



Introduction

The aim of this booklet is to examine how we as educationalists may improve the transition experience for children. Early school life should be enjoyable, fulfilling and exciting. However, it can be daunting for children moving into Year 1 (who are used to a Pre-School environment). We face various challenges in helping children build successfully and coherently on their past experiences, as they move between their early school years.

Research¹ has found that 'many pupils' experience dips in progress and motivation at transfer or transition'. It has also been found that the change of curriculum content and style of teaching can play a significant part in difficulties associated with transition². This may be attributed to moving from a less formalised, child-directed and play-oriented approach in the Reception Year to a more formal and subject based one with less time for child-initiated learning in Year 1.

Evidence suggests that it is likely that a combination of:

- effective communication between teachers on each side of the transition,
- parental engagement,
- a thorough induction programme, and
- a focus on both continuity and progression in pastoral and curricular content

may help sustain pupil progress and improve their experience of transition³.

We face various challenges in helping children build successfully and coherently on their past experiences, as they move between their early school years

Mount Pleasant Primary School in Dudley, West Midlands, has been examining this issue in practice through 'action research'. Working with the DfES Innovation Unit, Gail Bedford, the then Headteacher, drew together nine other heads. Together we represent the various types of early years settings.

In order to achieve our goal of improving this transition experience, our group had to examine how the transition experience impacts on children's learning, and how we might adequately address the Year 1 child's developmental needs. We soon began to realise the many commonalities we shared, both identifying what could be changed to ease children's transition, and how we have so far put certain strategies into place to address this.

This booklet is a list of examples and ideas from our schools. Included are our 'Key Challenges', which we hope will stimulate and inspire you to join us in creating a positive and successful transition experience for all children.

The Reception – Year 1 Transition Group of Heads



Creating a successful transition for all children: how we've done it

When reflecting on the many examples of good practice, the group considered that a successful transition experience for children, teachers and families was determined by three key areas:

1. The induction programme and nature of year-to-year links
2. The level of parental engagement
3. The style and content of teaching and learning

Below is a list of practical suggestions that we have found to be successful in the schools we have worked alongside.

1. The induction programme and nature of year-to-year links
 - The appointment of a key member of the early years' team to act as a 'transition link co-ordinator' between Reception Year and Year 1.
 - A close working relationship between Reception Year and Year 1 to share expertise and raise awareness, including:
 - (i) Good use of data to enhance the development of the child's 'Profile'.
 - (ii) Maintenance of the friendship or family group culture from Reception Year to Year 1
 - A structured programme involving children from Reception Year spending time in a year 1 classroom with their new teaching team. This would be undertaken during the last month of the Reception Year Summer Term and would include identifying resources that pupils will be using during the following year.

At Mount Pleasant Primary School, all parents are invited to work alongside their child for a half-day session at least once each term

2. Parental engagement

- Parents and family members are encouraged to become actively engaged with their child's learning.
- Clear and transparent information is given to parents about the curriculum content of each year.
- Families are invited to meet with the new Year 1 teaching team in the new learning environment before the end of the Summer Term.
- Regular parent-teacher meetings or workshops to discuss literacy, numeracy, creativity, ICT or behaviour management amongst other factors.
- Effective use of Information Technology to engage parents in dialogue around their child's progress.

Engaging parents for effective learning

At Mount Pleasant Primary School all parents are invited to work alongside their child for a half-day session at least once each term. Parents are managed in groups of six and briefed by the teacher on the content of the lessons they will be observing and their expectations of the visit.

They spend their time alongside their child, who takes the leading role in explaining the learning agenda for their session.

In conclusion, parents are asked to complete short questionnaires which help provide an insight into the education experience of their child, their child's ability and their growing confidence in supporting their child's learning and development.



3. The style and content of teaching and learning
 - The creation of a suitable outdoor learning environment in Year 1, offering opportunities for exploration and communication through play.
 - The re-introduction of topic where possible, moving towards an integrated thematic approach, we consider to be more relevant and accessible for the young child. This may be implemented for each morning or afternoon session. Through this we may be able to more successfully integrate the Foundation and Key Stage 1 curriculum.
 - An opportunity for child initiated learning that motivates and empowers the learner.
 - Continuing evaluation to include use of assessment data from the previous class and early child observations in the new school year to inform planning for teaching and learning.

Developing a seamless approach for teaching and learning

At Mount Pleasant Primary School a 'Team Teaching' is used throughout the school. The yearly admission of 50 pupils creates a cohort which remains together throughout their primary school careers. The school building has been adapted to support the creation of year areas from Nursery through to Year 6. A minimum of 2 teachers and 1 Teaching Assistant completes the Year Team.

The team plans jointly, giving shared responsibility and accountability to all 'members'. The team agrees joint priorities and chart pupils' progress on a planning wall. Collaborative planning and assessment are crucial in tracking and encouraging each child's progress.

How do we better understand how a child feels about their own learning?

Over to you: addressing the key challenges

We identified Key Challenges that have focused our work, informed our thinking and shaped our attempts to ease transition difficulties from Reception Year to Year 1.

We hope you find them a useful stimulus for professional debate as you address similar issues in your own context.

- (a) How do we develop teaching strategies that are exciting, challenging and appropriate? The challenge in Year 1 should be responsive to each child's needs, not compartmentalise their learning.
- (b) By maintaining a more formal approach in the mornings and a topic-based approach in the afternoons, are we restricting the child's developing sense of becoming an independent learner?
- (c) How do we better understand how a child feels about their own learning? Do we give them time to reflect on what they are doing and the opportunity to articulate their thoughts?
- (d) How do we create a culture of self-esteem that enables both teachers and learners to challenge themselves, become risk takers and confidently embrace new experiences?
- (e) By changing the Year 1 experience are we simply deferring the problems currently experienced in Year 1 to Year 2?



- (f) How do we actively involve parents and carers with their child's learning and development?
- (g) Acknowledging that we do not exist in isolation but are part of a local group of schools with parent and community expectations, we need to develop a school self-evaluation programme that has professional rigour. How can we assess children's progress in order to inform teaching in a way that does not inhibit children's access to a broad and balanced learning experience?
- (h) How do we work with the constraints of the physical environment and with available finances? We must encourage staff to use the space creatively, ensure availability of funding that would support the changes we would make and maintain enough appropriately trained staff.
- (i) Ultimately, we need to be clear what we believe each child should gain or experience by the end of KS1. How, in our individual settings, do we plan to provide that?

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**In conclusion:
giving you the
opportunity
to engage in
dialogue around
these issues and
challenges**

A whole school culture must value the individual and each individual must feel valued. As leaders of learning we must provide an environment that motivates, inspires and challenges each child. We should make assessment pertinent to the child's needs. We should encourage a willingness to innovate, change, share practice with our colleagues and look for ways of developing current practice if we feel it is not sufficiently addressing the needs of every child.

If you would like to share your own successful practice, respond to any of the challenges highlighted, or talk to practitioners working in a similar environment to you, get in touch with us via our website at:

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit

You may also wish to consult the Qualifications and Curriculum Authorities' website for details of curriculum content for all school years and information on the School Profile:

www.qca.org.uk

Gail Bedford is an Education Consultant who supports the Primary School learning. Read more of her work at

www.gailbedford.com

Footnotes

1. Galton et al., (2003)
2. Ofsted (2004) and Sanders (2005)
3. Galton et al. (2003), Ofsted (2004) and Sanders (2005)

The authors of this booklet are a group of headteachers who have been examining what happens when pupils move from the Reception Year to Year 1. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department for Education and Skills, we are publishing them in the interests of stimulating debate.



Reception to Year 1 Transition: The Child's Experience