in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.155).

Research implies that the passing on of primary school data to secondary schools is imperative at transition and, as there can be a vast amount of information to collate for secondary schools, the best way to do this is via e-mail (Galton *et al*, 1999). The use of information technology to collate pupil data can greatly reduce the time it takes for a teacher to find the correct information. Rather than having to sift through portfolios of work and statements for each child, increasing the likelihood records will be ignored, a teacher can access the correct record at the touch of a button, which can help greatly in the case of medical notes etc. This information can also be used to plan schemes of work by finding out, for example, which books pupils have read in their primary school, so that "there is no repetition of book choice" (Nicholls & Gardner, 1999, p.33).

In addition, social and personal records can be passed on to secondary schools to ensure that they are made aware of pupils who may be vulnerable during transition (Jindal-Snape & Miller in Jindal-Snape, 2010). Some primary schools ask pupils to prepare a transition passport, consisting of personal information, "thoughts, ideas and opinions" to be passed on to the secondary school (Smith in Howe & Richards, 2011, p.18). This "describes them as learners and gives samples of achievements" (Fuller *et al,* 2005, p.8). Evangelou *et al* (2008) report that successful transition occurs only when these "information exchange mechanisms" enable pupils to settle seamlessly into secondary school (p.51). Successful secondary schools were found

to be those which saw "each pupil as an individual", getting to know them before, as well as supporting and monitoring them following transition (Fuller *et al,* 2005, p.33).

3.43   Familiarisation

The majority of secondary schools hold transition or induction days to enable new entrants to find their way around the school (Zeedyk *et al,* 2003), usually when older pupils are not in school (Topping, 2011). These are thought to be very effective (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008) as pupils who have already experienced their new school feel "less threatened" (Sirsch, 2003, p.394). Attending open days, concerts, sports events and other social events at the school can also help pupils become familiar with the school and relieve anxiety (Rudduck, 1996, Nicholls & Gardner, 1999). Pupils could also take part in after-school activities during primary school, or experience sample lessons at open days (Evangelou *et al,* 2008). Some schools colour-code their buildings, or have particular buildings designated for whole subjects, such as the science block, to help pupils find their way around (Lucey & Reay, 2000). It can also be beneficial to provide a map for pupils to familiarise themselves with the school prior to the start of term (Galton in Jindal-Snape, 2010), however, as previously mentioned, Evangelou *et al* found that only one pupil was able to read the map, so it is essential to make sure maps are clear. Howe (in Howe & Richards, 2011) suggests online information being made available to pupils and parents to allow them to acquaint themselves with the school prior to transition, ensuring that any pupil unable to attend the transition day still has the advantage of preceding information.

4.   Methodology

In order to understand the transition process, qualitative ethnographic research was used, studying a group of people in their natural environment, enabling the researcher to scrutinise pupils over the course of their transitions (Creswell, 2007, Bell, 2005). Qualitative research can communicate "what it is like to be" a pupil going through transition and how schools deal with the process (Bouma, 2000, p.171). It is also a good way of making sure research is valid, because in depth interviews and questionnaires allow for more detailed results (Hakim, 2000). Research which takes place over a period of time, such as this, is longitudinal because it examines pupils, initially at primary school in July 2012, through to secondary school in April 2013, looking at the changes that take place over this time.

The research took place in four schools in the suburbs of a large city in the North of England. Two were primary schools, one small (school A), with around 170 pupils, the other larger (School B), with 370 pupils, both being partners in a local secondary school trust, which was also involved in the research. The trust secondary school (School C) has around 1300 pupils, being situated on the edge of the village. The final school to take part in the research was an academy in a nearby town (School D), with roughly 2000 pupils on roll. Academies are "independent local secondary schools", publicly funded and sponsored by businesses, "faith or voluntary groups working with partners from the local community" (Sutherland *et al*, 2010, p.32). The majority of pupils in year 6 at schools A and B transferred to either school C or D. This ensured that it would be possible to compare the experience of transition within a trust and out of a trust. These schools were also used because they were

accessible, the researcher having worked in and having Criminal Records Bureau

(CRB) checks for both schools A and B. This has both advantages and

disadvantages, as staff and pupils are often more willing to take part in research

undertaken by a colleague, however, an insider could overlook vital issues (Alderson

& Morrow, 2011, p.5). For ethnographic research, it is imperative that the researcher

is able to study pupils within their student group, in their own schools (Creswell,

2007).

Transition seems to have a major effect on pupils' academic and social lives and it is

essential that their rights are respected and ethics observed whilst undertaking

research in this area (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). The researcher has a duty to

protect vulnerable participants, such as children, from harm at all times, including

distress caused by invading privacy (Layder, 2013). Accessing pupil achievement

records, such as SATs and GCSE results, could have compromised pupils' rights to

privacy and confidentiality. It could also have contravened the Data Protection Act

1998 for schools to disclose this information to the researcher (Alderson & Morrow,

2011). Therefore the research focused on qualitative rather than quantitative

methods and university guidelines on ethical issues were followed at all times.

All schools were approached in May 2012 to ask them to take part in the research,

and for them to give permission for pupils and staff to be interviewed. Schools were

provided with information to enable them to decide whether to take part in the

research, such as a learning contract, ethical proposal and drafts of all

questionnaires and interview schedules (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Positive replies

were received from schools A, B and C, but School D did not respond initially, and conversations with administrative staff implied that the school did not usually take part in research. However, the researcher persevered and, when put in contact with the member of staff responsible for transition, eventually received confirmation that the school would like to take part.

Several methods for data-gathering were used, as triangulation can "provide different perspectives on the situation" (Bouma, 2000, p.182, Brewer & Hunter, 1989). It was decided that questionnaires were the easiest way to assess the feelings of pupils across all four schools, about transition. It would have been preferential to have named questionnaires so that the exact same pupils could be analysed at both the start and end of the research, to see how each child's feelings had changed over the transition period. This was not possible, however, due to the need for anonymity, to ensure that "information cannot be traced back to the originating sources" (Layder, 2013, p.18).

Questionnaires (Appendices B, C and F) were designed by the researcher, in order to make use of the researcher's knowledge of the context and give a personal appearance, as suggested by Nicholls & Gardner (1999). Care was taken to make sure the questions were framed positively so as not to cause unnecessary worry to pupils prior to transition (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Tick boxes were used to make questionnaires quick and easy to complete, and Likert scales to find out how much pupils were looking forward to, or had enjoyed moving up to secondary school.

Likert scales are a good way to "measure variation in attitude" as all responses can be placed between the two points on the scale (Bouma, 2000, p.73).

The pre-transition questionnaire (Appendix B) was piloted with two year 5 and two year 6 pupils to ensure that it was suitable for all ability levels. This led to the wording of question 6 being changed from "visited" to "been to", as pupils asked whether visited meant official visits and the researcher was looking for all visits, both official and unofficial. The name of the school trust was added to question 10, as pupils were not sure what was meant by "Are you a trust member?", but remembered what it was when the school name was present. Clarification of question 11 was also necessary, giving some examples of previous events, as the pupils were not sure what the trust events were. A "don't know" tick box was added to both these questions as the pupils in the pilot were not sure whether they were trust members or had been to any events and spent some time worrying about this.

A parental consent letter was also put together (Appendix A) and sent out in July 2012, informing all participants and their parents or carers that the research was entirely voluntary and assuring them of anonymity and confidentiality. This included a reply slip for parents/carers to sign and return if they decided to give consent for their children to take part in the research. It was originally intended that parental consent forms would be handed out to all year 6 pupils, 28 in school A and 53 in school B, and questionnaires would be issued and completed in school time by those who returned signed forms. However, due to time constraints in school A and accessibility in school B, pupils who returned their signed consent forms were given

the questionnaires to complete at home and return to school. This reduced the number of respondents, as questionnaires were lost or forgotten, and school A only returned two responses, with school B returning 12. A second issue of parental consent forms attached to questionnaires returned a further two signed responses and one completed questionnaire without a parental consent form, which the researcher was unable to use. It was for this reason that it was decided to repeat the questionnaires with the following year's year 6 at school A, and parental consent letters and questionnaires were sent home with these pupils in January 2013. These produced a far greater response, with 15 out of 21 pupils returning completed questionnaires along with signed parental consent forms. Focus groups that had been planned for year 6 pupils were unable to go ahead due to time constraints.

A post-transition questionnaire (Appendix C), to be sent out to the same group of pupils once they had been through transition and were settled in year 7, was piloted on two year 6 and two year 7 pupils, to ensure that it was suitable for all ability levels, and checked with the transition leaders in both secondary schools. Some changes were made to question 8 following the pilot, as it was pointed out that pupils may feel differently about different lessons. Accordingly, the words "if there are any particular lessons/periods you feel differently about, please make a note at the bottom of this page" were added. The word "registration" was also changed to "tutor time" for pupils in school C, and the position of this in the list altered to reflect the timetable and terminology of the school. In January 2013 these questionnaires were sent out, to 66 pupils in school C and 15 in school D, with envelopes attached to enable pupils to return them confidentially.

Further to this, interview schedules (Appendices D and F) were drawn up, based on questions arising from the literature. Due to time constraints, the interview schedules for schools A and B were converted to questionnaires, to enable respondents to complete and return these as quickly as possible. Interviews were arranged with the transition leaders in schools C and D and the interview schedule e-mailed to transition leaders, prior to interviews, to enable them to approve questions and prepare responses for the interviews. Interviews were then less formal, as the interviewee was able to supply the information required by the interviewer, without having to search for documents, and was "able to steer the conversation" should they so wish (Hakim, 2000, p35). This form of in-depth interview is useful in qualitative research as it allows the interviewee to include material they feel is relevant to the subject. Notes were taken by hand, transcribed by the researcher and confirmed with the interviewee.

The researcher also observed the nurture group run by School C, following the interview. During this session the researcher was able to assist pupils with their work as well as observing them working with the teacher and support staff. Participant observation enables the researcher to take part in the process, giving them a unique viewpoint and allowing them to research "their own reactions, feelings and understandings of what is happening" (Bouma, 2000, p.179).

It was decided to follow up questionnaires with focus groups because a group of pupils "influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion" therefore adding to the individual responses of questionnaires and interviews (Krueger, 1994, p.6). This is useful for qualitative research as it enables the researcher to have an overall view of the group feeling on a subject and can also highlight opposing views, should there be disagreement in the group (Hakim, 2000). A pilot focus group was held first, with two year 6 and two year 7 pupils known to the researcher, focusing on how transition could be improved. It was hoped that focus groups would be unstructured so that pupils would reveal "*their perspective* on the research topic" (Morgan, 1998). Structured questions (Appendix E) were prepared, however, based on questions arising from the literature and returned questionnaires, to enable the researcher to prompt pupils should this be required. These were not required during the pilot, as pupils covered all the topics in a varied discussion. The questions were e-mailed to transition leaders, for authorisation, prior to focus groups taking place. Researchers typically hold several focus groups in order "to detect patterns and trends across groups", however, it was felt that, due to the small size of the sample, time constraints, and the difficulty in organising time out of lessons for pupils, only one focus group would be held in each school (Krueger, 1994, p.17). Focus group participants were chosen by the transition leaders from a list of pupils for whom the researcher had parental consent to take part. It would have been preferable for the researcher to select pupils at random, from the list of those with parental consent, to ensure they were not biased (Morgan, 1998). However, it was necessary for school staff to guarantee pupils were able to take time out of lessons to attend the focus group, so they were asked to select appropriate pupils. For this reason, transition leaders also booked the room for the discussion to take place in.

The focus group at school C consisted of six pupils (three male, three female), four from school A and two from school B, and one member of staff from school C. The group at school D consisted of seven pupils (four male, three female), two from school A and five from school B. It was necessary for a member of school staff to be present at school C but not at school D. This could have affected pupils' responses as they may have withheld information that would otherwise have been given, being concerned about reprisals, at school C. The researcher firstly introduced herself and the project, then asked the pupils permission to take notes. Notes were taken by hand and transcribed by the researcher later. Pupil names were not recorded, only a number, their sex and a letter to represent the primary school attended previously. All participants were assured that they would remain anonymous in the report, were asked not to interrupt, to listen carefully when others were speaking and to let the researcher know at any time if they would like to stop and take a break. Alderson & Morrow (2011) explain that this can help redress the balance of power "that adults hold over children" (p.40).

The focus group participants in school C were quiet at first and did not seem to have many comments to make other than about moving around the school, therefore the researcher resorted to the structured questions. This could have been a "cold" group, with little to say on the subject (Krueger, 1994, p.17). The questions prompted further discussion of the subject, mainly by two dominant participants, with one child making no comments, even when specifically encouraged. This could affect the results of the research as dominant participants can influence contributions

and "unduly sway" others opinion (p.17), however, it was not possible to run further focus groups to counteract this. The group held at school D did not need prompting and had lots to say on the subject of transition. The researcher had to end the group as it had come to the end of the school day.

5.   Analysis of findings

5.1   Social and Emotional Aspects of Transition

The findings suggest that all pupils went to their first choice of secondary school, with the majority of pupils choosing the school themselves. Half the pupils at school A made the choice in conjunction with parents, with none having the choice made for them, whereas 30% of pupils at school B had the choice made for them by their parents. The remaining pupils moved to the school that their siblings attended, 43% of pupils moving to school D for this reason, this being second in the school's admissions policy criteria.

All respondents knew pupils from other schools who would be attending the same school as them, although pupils transferring to school D knew between 1 and 5 people and those transferring to school C mostly knew more than 8 pupils. Most pupils, across all schools, said that making new friends was the thing they were most looking forward to, although 25% of pupils transferring to school D said that they were not looking forward to having to make new friends. This school sets aside a day in the last week of the summer term for pupils to get to know one another as a form, often involving things like circus skills, inflatable obstacle courses, sumo

wrestling, Velcro football etc., followed by classroom based work where pupils introduce one another. It is interesting to note that 100% of pupils moving to school D made more than 7 new friends, suggesting that those who were not looking forward to this aspect of transition may have been unnecessarily anxious. The majority of pupils moving to school C also made 7 or more new friends, with 15% making between 3 and 6 new friends, and only one pupil making 1 to 2. Many pupils said that making new friends was the most enjoyable part of moving to secondary school, which was supported by pupils in the focus groups, who found making friends with people in their form easy to do.

Pupils at school D are not put into form groups with friends unless this has been specifically requested for a good reason, such as vulnerable pupils needing peer support, however, pupils transferring with only a small number of peers from their primary school are usually put in the same form. Although one child at school D reported being put into a form with nobody she knew, this was because she opted to study Spanish and the rest of her primary school peers were studying French, she claimed,

> "It was the best thing really, to be put in a form with nobody I knew, because I had to make new friends and now I have loads" (Female 1, School B).

Staff at schools A and B felt that it was important for pupils to be able to choose a friend to be in their form as this provides stability and eases transition, particularly for more vulnerable children. School C always put pupils into classes with people they know if possible, however, emphasis is very much on meeting new people and

making new friends. Pupils at school C remained friends with primary peers but reported that they had "mainly made new friends" (Male 1, school A).

Some pupils revealed that they were looking forward to increasing independence at secondary school, sitting on chairs in assembly, or travelling to school with friends. It appears, as Rudduck (1996) mentioned, that pupils hope to be treated more like adults when they get to secondary school. Following transition, it was pointed out in both focus groups that "it's a bit of a jump from being the oldest to the youngest again..." (Female 1, school B), and

> "we used to be the oldest at primary school and they used to let us go into class reception and look after the little ones and now we're the youngest and the year 10s say "Aw you're so cute" and it's annoying" (Female 1, School A),

which suggests that these hopes may not be realised. Pupils at school C were also incensed that teachers pushed in front of them in the lunch queue and took the last packet of chips, perhaps feeling that they should queue alongside them as adults would with other adults. However, 10% of pupils said that they enjoyed the freedom of secondary school more than anything else. This is apparent when pupils were asked how they felt at particular times of the school day, with the majority feeling their best at break and lunchtimes, as well as on the journey to and from school. This supports Lucey & Reay's (2000) point, about pupils preferring places in school where no adults are present, which helps them develop independence and autonomy.

For those who are not quite ready to relinquish the protective factors offered by adult support, school C has developed a nurture group. The transition leaders identify pupils who may potentially need this support and observe them within the primary setting, before drawing up a final list and inviting parents to a meeting to look at the provision. Nurture group pupils study core subjects (English, Maths, Science, History, Geography and Languages) together in one classroom but go out to their forms for other subjects. Pupils can join the nurture group later if it is felt that they need it, or can leave and rejoin their form when they no longer need it. This protective factor could help to increase the likelihood of a positive transition for these pupils, giving them the resilience to cope with the change (Jindal-Snape & Miller in Jindal-Snape, 2010).

School C has put in place a specific programme to look at the emotional literacy of pupils in transition to secondary school, with questionnaires highlighting pupils who need support with social and emotional issues. The strong social network between school C and the primary schools in the trust, promoted by the transition team, can help to increase self-esteem (Richards in Howe & Richards, 2011). Although 75% of pupils attending school C were members of the trust, only 13% had ever attended one of the trust events. However, pupils from trust schools spend time at school C for many events during the school year, such as maths challenges, sports events and Christmas productions. This gives pupils a prior knowledge of the secondary school, and helps to alleviate fear of the unknown at transition. School D also liaised with the six primary schools in their School Partnership Trust (SPT), team teaching maths or sending out members of the food technology or ICT departments into these

schools. Nevertheless, school A and B were not members of the SPT and therefore pupils in this research did not benefit from this social network.

The majority of pupils felt that they were well prepared for secondary school, with 100% of those transferring to school D and 67% of those to school C, only one pupil felt that they were not adequately prepared and the rest were unsure. Most pupils rated the amount they were looking forward to transition between 1 and 3, all those transferring to school D and 84% of those to school C. There were no pupils in the 8-10 bracket of not looking forward to transition. This suggests that most pupils were well prepared psychologically and had good self-esteem. Three pupils were worried about bullies or older pupils, perhaps suggesting they were not quite confident others would respect them. This is also highlighted in the focus groups, where pupils from both secondary schools referred to year 10s standing in their way in corridors and not letting them pass, and at school C, throwing cups of water, trapping them in corners or "taking the mick" (Male 1, school A). However, pupils had faced these difficulties and overcome them, "it was sorted out by the teacher" (Female 1, School B), increasing their resilience.

Although some pupils mentioned that they were not looking forward to leaving their primary school or friends behind, this did not appear to be a problem for pupils following transfer. Focus group pupils at both schools said that they would not like to go back to primary school and enjoyed secondary much more. Results from the questionnaires suggested that pupils were replacing the family ethos of primary school with strong friendships, preferring the journey to school, lunch and break

times, because they could spend time with friends. Pupils were also looking forward to moving to year 8, so that they would no longer be the youngest and could look down on the new year 7s, as one pupil said "It'll be like getting your own back!" (Male 1, School A). One primary pupil specifically mentioned looking forward to transition to "get away from trouble", supporting Rudduck's (1996) idea that some pupils look forward to moving on from their own reputations.

The transfer to secondary school for the majority of pupils in this research appears to be a positive experience. Both secondary schools had procedures in place to help pupils get to know one another and pupils reported making friends easily. All pupils rated their enjoyment of transition between 1 and 6, with the majority being at the top end of the scale. Focus group pupils from school C suggested telling new pupils "Don't worry, it's not as bad as you think" (Male 2, School A).

5.2   Academic Aspects of Transition

Results show that pupils appreciated the widening of the curriculum on moving to secondary school. At primary school 20% of pupils were looking forward to studying different subjects, whereas following the move 77% of pupils enjoyed the range of subjects. Pupils at school D particularly enjoyed after school activities and using the Independent Learning Centre (ILC). They also appreciated the subject specific knowledge of teachers, with one pupil reporting,

"If a teacher at primary school wasn't good at art then you didn't get taught art very well, but at this school they know what they're talking about" (Male 1, School A).

However, results from the questionnaires show that pupils did not enjoy all subjects, with science, geography and maths being named specifically. One pupil claimed that the teachers were better at secondary school, "I wanted to get away from the teachers there. The teachers here are better" (Male 1, School B), although the questionnaires show that 10% of pupils did not enjoy having stricter teachers at secondary school. The pupils in the focus group at school D complained about the amount of detentions they were given for forgetting books, being late to lessons or talking in class. Pupils at school C expressed concern over the number of teachers they had to learn the names of, and those at school D thought they had too many teachers for the same subject, which they found confusing. Although they also preferred having more teachers because,

"It's better than having one because then if you don't like them or get on with them at least you don't have them for every lesson" (Female 1, School B).

The majority of pupils at secondary school found their work harder and more serious, with one pupil claiming "they tried really hard to make it fun at primary" (Female 1, School A). Pupils felt that they should not have to be so serious in class because "we've got ages before we have to do out big exams" (Female 1, School A). Homework in particular was not looked forward to by primary pupils and was top of the list of things secondary pupils did not enjoy. One pupil pointed out that

homework that took him 2 hours in primary school would now take 30 minutes because he knew more, however, his peer replied,

> "There's a lot more than at primary 'cause instead of one homework a week that takes you 2 hours, there's 5 homeworks a day that take half an hour each" (Male 2, School A).

To ensure curriculum continuity, secondary school C shares best practice at a meeting with year 6 teachers, incorporating common themes which run through their feeder primaries, such as the emotional register and maths journals, into the secondary curriculum. Subject departments at school D hold liaison activities in their SPT primary schools and team teach maths. Bridging units are used on a needs basis, however, those used for English have not proved to be successful so far.

A performance dip is evident at both secondary schools, although secondary C reports that this is not large, does not happen in all subjects, and pupils usually catch up by the end of the year. This school has numeracy and literacy groups working across the feeder primary schools, in a direct effort to help pupils sustain their achievement throughout transition. They also meet with primary teachers and discuss every pupil transferring to their school prior to transition, including those from schools outside of the trust. Pupils send individual letters back to their primary schools in their first term, with tutor comments on their progress and how they have settled in. This two-way, thorough, exchange of information is thought to improve transition for pupils and allow them to continue learning to the best of their abilities.

This supports Evangelou *et al* (2008), who found that schools with strong links and effective collaboration had successful attainment at key stage 3.

School D ask primary schools to pass on SATs levels and sub-levels by completing a form, although it is noted that sub-levels are often not passed on. The school reports that there can be a huge difference between SATs levels passed on by primary schools and those achieved in tests taken in the first two weeks of secondary school, often up to two levels. This is thought to be due to primary schools teaching to the test, and can make pupils appear to have regressed. This indicates that, as Nicholls & Gardner (1999) suggested, secondary schools find it difficult to trust primary assessments. Pupils at school D also felt that they had regressed rather than progressed, although they felt that being put in sets for maths and English helped them, as they were not being held back by lower ability pupils.

5.3   Fears and Difficulties of Transition

Although the literature suggests that making new and keeping old friends is one of the biggest worries pupils have during transition, the results show that this is not the biggest worry for pupils at schools A and B. Only one pupil moving to school C was worried about missing friends, with 25% of pupils moving to school D not looking forward to making new friends. However, as previously mentioned, all pupils at school D made more than seven new friends following transition and 95% of pupils at school C made more than three new friends. Pupils at both schools found it easy

to make new friends and enjoyed doing this, with 20% picking this out as the most enjoyable aspect of transition.

The results show that 14% of pupils transferring to school C were worried about bullying, however, none of the pupils moving to school D mentioned this. Focus groups suggest that any bullying is dealt with appropriately by teachers, but pupils at both schools highlighted the fact that year 10 pupils continue to block their way in corridors, push them around or spray them with water. When asked what they could do about this the pupil replied, "Well, tell a teacher, but..." (Female 1, School B) and failed to finish the sentence. The pupils at school D said they preferred not to tell because, "You can get into a lot of trouble for telling..." (Female 1, School A). This supports Rudduck's (1996) view that secondary pupils find it more difficult to report bullying.

The biggest fear for year 6 pupils was getting lost, with 20% of all pupils mentioning this specifically. Pupils in focus groups said they found it difficult at first and got lost a lot but both schools had a buddy system in place to show pupils round and take them to lessons. On average it took around two weeks for pupils to find their way round, with both schools providing maps and timetables that pupils found easy to use. School D was organised by subject blocks to make it easier for pupils to find their way around and had extra staff in corridors in the first few weeks. School C assemble prior to lessons and are led to classrooms by their buddies, with one at the front and one at the back of the line, for the first few weeks. There were also

buddies present at lunchtime and pupils reported following the crowd and watching what they did.

Another pre-transition worry was travel to school, with 16% of pupils transferring to both schools reporting being nervous, scared or worried about crossing the main road. However, most pupils were excited about walking to school, particularly with friends. This is highlighted in the post-transition questionnaire, where the majority of pupils enjoy travelling to school, apart from those at school D who travel by bus and complain that it is always late or too full. Problems with buses were also prominent in this focus group, with pupils reporting missing buses because of detentions, and having to walk home.

6.   Conclusion & Recommendations

The schools in this research had extensive programmes in place to provide pupils with social and emotional support during the move from year 6 to year 7. Both secondary schools used a buddy system and made sure year 6 were visited by, or had access to, pupils from year 7 to talk about their upcoming transition. School C also issued a booklet to the new intake, written by older pupils, giving advice and information on what to do at their new school, and put pupils through emotional literacy screening prior to transfer. However, the gap, mentioned by Kegan (1982) and Compas *et* al (1995), between pupils achieving physical maturity and being awarded adult status, is exacerbated by them going from being the oldest in primary school to the youngest in secondary. This is aggravated by year 10 pupils exerting

their power over the new intake. It may be helpful to use year 10 pupils as peer mediators, as Dawrent (2008) suggests, encouraging them to support the new year 7 rather than bully them. However, this may also give year 10 pupils further power over year 7 pupils. To prevent this, it may be possible to train pupils as part of an accredited coaching and mentoring programme, with the position of peer mediator being work experience for the module. This would have the additional benefit of guiding and supporting year 10 pupils through the transition to becoming young adults.

The research appears to suggest that, for most pupils, being placed in a class with friends from primary school does not make much difference, as pupils tend to make new friends, developing this as a competency and increasing self-esteem and resilience. The secondary schools both provide opportunities for pupils to get to know one another, such as the activity days at school D, which help them to make new friends quickly and easily. Vulnerable pupils are able to transfer with a friend at both schools, or into a nurture group at school C, to give them the extra support needed at a potentially difficult time. School C are able to identify vulnerable pupils through emotional literacy screening and thorough discussions with primary school staff. These methods should be shared as good transition practice.

It appears that the performance dip has been reduced at school C, through working in conjunction with primary schools in the trust to ensure pupils sustain their achievement throughout transition. Good practice is shared among the primary schools in the trust and with the secondary school, which ensures curriculum

continuity and consistency in assessment. A more collaborative, two-way networking procedure with all schools in a trust can be shared as effective transition practice.

All schools work well to diminish the fears and difficulties of transition. Friendships are made easily, bullying is dealt with appropriately by teachers, maps and buddies are provided to prevent pupils getting lost, and travel to school, although still a worry for those who travel by bus, is less so when accompanied by friends.

Both the research and literature emphasise the beneficial effects of strong partnerships between primary and secondary schools. Yet it is important that schools extend these opportunities to pupils transferring from primary schools outside of these partnerships and ensure that trusts do not create barriers for these pupils. School C make a point of seeing each pupil as an individual and ensuring that each child, no matter where they are transferring from, receives a visit from the transition team. Although this may be more difficult for larger schools it can be shared as good practice.

Transition can be a difficult and stressful time for pupils, however, it appears that the schools in this research have developed some effective methods to help pupils increase their self-esteem and resilience through transition. By taking part in this research, these schools have demonstrated that they are ready to develop and share good practice in transition. As the literature suggests, without these processes

in place, transition can be traumatic, particularly for vulnerable pupils. In light of this,

it is arguable that sharing effective transition practice between all schools should be

top of the national agenda.

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Appendix A – Parental Consent Letter

9 January 2013

Dear Parent

Year 6 to Year 7 Transition Research

As part of a BA (Hons) in Learning and Teaching at ███ University I am undertaking some research into the transition of pupils from year 6 to year 7. Your child has been invited to take part. Participation is entirely voluntary and involves your child completing the attached questionnaire and contributing to a focus group during school time. All questionnaires will be anonymous and the research will be completely confidential. Names of pupils, staff, schools, education authorities and geographical locations will not be used. The final report will be available to the head teachers of the schools involved along with myself and ███ University.

I would be grateful if you would give permission for your child to take part by signing the tear off slip below and returning it to school along with the completed questionnaire by Friday 18 January 2013.

I am extremely appreciative of any input you can give and hope that all pupils have a seamless transition to their new schools.

Yours faithfully

███

✂ -

I hereby give permission for _____ to take part in the research project provisionally entitled "The transition experience. Are we getting it right?" by ███████████.

Signed_____ parent/guardian

Appendix B – Pre-Transition Questionnaire

Please complete and return this questionnaire to ██ █████ by Friday 18th January 2013.

1. Which secondary school did you put as your first choice to attend in September?

2. Is this the secondary school you want to go to?

   Yes ☐   No ☐

3. Who chose or influenced the choice most?

   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐
   Me   Parents/carers   Teachers   Council   Other

4. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being very much and 10 being not at all, how much are you looking forward to moving into Year 7 (please circle)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very much									Not at all

5. Is there anything in particular that you are looking forward to or not looking forward to?

6. How many times (roughly) have you been to your new school before?

   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐
   Never   1-5   6-10   More than 10

7. Do you know any pupils from other schools who will be going to the same school as you, if so roughly how many?

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

None   1-2   3-5   6-8   More than 8

8. Have you planned how you will travel to school and if so how?

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Not decided   Walk   Cycle   Bus   Car   Taxi   Other

9. How do you feel about this?

10. Are you a ███████ Trust member?

Yes ☐   No ☐   Don't know ☐

11. If yes, have you attended any trust events (film night, ice-skating, disco, etc.)?

Yes ☐   No ☐   Don't know ☐

Please feel free to add any comments below:-

Appendix C – Post Transition Questionnaire

Please complete and return this questionnaire to your class teacher along with your signed parental consent form by Friday 15th February 2013.

1. Which primary school did you attend?

2. Which secondary school do you now attend?

3. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being very much and 10 being not at all, how much did you enjoy starting Year 7 (please circle)?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very much									Not at all

4. Is there anything in particular that you enjoy or do not enjoy about Year 7?

5. How many new friends would you say you had made?

☐ None   ☐ 1-2   ☐ 3-6   ☐ More than 7

6. How do you usually travel to school?

☐ Walk   ☐ Cycle   ☐ Bus   ☐ Car   ☐ Taxi   ☐ Other

7. How do you feel about this?

8. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being happy and 10 being unhappy, how do you feel at the following times (please circle)?

Journey to school

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Happy									Unhappy

Registration

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Happy									Unhappy

Lessons

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Happy									Unhappy

Breaktime

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Happy									Unhappy

Lunchtime

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Happy									Unhappy

Journey home

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Happy									Unhappy

9. Do you feel that you were adequately prepared for your transition to year 7?

Yes ☐   No ☐   Not sure ☐

10. Is there anything you feel could be done better to prepare pupils for the move to secondary school?

Appendix D – Interview Schedule

1. How are pupils prepared / what strategies do you have in place for the transition from primary to secondary school?

2. Do Y7 teachers have the opportunity to get together with Y6 teachers from feeder primaries?

3. Are pupils put in classes/tutor groups with friends from primary school?

4. How is information on pupils (bullying, needs etc.) exchanged between primary and secondary?

5. Are pupils in year 6 given opportunities to meet with new teachers and older pupils (buddy system?) prior to transition?

6. Are pupils given orientation guidance such as maps of the school, timetables or older pupils as guides to show them to classes etc.?

7. Are bridging units used?

8. Do you have a transition policy (if so can I have a copy please)?

9. Do you find that there is a difference between attainment levels achieved at the end of KS2 and those reached in Y7?

10. Roughly how many pupils transfer from schools other than the main feeder schools?

11. Does the transition experience differ according to the school pupils are coming from?

12. Is there anything else you feel could be done to aid transition?

Appendix E - Focus Group Questions

- ➢ Arrange chairs in close circle.
- ➢ Introduce self, (███████████████, also worked at ████████ & ████████) say what doing (Research project into transition from Y6 to Y7 to make sure we are doing everything we can to make the transition successful for pupils)
- ➢ I would like to ask you about the transitions that you made in September.
- ➢ Would it be OK for me to make notes on what you say? I will not write your names, only whether you are a boy or girl and which primary school you went to.
- ➢ Please don't interrupt one another.
- ➢ Listen to what each person says.
- ➢ Speak clearly so that I have chance to write it down.
- ➢ If at any time we discuss something that is difficult for you to talk about or you want to stop for any reason, please raise your hand and let me know.
- ➢ Do you have anything that you would like to discuss in particular about moving to ████████?

1. Have you enjoyed starting year 7 or have there been difficult parts?

2. Was it easy or difficult to make new friends?

3. How do you feel about having different teachers for different subjects?

4. Are some lessons or subjects easier or harder than in primary school?

5. Do you think you have made good progress this year?

6. Is the type of work you do here the same as in primary? How is it different?

7. Can you think of examples of how something you did in year 6 helped in year 7?

Appendix F – Primary Headteacher Questionnaire

Interview Schedule

School Name: ███████████████ (please delete as appropriate)

1. How are pupils prepared for the transition from primary to secondary at your school?

2. Are Y6 teachers offered opportunities to get together with Y7 teachers to discuss pupils/schemes of work etc.?

   Yes □   No □

   If yes, what are they?

3. Are pupils consulted about which friends they would like to be in the same form as at secondary school?

   Yes □   No □

   Do you feel that this is important?

   Yes □   No □

   Why?

4. How do you exchange information about pupils with the secondary schools?

   e-mail   □
   telephone   □
   face-to-face □
   paperwork   □

5. How do you feel about this?

6. Does the experience differ according to the school they are going to?

   Yes □   No □

   If yes, how?

7. Are Y6 pupils given opportunities to visit their new secondary schools, meet new teachers and older pupils?

   Yes □   No □

If yes, how often and are these taken up?

8. Do you use or have you ever used bridging units?

Yes □   No □

If yes, were they successful?

9. Are you given feedback from the secondary schools, regarding attainment levels/how pupils settle in etc.?

Yes □   No □

If yes, what?

10. Do you have a transition policy?

Yes □   No □

11. Is there anything you feel could be done to aid transition?

Please feel free to make any further comments: