TRANSITION

What do we mean by transition?

When ensuring the most effective organisation of transition, in collaboration with your colleagues and with those in associated schools or colleges, first ensure that all are agreed on a definition.

INTRODUCTION

Transition defines the point at which pupils pass from one educational institution to another, when they have reached a certain age and/or have concluded one phase and are beginning the next.

The most common point of transition is that at which pupils pass from primary to secondary school, from Year 6 to Year 7 and from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. There are, of course, other points of transfer, for example at age 12 or 13, where a three-tier system operates, and at the age of 16, when students may move on to a sixth form college or a college of further education. Whatever the point of transfer, the issue of continuity is of paramount importance. It has been recognised as such for many decades, but the evidence is that many schools do not have effective systems to ensure it.

Some 28 years ago, the ORACLE project, a large-scale longitudinal study, was in mid-stream, and one of its strands involved a study of 100 children during their final year in primary school and their first year in their next school, be it secondary or middle. The evidence which emerged suggested that, generally speaking, children lose ground on changing school. It might reasonably be expected that the later introduction of the National Curriculum would go a long way towards correcting this tendency. After all, a common curriculum, with consecutive key stages, was by its very nature a powerful instrument for cohesion. In 1990, an NFER study took as its theme this point, but recognised at the outset the need for a caveat. 'The National Curriculum now provides a single framework for compulsory schooling. It cannot, however, be assumed that the NC framework will by itself ensure continuity across the 5-16 age range….the provision of a 5-16 curriculum will ultimately

depend on the ways in which schools and LEAs manage curriculum links across school phases.'

Nearly a decade later, NFER carried out a detailed study which was reported in 'Bridging the Gap? : the national curriculum and progression from primary to secondary school' (1999) . In the period between these two studies the end-of-key stage tests had taken effect, along with the publication of the results. Again it might have been expected that these would have reinforced planning for continuity and the practice of seamless learning. However, 'Bridging the Gap?' concluded that 'primary data is little used in secondary schools to support individual progression. It suggests that relatively little has changed in recent years.'

WHY IS TRANSITION AN IMPORTANT FOCUS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED AND TALENTED PUPILS?

It should be clear from the outset that continuity in teaching and learning, and in pastoral care, is of equal importance for all pupils, irrespective of ability. Children's strengths and needs should never be lost sight of, and the programme of providing for them should be an uninterrupted process. Where gifted and talented pupils are concerned, there is the added dimension that there must be no break in the progressive development of their particular abilities, and above all no regression to work which is easier than that of which they are capable.

A useful reminder that continuity is not always achieved occurs in a review carried out by Suffolk local authority in 1996. This found that pupils who had achieved level 4 in the Key Stage 2 tests in their primary schools were given tasks of level 2 standard after arriving in their new school. Some notion of differences in perception can be gleaned from the remarks of secondary school teachers quoted by McCallum in her 1996 study; for example, 'We don't talk the same language – levels 3 and 4 don't mean the same thing at primary and secondary – so TA (*teacher assessment*) levels are regarded suspiciously.'

This lack of close co-operation also emerges in the findings of Ofsted's survey of transition, published in 2002 with the title 'Changing schools: An evaluation of the effectiveness of transfer arrangements at age 11'. The sample was a small one, with eight local authorities and a total of 32 primary schools and 16 secondary schools, but the study had the advantage of an additional dimension. This was the government's new Key Stage 3 Strategy, one of whose main objectives was to improve progression across the key stages. It took effect in September 2001, and four of the eight LEAs visited by Ofsted had in fact been involved in the pilot exercise. One focus of the survey was the management of the transfer programme and pupils' induction into Year 7. The inspectors reported that 'The secondary schools were not building well enough on what their Year 7 pupils had achieved in English and mathematics in Year 6. They generally did not know, in sufficient detail, what their new

pupils could do, and they had not set targets for improving attainment during Year 7'. Since then the government has introduced the notion of a 'condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum', of which Phase 1 was introduced in 2003 and Phase 2 in 2004. The condensed curriculum occupies two rather than three years, and is open to students able to accomplish it. An up-to-date account of this can be found in 'Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement, a condensed Key Stage 3: Designing a flexible curriculum. 2006 update.' This urges that schools introducing a condensed curriculum should ensure 'that they choose carefully the subjects and pupils for whom a condensed curriculum is likely to be of benefit.' The advantages for able pupils in particular are clear to see.

On 3 July 2002 the then Minister for School Standards endorsed transition units in mathematics and English, which had been produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Their purpose was to ensure that:

- pupils experience a lesson structure they are familiar with and understand
- there is a consistency in teaching approach that will help pupils to respond to new people in new surroundings
- pupils are able to build on their early successes and show what they know, understand and can do in the context of the work they did in Year 6
- teachers are better informed about pupils' strengths and weaknesses and can use the lessons to confirm their assessments and plan teaching programmes that meet the needs of their pupils
- there is greater continuity and progression and less repetition of work.

These are all admirable aims, and the QCA's 'bridging units' have been used to good effect to fulfil them. Indeed, some schools and local authorities have produced their own.

The Summer School programme for gifted and talented pupils makes the point that there should be 'a particular focus on transition' (www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/**gifted**and**talented**/guidanceandtraining/**summer**schoolguidance/). Of course, gifted and talented pupils can benefit not only from these particularised Summer Schools but from the many that local authorities organise for all pupils about to transfer to the next phase. Some offer a generous menu. One authority, for example, provided 12 in one summer, of which three were designed for the gifted and talented. The others, open to all, consisted of five focusing on numeracy, three on literacy, and one on science. In the last of these, primary school teachers learned alongside their pupils in the use of control equipment and were then supplied with the same data logging equipment to use in their classrooms in subsequent years.

WHAT MIGHT WE DO IN SCHOOL?

The most obvious requirement of good transition arrangements is a rich relationship between a secondary school and its partner primary schools. The intellectual and social development of every pupil has to take on the character of a shared goal, with a focus on a personalised education throughout the

school years. It is not enough to state the goal, and to pledge to subscribe to it. The goal must be explored from every angle, and every member of staff of all the schools needs to understand in detail the agreed means of fulfilling it.

The data passed on from primary to secondary school should not simply comprise the results of National Curriculum tests and teacher assessments but should include such material as curricular targets and illustrative examples of work. The latter are especially important in the case of gifted and talented pupils, since first-hand evidence of what they are capable of achieving has greater impact than merely numbers on a page. Where primary and secondary colleagues teach together, their expectations of these pupils can be reviewed through a shared experience, which commonly means that expectations are raised.

The coordinator for the gifted and talented has an important part to play in the school's actions to ensure continuity of learning. He or she should be a key member of a compact working party made up of teachers from the secondary and primary schools. Within the general context, the coordinator should be a continual source of advice on ways in which developing the abilities of the gifted and talented can be an unbroken and progressive process. This is not, of course, to suggest that he or she will contribute only to this aspect of transfer. The coordinator is in a strong position to propose initiatives which will have equal benefit for all pupils

There is a growing number of such initiatives, many of them devised by schools in partnership, often helped by the local authority. Most common are classroom observation, inter-school visiting, tracking individual pupils, and exchange of teachers. There is also the practice of setting up programmes of study which start in the last term of Year 6 and are continued without break in Year 7.

- One example is a partnership project on English, where the primary schools begin the agreed work on text level features and writing styles. The pupils take their books and other materials with them when they go on to secondary school and continue the work with their new teachers, whom, of course, they already know through the regular contacts between the schools.
- In another example, the secondary school welcomes its new Year 7 with an Inductive Skills programme which occupies the whole of their first month in school, with their Year 6 teachers fully involved. There are activities focused upon a variety of subjects, with the use of Successmaker Software, and such experiences as 'peer mediation' workshops. The pupils, 300 in all, also enjoy workshops by visiting writers and dance companies, and a number of out-of-school activities.
- A third example is where a secondary school and its partner primary schools devised an ICT extension programme across Years 6 and 7. Pupils in Year 6, using the secondary school's facilities and working with its teachers and with their own teachers, develop their skills in multimedia, PowerPoint presentations, spreadsheets, and control in design technology.

- Yet another example is that of a partnership which consists of a large secondary school, five primary schools, and a nursery school. The partnership's Literacy Continuity Group worked out a programme of common action on standards, expectations, marking, moderation, and teaching approaches, and a corresponding mathematics group did the same. Other partnerships in the authority devised projects for other subjects, such as 'KS 2/3 Continuity in music', and one set up a 'Cross-phase poetry project.' The teachers engaged in these activities posed themselves some searching questions, for example the following, which exercised the mathematics group: 'More children are likely to be able to use their skills to gain level 6 in the SATs extension paper. What does this tell us about the way that more able children are able to interpret problems and apply their skills without having been taught the Key Stage 3 syllabus?'

These are just a few illustrations of what can be achieved with imagination and resolve. Another good source of examples is the website of the project on the 'Impact of Transfer and Transition on Pupil Progress', at Cambridge University.

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