



Primary

National Strategy

Practice

Curriculum and
Standards

Seamless Transitions – supporting continuity in young children's learning

**Local Authorities,
Early Years
Practitioners &
Teachers in Key
Stage 1, Heads of
children's centres,
Headteachers and
Managers of early
years settings**

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1. Introduction

Right from the start, babies and young children manage changes in their lives on a daily basis. When small changes are supported by responsive, knowledgeable adults, children will gradually discover that their world is a safe and predictable place. As strong and competent learners, this will stand them in good stead when faced with the challenge of experiencing the bigger changes that will inevitably come their way.

These bigger changes, for many children, include moving from home to a childminder or early years setting for the first time, and a range of other transitions as they progress through the Foundation Stage and into Key Stage 1. They will respond in different ways, some with confidence, others with more apprehension, but so many adjustments are likely to have profound and long lasting effects if the importance of maintaining coherence and continuity is not well understood. Children's confidence will be enhanced when changes happen gradually, and when time is prioritised to support these transitions with sensitive planning and preparation.

One of the main recommendations from the National Federation for Educational Research (NfER) publication *A Study of the Transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1*, is that transition should be viewed as a process rather than an event:

'the process of transition may be viewed as one of adaptation. This study has shown that the best adaptation takes place where conditions are similar, communication is encouraged, and the process of change takes place gradually over time'.

NfER, March 2005

Much has happened since this report was published to raise awareness of the nature of effective transitions and the importance of providing continuity of experience for young children and their families. Funding

has been prioritised to support training, particularly in the transition from the Foundation Stage to Year 1 and many Local Authorities have now developed and published excellent guidance of their own. There is evidence that all this is having an impact and that practitioners, parents, early years settings and schools are working collaboratively to strengthen their transition practices (Ofsted, 2005).

While it is impossible to capture all the innovative work that is happening around the country, this publication aims to disseminate examples of effective practice that will stimulate professional dialogue, encourage reflection and support further training to develop seamless transitions throughout and beyond the Foundation Stage.

These materials reflect the learning journeys of the six Local Authorities participating in the Foundation Stage Transition Project between October 2004 and October 2005. Funding was provided for each to extend their work on an existing project, developing effective transition practice within the Authority. The Local Authorities were specifically chosen to illustrate different points of transition, from setting to setting, from nursery to school, and from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1, and different perspectives, strengthening inclusive practice and improving the experience for children and their families.

The Local Authority projects are all at different stages of development as evidenced in the diverse nature of these materials but they all share common principles and approaches which reinforce the NfER recommendations.



2. How to use this resource

Each of the six Local Authorities has a dedicated section on the CD with details of their project. Additional material including case studies, publications, video footage and presentations can be accessed by hyperlinks.



3. The Foundation Stage Transition Projects

Bristol

Successful transitions
- listening to parents



Starting school is a period of time that is filled with a range of emotions for both the children and their parents.

The successful transition for children from Nursery to Reception is crucial in order to enable both children and parents to feel secure in the new environment, and for children to continue to develop and learn effectively. Children and parents need time and opportunities to familiarise themselves with the school environment and to start building relationships with key members of staff.

The piece of action research detailed below focussed on the importance of listening to parents to inform practice in the transition from nursery to school.

In 2002 the Local Sure Start programme commissioned research to explore parents' perspectives on the transition from pre-nursery groups into the local Nursery School and Nursery Classes. Interviews with parents discovered that while they felt happy with the procedures for their children starting Nursery, they felt less confident about the transition from Nursery to the Reception Class, even when this was within the same school.

This led to a further study in conjunction with the local Action Zone, which aimed to capture parents' views on their children's transition to the Reception Class. This information was then used to improve practice and develop a transition policy for the six primary schools, two Children's Centres and linked early years settings within the zone.

The research focussed on a group of schools that were part of a strong, supportive network of Foundation Stage practitioners in the Success@ Action Zone, with strong links to the Local Authority Early Years Advisory Team and Sure Start Local Programme. They have found that close collaborative working between parents, Nursery and Reception practitioners, has proved to be invaluable in developing continuity for children and their parents and carers, particularly when this has been supported by headteachers and governors.

This research is documented in the Bristol section of the CD with an accompanying video which explores the impact of the changes to practice that have been made in light of the parents' recommendations.

For more information contact: Dawn Butler at Four Acres Children's Centre, Bristol Dawn.butler@barnardos.org.uk





Devon

Supporting individual approaches to transition

Devon is a large rural county with a range of provision for children to access pre-school education and care. The transitions between home and pre-school, and from pre-school to school are major stepping stones in the life of any child. For a child with specific difficulties additional considerations have to be made.

This project reflects a commitment to inclusive practice and highlights the importance of:

- building strong collaborative partnerships with parents;
- developing close multi-agency relationships with colleagues, working in health, social services and education, and
- consultation with children, respecting their views.

The Early Years team in Devon feel that it is important to 'get it right' for all children so that communication between services, as well as between placements, is effective, and that transitions become as seamless as possible. Their learning story, documented on the CD represents a gradual process, informed by feedback from the users of the service (the child, the family and other professionals), and the team's own reflective practice.

The CD captures the professional support that has been developed to strengthen inclusive practice for children and their families as they move throughout the Foundation Stage and into Key Stage 1. It emphasises

the importance of collaborative working, communication, forward planning, training and support, and includes an evaluation of the changes that have been made to practice and the impact of this new learning on all concerned.

The effectiveness of these transition practices is explored from the perspective of seven children and their families. Robert, Poppy, Katherine, Erin, Thomas, Oliver, and Oscar all started in mainstream schooling between September 2004 and September 2005.

For more information contact: Jenny Evans at Devon Local Authority
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Kirklees

Continuity - a creative orientation to learning



The focus of the Kirklees Transition Project has been to extend work on the 'Continuous Curriculum' which is being used to support the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 and into Key Stage 2 by building on the philosophy and practice already established in the Foundation Stage. It aims to encourage children to continue to develop confidence in themselves as learners through the provision of opportunities for independent learning, responsibility and evaluation of their own learning.

Transitions need to be carefully planned and reviewed, as do other aspects of school life, if they are to be successful. The documentation featured on the CD is centred on the hub setting, Linthwaite Clough Junior Infant and Early Years School. The staff at Linthwaite Clough believe that a child's journey through each phase, and from each phase to the next, should form a continuous and seamless progression.

The school's vision is 'to create confident learners with a personal vision and a developing appreciation of life'. High levels of involvement and self-esteem are seen as important for all learners, and at Linthwaite Clough the Continuous Curriculum is viewed as the ideal vehicle to deliver this, as it provides opportunities for children to develop their questioning, exploration and thinking skills throughout the school.

As children move through the school the balance gradually shifts between the Continuous Curriculum, led by the children, and the taught curriculum, led by adults – the emphasis given to each is dependent on the child's stage of development.

Activities within the Continuous Curriculum are known as Confident Creative Learning sessions. They have clearly identified cross-curricular learning objectives which are communicated to the children and can be accessed in different learning bases both indoors and outdoors, within, and occasionally outside, the school environment.

Within the Confident Creative Learning sessions children are given time and space for individual interests to be expanded upon, and therefore involvement in their own learning is maximised.

The materials on the CD illustrate the learning story from Linthwaite Clough and demonstrate how the child involvement and adult engagement observation scales from the Effective Early Learning Project (EEL) can be used to monitor the effectiveness of the Confident Creative Learning sessions. Extracts from the publication *The Continuous Curriculum, Planning for Spontaneous Play* Kirklees Education Service, 2004, are also included in this section.

For more information contact: Gail Newton
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North Somerset

Key elements of effective transition

'Points of transition are a critical time for young children and need to be managed sensitively by schools. Successful transition relies on a high degree of continuity and consistency in approach. This requires adults working with young children to have a clear understanding of the principles of the Foundation Stage and those aspects that will need to be continued into Key Stage 1'.

North Somerset Key Elements of Effective Transition, 2005

In North Somerset, the project has focussed on extending the innovative and successful work that began with the Foundation Stage Profile Transition Pilot. This brought together headteachers and teachers from Reception and Year 1 classes to develop a set of shared principles for learning and teaching distilled from the *Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage, Excellence and Enjoyment* and the National Curriculum. These principles with associated 'quality characteristics' were used as prompts to support peer observations in Reception and Year 1, and promoted continuity across the two key phases by encouraging reflection, discussion and a deeper mutual understanding of the early years curriculum and pedagogy.

The seven participating pilot schools taking part in the North Somerset Transition Project were selected to represent a range in terms of size and demographics. Two of the infant schools selected also faced the additional challenge of having mixed Year 1 and Year 2 classes.

Each of the participating schools established a 'learning team' consisting of the headteacher, Year 1 teacher and Year R teacher. Funding was provided for these Learning Teams to attend three professional development days which provided opportunities to provoke reflection on current practice, challenge assumptions, explore possibilities, and ultimately to establish curricular continuity and a consistent pedagogy. Each development day was interspersed with small-scale action research and visits to other schools.

The project culminated with the development of guidance for schools, *North Somerset Key Elements of Effective Transition*, which includes contributions from the seven participating pilot schools. This guidance has been written to guide schools in finding ways to preserve the best of Foundation Stage pedagogy while at the same time recognising that Key Stage 1 is different – without making it too different too quickly.

The CD documents the learning stories of the seven schools in the project, and includes the core principles, the peer observation pro-forma and the publication *North Somerset Key Elements of Effective Transition*, North Somerset Council, 2005.

For more information contact: Gale Bruce or Andrea Sully

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City of York

Transition Matters - from babygrow to uniform

In the City of York, Early Years practice is underpinned by a policy of 'Shared Foundation Community Partnerships'. These partnerships support close working relationships between schools and a range of linked providers from the voluntary, independent and private sectors. There are now 39 active partnerships around the city and these are beginning to include Health Visitors, Speech and Language Therapists and other services. Shared Foundation Community Partnerships provide a sound base on which to develop services that reflect the needs of individual communities and support the Government's agenda for providing extended schools beyond education and the standard school day.

Shared Foundation Community Partnerships aim to give children and their families the opportunity to access seamless, high quality care and education as they move through the Foundation Stage, irrespective of the setting they attend or the community they live in. Settings are required to work in partnership to provide this quality of education and care. The partnerships also provide a focal point for practitioners to build relationships with each other and support the development of a shared early years culture.

Many of the Shared Foundation Community Partnerships expressed an intention to improve transition at key points in a young child's life. In response to this and in order to meet the needs of practitioners, City of

York Council has, since 2001, been working with schools and settings to improve transitions for children from part-time to full-time education and from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.

Participation in the project has given practitioners opportunities to take part in a range of transition-focussed activities that meet the needs of the individual settings and the partnerships. An extensive and well received training programme has been delivered as well as in-service support to schools and settings.

The project has succeeded in raising the profile of transition, furthering policy and practice, and bringing together the work that is being done by a range of local authority services to improve continuity for young children and their families.

Information on the Shared Foundation Community Partnerships and its links to Extended Schools and Family Learning can be found on the CD, with the publication *Establishing and Developing a Local Partnership* (City of York LEA), and examples of effective transition practice, including a Learning Journal from St Mary's CE Primary School, examples of Shared Foundation Newsletters, and sample pages from the Transition Toolkit, developed by York City Council.

For more information contact: Stephanie Windsor, headteacher at St Mary's CE Primary School or Rosemary Flanagan, Early Years and Extended Schools Service stmarys.primary@york.gov.uk rosemary.flanagan@york.gov.uk



Wandsworth

Foundation Stage Continuity and Transition Project



The Continuity and Transition Project in Wandsworth has built on the work that has been developing over the past two years through events run for teachers in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

The innovative work of three schools, each with its own unique and distinctive character is documented in this project as they come together to reflect on and share practice through establishing an effective network.

An overarching aim of the project was to address the specific needs of children and families at points of transition with a focus on those for whom communication poses particular challenges, especially where children have an autistic condition or where children and families speak English as an additional language. Aspects of effective transition practice that would be particularly beneficial for these groups are then explored.

The Coram Family materials, *Listening to Young Children* have been a major influence in the work developed by the three schools and have inspired much of the effective practice.

Four themes emerged as the project evolved:

- listening to children, and involving them in the process of their learning;
- communicating effectively with parents to build partnerships;

- creating appropriate conditions for learning, and
- building a collaborative network.

These themes are bound together by the common threads of listening, reflecting and responding.

The three schools involved, Southmead Primary, Honeywell Infants and Sir James Barrie Primary are inner London schools which serve culturally, linguistically and socio-economically diverse communities. They share a strong inclusive ethos, each is distinctive in character and has a particular focus within the project enabling practitioners from a wide range of settings to find valuable and practical examples of effective transition practice.

The learning stories from each of the three schools are illustrated on the CD. The inclusion of children with autism in a mainstream setting is the focus at Southmead Primary, Honeywell Infants explores the development of curriculum provision to meet diverse needs, and the focus at Sir James Barrie Primary is on meeting the needs of children and families for whom English is an additional language.

For more information contact: Wendy Howe
whowe@wandsworth.gov.uk

4. Useful websites and publications

- DfES (2005) *A Study of the Transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1*, NFER. Available from DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham. Ref: SSU/2005/FR/013

Copies of the main report and summary are available on the Sure Start website www.surestart.gov.uk/ensuringquality/research and on the DfES website www.dfes.gov.uk/research/

- Adams, S., Alexander, E., Drummond, M.J., and Moyles, J. (2004) *Inside the Foundation Stage: recreating the Reception Year. Final Report*, London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers
- Bayley, R. and Featherstone, S. (2003) *Smooth Transitions: Building on the Foundation Stage*, Husbands Bosworth: Featherstone Education
- Bertram, T., Pascal, C., Bokhari, S., Gasper, M. and Holtermann, S. (2002) *Early Excellence Centre Pilot Programme: Second Evaluation Report 2000–2001* (DfES Research Report 361), London: DfES
- Birmingham Education Service Assessment Unit/Wendy Sutton (2003) *Making Links, Supporting Transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1*, Birmingham City Council
- Birmingham Learning and Culture Assessment Unit/Wendy Sutton (2005) *First Links, Linking the Foundation Stage Stepping Stones to the Foundation Stage Profile*, Birmingham City Council
- Fabian, H. and Dunlop, A. (2002) *Transitions in the Early Years*, London: Routledge Falmer
- Office for Standards in Education (2003) *The Education of Six Year Olds in England, Denmark and Finland: an International Comparative Study*, (HMI 1660), London: OFSTED
- Office for Standards in Education (2004) *Transition from the Reception Year to Year 1: an Evaluation by HMI*, (HMI 2221), London: OFSTED

- Office for Standards in Education (2005) *Primary National Strategy: an evaluation of its impact in Primary Schools 2004–2005*, (HMI 2396) London Ofsted
- Sammons, P., Taggart, B., Smees, R., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Elliott, K. (2003) *The Early Years Transition and Special Educational Needs (EYTSN) Project* (DfES Research Report 431), London: DfES
- Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project. A longitudinal study funded by the DfES 1997–2004*, London: DfES

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