

Thames Valley Partnership

A Positive Transition to Secondary School

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on behalf of the Thames Valley Partnership

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The mission of the Thames Valley Partnership is:
*"To promote and strengthen partnerships to reduce crime and the fear of crime,
adding value to the quality and scope of work in Community Safety".*

What's the problem?

'Children's (and parents') anxiety about practical matters'

'Stories passed from child to child - peer mentors can help sort myth from reality'

'Children with medical needs, mental health problems, learning difficulties, social problems... what happens to them at secondary school?'

'What happens to children when they move from the safe, child-centred gentle world of the primary school to the relatively hard and hostile environment of the secondary school?'

'If difficulties are picked up early enough they can be prevented from becoming worse as young people progress through the school'

This briefing paper has been prepared for those who want to change a potentially stress and anxiety laden process into one which is optimistic, creative and enjoyable for everyone. It has been written with head teachers, heads of year, form or day tutors, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs), learning support assistants (LSAs), school counsellors and youth workers in mind. The intention is to promote discussion, share good practice and consider ways forward. It is hoped that insights gained from pooling ideas will support the development of existing projects and suggest further strategies to promote good practice. Above all, this briefing paper aims to overcome the danger of doing nothing and the danger of a 'lost year' for some of our most vulnerable young people.

The projects described here are examples only, demonstrating the range of what is happening at the moment. They illustrate the close link between initiatives designed to make transition a better experience for everyone and those designed to improve the life chances of the most vulnerable.

A significant feature of these projects is their capacity to move with agility between universal and targeted provision as they progress and develop over time.

Context

The transition from primary to secondary school has always been regarded as a significant event in young people's lives. In previous generations it marked, for some, the sharp contrast between two very different kinds of education. For many, the end of primary school led not to secondary schooling, but to the search for employment. With the introduction of secondary education for all, transition was dominated by examination results, notably the 11+ exam, still a feature in some parts of the country.

With the development of comprehensive schools, liaison activities over the transfer of pupils moving from primary to secondary school broadened considerably. These activities were given further impetus by the growing emphasis on the importance of continuity in the curriculum and in teaching styles, and of the importance of understanding the pupils themselves as learners, and human beings of great diversity, potential and worth.



A recent NFER report (Schagen and Kerr, 1999) identifies three overlapping purposes for liaison activities at transfer. These are classified as:

- Marketing: encouraging primary school pupils to select certain secondary schools
- Pastoral: attempts to get to know pupils and help them settle in quickly
- Curriculum: avoiding repetition of content and improving information about pupils to help them build on prior achievement.

The same study found that the emphasis placed on these three aspects of liaison varied considerably from school to school and furthermore that interviewees in the study 'almost without exception, tended to stress the pastoral aspects of liaison.' Good liaison, in their experience, was about knowing the young people better, and giving them confidence in themselves and in the adults around them.

The Target Group

Nonetheless, in spite of the evidence of much progress and interest in this field, the Thames Valley Partnership, as a result of its recent work (1998-2000) on reducing exclusion, has identified the transition between primary and secondary school as a critical time in the lives of vulnerable young people.

These are young people who have been subject to personal and family stress of various kinds, or whose mental health has perhaps given cause for concern. Local evidence suggests that attempts to hold on to young people, rather than exclude them when their behaviour is really challenging and difficult, is being hampered by league tables, perverse funding mechanisms and the general spirit of competition between schools. Some schools may therefore be experiencing a conflict of interest between the need to recruit young people who will be a credit to them and the need to serve their whole community, including the most challenging young people. The introduction of targets for reducing exclusion and for the achievement of the lowest quartile of pupils could give a new incentive for schools to work constructively with their most vulnerable pupils, as could the evaluation of inclusion as a measure of school effectiveness. Unless, however, ways are found to support schools and exchange good practice over the care of the most vulnerable young people, teachers will feel they are being asked to undertake more than it is possible for them to achieve.

This paper is drawn from a number of projects which aim to ease the transition in various ways. From these we identified some common principles and objectives:

Principles

- integration of universal and targeted provision, with an emphasis on early intervention
- respect for children's rights
- respect for the role of the tutor as a key worker with other agencies in support of vulnerable young people
- respect for older teenagers as responsible citizens, particularly those who perhaps suffer a bad press because of problems in the past
- development of expertise, inter-personal skills and understanding of citizenship among children, young people and adults
- schools encouraged to absorb initiatives into their mainstream practice

Objectives

- to improve self esteem of students
- to reduce the stress associated with transfer from primary to secondary school
- to involve parents in school activities
- to reduce exclusions
- to improve attendance

Issues

- There are complex networks of provision and professionals involved in the projects which emphasised the importance of developing links with other agencies and with 'traditional' school transfer systems
- Effective record keeping to deepen teachers' understanding of young people they may know little about
- Time and resources to ensure that initiatives are absorbed into mainstream practice and evaluated
- Adults' perception of children and young people
- Logistical problems, such as transport, resources to support e.g. peer mentoring
- The citizenship agenda and the involvement of children in decision making over issues which affect them e.g. the Children's Parliament, the Guardian's The School I'd Like Competition (May 2001)
- Initiative fatigue

'Links' Early Intervention Service Reading

The focus of the 'Links' Early Intervention Service in Reading is on multi-agency working, early intervention and a four stage transition programme for pupils in Year 6

The 'Links' project, of which the Year 6 Transition Groups form a part, is a pilot early intervention programme initiated and funded jointly by Turner's Court Youth Trust, the Social Services and Housing Directorate and Education and Community Directorate at Reading Borough Council. It aims to establish an early intervention service for children 8-12 years attending one of the five primary schools in West Reading.

As a whole, the Links project hopes to reduce the number of children:

- requiring a statement of special educational needs because of their emotional and behavioural difficulties
- being excluded from school
- entering the 'looked after' care system

The objective is to work directly with vulnerable children in order to:

- enhance self esteem
- build life skills
- increase the likelihood of achieving a settled and successful school career
- increase family confidence and reintegration into the community

In January 1999, the project employed two part time workers, a teacher and a social worker. Initially, the workers' brief was to:

- introduce themselves and the project to other professional agencies
- define the criteria and processes of referral
- design a range of intervention packages to best meet the needs of the children

Schools and other agencies can make referrals and families can self refer. Presenting issues include, for example, family bereavement, difficulty with peer group relationships, poor school attendance, bullying, and mental ill health of parent leading to problems for the child.

The Links programme is a multi-agency project operating in the belief that a collaborative approach will provide a more efficient and effective service. Children and their families are not known to other agencies or have limited involvement with them. The project undertakes to work with them and their families for up to six months in the first instance. During this time the children, with support from project workers identify and agree issues of concern and agree as to how they will be tackled. Where appropriate, families and children are helped to develop contact with groups and agencies in their community. The issues are addressed through a range of interventions, for example, individual work with children both during and after school, after school groups which aim to improve social skills and self esteem, holiday activities and support for parents.

Among these, the Year 6 Transition groups for vulnerable pupils is to be expanded and extended to include work in secondary schools in Year 7 with pupils who had previously participated in the Year 6 Transition groups.

The Year 6 Transition programme takes place in four stages, beginning with a parents' meeting, followed by group work in school, activities in the holidays and Year 7 school visits. Activities aim to support vulnerable children during the transition period by raising self esteem and confidence through discussion, role play and group activities related to secondary school. Workers aim to act as an advocate for children and families as they find their feet in their new schools and to provide strategies to help children and families manage challenging situations and minimise conflict. In the summer holiday, children are offered a full day, a half day, and a workshop. In addition, every family is invited to a picnic. In the future, the project plans to receive referrals earlier, conduct individual work with pupils prior to the group and extend work with the families.

For further details please ring Kathryn Warner, Jane Waring or Viv Akerman on 0118 959 4208 or e-mail turnerscourt@turnerscourt.f9.co.uk

Banbury School's Buddying Initiative Banbury

Banbury School's Buddying Initiative has created a support programme for pupils at the point of transition from primary to secondary school.

This scheme was set up in 1998 with the aim of making the transition from primary to secondary school a more positive experience for Year 6/Year 7 pupils. Banbury School worked with one of their feeder schools in the 1998/1999 school year to pilot the project which involved a group of Year 10 pupils from Banbury School buddying Year 6 pupils who would be moving up to secondary school the following school year.

The buddies completed a comprehensive training programme for a day during the Spring Term in which they were taught listening skills, techniques in introduction and how to involve all the young pupils, before working with the Year 6's. The topics they covered with them included getting to know you, planning and homework, relationships and working together, and how to handle bullying.

The Year 10's work in pairs with small groups of Year 6's for 6 weeks in June/July, on one afternoon a week after school, and the Year 6's then move up to Banbury School for the final week of the summer term.

The school has undertaken a comprehensive evaluation of this pilot scheme, including questionnaires to Year 6 pupils and the parents, primary school heads, buddies and teaching staff from both schools, and has received some very positive feedback, particularly from parents. As a result of the success of the project, it was extended, in 1999/2000, to all the feeder primary schools. This involved over 100 Year 10 pupils from Banbury School and over 300 Year 6's from the primary schools. A pleasing development from the Year 1 pilot was that the primary school involved has now extended the buddying idea to its nursery school - with the older primary pupils working with the pre-reception children to help prepare them for their 'big' move into primary school.

**For further details please ring Julie Turner,
Banbury School on 01295 251451**

The Grange School Aylesbury

At The Grange School in Aylesbury, the Youth Service has played a key role in setting up a Buddying Scheme.

The Grange School Buddying Scheme was set up in June 1999 as a result of an identified need regarding the transfer of Middle School pupils into a Secondary School environment. This was a particularly relevant issue since the number of pupils at the school (around 1,400) made the transition to such a large school particularly daunting for many of the new intake. As the school has a Youth Centre on the school premises, and the Youth Worker runs the training each year, the scheme benefits from a Youth Centre 'flavour'. Prospective buddies submit their applications and C.V.'s to the school at the end of Year 9. As the scheme is always oversubscribed, there is a selection process to determine who will go forward for training. Training is provided over the summer term, and buddies meet their tutor group when the new students visit the school for the first time. Four Year 10 buddies are allocated to each Year 7 form.

On the first day of the autumn term only the Year 7's and their buddies are in school for the first part of the morning. Buddying duties consist of escorting Year 7's from lesson to lesson until they feel confident enough to find their own way round. Buddies are also trained to spot any potential difficulties or issues which may arise and report them to the relevant person in the school. Although the buddy's role tends to end in the third week of term, we often find that Year 7's come to their buddy with issues over a longer period of time. In addition, many buddies go on to become prefects in Year 11/12, for which training is given in Year 10.

The programme looks at issues such as listening skills, bullying and protective behaviours, the needs of Year 7's, Maslow's hierarchy of needs and case studies. These case studies are based upon actual situations which have arisen for buddies - they prove to be a very popular part of the course. We also look at the dangers of stereotyping and the reasons why they have chosen to be buddies. The training element of the programme combines the fun element with developmental learning and has proved very popular with young people and teachers alike.

**For further details please ring Robert Legge,
Grange Youth Centre on 01296 422091**

Lord Williams's School Thame

A local community inter-agency network for children and young people in the catchment area of Lord Williams's School, has facilitated the development of a range of initiatives designed to integrate universal and targeted provisions. These include initiatives to improve Primary to Secondary transition.

The Family-School-Community Links Inter-Agency worker.

Thame Interagency Network for Children and Young People brings together a range of practitioners from different agencies, both statutory and voluntary, whose collective experience is brought to bear on issues of pressing concern for children in the area. One of these was the need for additional support for families at points of stress or transition.

In April 1999, a grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation enabled schools in the area, in co-operation with the Network, to appoint a part time worker to support the project's four objectives.

- pupil support and learning - to work with identified pupils at times of change (for example, family distress or bereavement) and transfer (for example, moving from primary to secondary school)
- training - to suggest improvements the schools might make to reduce the effect such changes have on children's achievements, for example, setting up after school provision in primary schools for present and former pupils, extending opportunities for student mentors to work alongside the Family-School-Community worker
- support for teachers and parents - to develop a parenting initiative in the area, facilitating a support group for parents of children with special needs, and to provide support for parents and teachers concerned about the emotional and behavioural difficulties of children and young people
- successful inter-agency practice - to enable practitioners to work together to provide a holistic network of support for children and their families.

The initiative has successfully identified and supported some extremely vulnerable people and their families who would otherwise have been excluded or have dropped out of school.

The project has also been successful in supporting and promoting initiatives, already in place, designed to benefit all children at times of transition in the area. These include:

Summer School - arranged for Year 6 pupils in the holiday preceding transfer, and held at the Lower School campus. It is staffed by Lord Williams's school teachers and sixth form students, many of whom are already involved in mentoring within the school.

Year 7 Team Building Days - which take place early in the Autumn term, off site, and provide an opportunity for tutor and tutor group to get to know each other in an informal setting, engaging in team building activities. This is staffed by teachers, sixth form mentors, the school counsellor, the Family-School-Community Links worker and youth workers. This is universal provision but provides an opportunity for early identification of difficulties, which can be appropriately supported in later work.

Peer Mentoring Scheme - the previous, relatively small scale, peer mentoring scheme was extended with the help of a grant from Barclays New Futures (£7,000 over two years). Sixth form mentors receive training and ongoing support and work over the whole school year. This scheme has been extended, with the support of the Family-School-Community Links worker, to enable mentors to work (usually once a week over a year) in primary schools with Year 6 pupils, getting to know them and assisting them with the transition to secondary school. When the mentors become aware of particularly vulnerable pupils, they can immediately call on the support of the Family-School-Community Links worker. The scheme is being further extended with Year 9 students, on the Lower School site, mentoring younger pupils.

After School Provision - a further development is the setting up of after school provision in one of the village primary schools, staffed by the Link worker with the help of sixth form mentors living in that village. It is hoped that as funding becomes available, this can be extended to other village communities in the Lord Williams's catchment area.

The intention, overall, has been to integrate universal and targeted provision, to facilitate the work of all agencies involved with children in the area, to involve and support older students in the care and education of younger children and to develop a sense of community, capability, responsibility and mutual support.

For further details, please ring Jane Harrison on
01844 210510.

'Close To Home' Project

Milton Keynes

The Close to Home project, which supports transition in Milton Keynes, uses ICT and peer mentors to introduce pupils to their new school through the development of a specially created web site and system of personal 'mini-weblets'.

This project aims to support groups of students at times of increased vulnerability so that they and their families are engaged in and recognise the value of education. A number of possible project elements were identified e.g. key skills, anger management and self esteem, peer mentoring website, an anti-smoking initiative, arts residency, sports events, summer scheme, racial equality/ equal opportunities, drama workshop. Of these, a peer mentoring scheme 'See you at our New School' is described here. In this project, ICT is used as a tool to engage pupils with their new school. The aim is to assist pupils in the transition from one school to another by pro-actively addressing issues that may affect them, with the support of other young people.

A specially created web site which is developed in conjunction with all partners is central in providing information and the link to the pupils' new school, with pupils, teachers and external organisations all involved in developing the content of the site. The web site integrates 'chat room' technology so young people in Year 7 can make contact with their peer mentors in a structured way. Peer mentors are identified so that they can support the 'new' pupils during the transition period. This involves participation (out of school hours) in a structured accredited training course before they make contact. This training focuses on boundaries, commitment, issues of confidentiality and equality and gives them time to think more about the aims of the project. The programme also explores other avenues related to the Connexions service that young people may want to pursue after their involvement with this project finishes e.g. Peer Advisor roles. Peer mentors are themselves supported by an adult mentor who goes through a shorter training programme.

Year 7 pupils and peer mentors make initial contact through the web site by creating personal 'mini-weblets' which share information about themselves and the new school. Peer mentors each take a level of responsibility for 'looking after' the new pupil for the first 3-4 weeks into the September term, inducting the new young person into the school and ensuring s/he is settling in and is therefore better equipped to deal with problems. Further objectives planned for this project are:

- to provide a web facility for the schools to share information with parents
- to develop opportunities for parents to 'come on board' by the young people hosting a presentation and 'come and try it' evening which explains the project
- to produce a web site written by young people for young people
- to tie this project into other transition projects such as pre-school visits, parents' evenings etc.
- to reduce anxiety and stress of transition by addressing issues young people may face in a pro-active way
- to explore issues of bullying and racism in a specially written training programme
- to work with staff and adult mentors in delivering a training which creates a sound framework to assist and support peer mentors
- to explore 'spin off' projects which could benefit participating schools i.e. young people developing a school web site or schools IT support needs being addressed
- to accredit the peer mentoring process so young people receive recognition for their involvement
- to explore follow on projects which peer mentors can be participate in.

For further details please ring Tim Read on 01908 368268
or Paul Oxborough on 01908 312367

The Year 7 Transition Scheme at Beechwood School Slough

The Year 7 Transition Scheme at Beechwood School, in Slough, has rooted its initiative firmly in the area of curriculum and staff professional development.

The project, begun in September 2000, is still in its early stages in this urban school characterised by a high proportion of very vulnerable young people. The aim is to recreate in the secondary school an environment which has, for the most vulnerable children, some at least, of the characteristics of the typical primary school. This means securing a well differentiated curriculum, child-centred teaching methods and style, additional resources and continuity of support which attends to the social and emotional needs of the children as a priority. Accordingly, Year 7 has been organised to include, in its otherwise mixed ability teaching and tutor groups, a group of high achievers, and a small group of 15 children with special educational needs. Five of these have statements of SEN. This group is taught together for 18 out of their 25 lessons per week and all these lessons have excellent support from learning support assistants who contribute to the sense of security of the group as a whole, and maintain continuity as the different subject teachers come and go. In addition, some members of the group have English and Maths lessons with a specialist teacher for children with specific learning difficulties.

A key feature of this group's curriculum, is regular input from a Drama therapist to work on raising the pupils' self esteem. In Year 7 there is additional support from a member of the LEA's Behaviour Support Team, who is able to offer certain named students support for one hour per week over a 6 week period. This solution focused work is augmented, where appropriate, with drama therapy. For the extremely troubled, there is access to a newly opened facility known as The Link, an inclusion unit to which students may refer themselves, or where they can be referred, rather than risk exclusion or truancy. This unit is staffed full time and students, while getting on with their work, can also receive support for their social and emotional needs.

For the future, Beechwood School hopes to repeat the experiment with next year's Year 7 and to extend it into Year 8. The school would like to increase the range of its activities to include for example, coffee mornings for parents with opportunities to meet with e.g. Educational Social Workers and Educational Psychologists, and, for teachers working with vulnerable students, opportunities for curriculum and staff training. A particular ambition is to give the whole of Year 7 some residential experience. Although it is early days for the project, it has dramatically reduced the exclusion rate among Year 7 students and other benefits can be expected to develop from this.

For further details please ring Carol Thompson on 01753 520473

Future Developments

The projects described here demonstrate the range and originality of the work in this area to care for young people in transition. There are also encouraging signs that the good practice initiated by the original schemes is becoming embedded in the normal routines of the school year. The following are ways in which we may be able to help to maintain the momentum for existing projects and to assist those wishing to enter the field. We need your views and guidance so please use the fax back form overleaf to let us know what you are doing and how we can help.

- A conference to disseminate good practice, discuss the issues raised in this paper and the practicalities of organising transition schemes
- The development of an online 'transition information exchange'
- Buddies' conference
- Seminar series on specific aspects of transition e.g. training for tutors/LSAs, evaluation techniques, ICT, peer mentoring, curriculum issues, working with parents/carers, developing community networks
- Pump-priming funding of up to £500 to help you get things off the ground.
- Ideas for class work/lesson plans in preparation for transition
- Inclusion in our Schools in Action Project

Further Reading

Madge, N. (2000) 9 - 13 The Forgotten Years? London: National Children's Bureau

Schagen, S. and Kerr, D. (1999) Bridging the Gap? The national curriculum and progression from primary to secondary school Slough: NFER

Smith, D. (2000) Smoothing the Transfer for Pupils with Learning Difficulties Tamworth: NASEN

Faxback

In order to help us help you we invite you to respond on the form below.

Name/School:Tel No:

What is your current practice?

.....

What do you consider to be the main issues?

.....

.....

How can the Thames Valley Partnership help?

.....

.....

We have copies of lesson plans on transition. Would you like a copy? Yes/No

Do you support the idea of a conference, and please say what time of year would suit you best?

.....
Please fax this page to Patsy Townsend at
The Thames Valley Partnership on 01844 202008

With thanks to:

**The Equitable
Charitable Trust**

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