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National Foundation for Educational Research

Transition from Primary to Secondary School:
Current Arrangements and Good Practice in Wales

Final Report

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Acknowledgements

Glossary of terms used in the report

Transition: the movement of pupils from KS2 to KS3 and the procedures associated with it.

Pyramid of schools: a 'pyramid' of schools is the secondary school and the primary schools which would normally feed into that school. This is often based on geographical location although it can also refer to certain types of schools, for example a Welsh-medium secondary school and the primary schools which feed into it.

Cluster of schools: a group of schools working together, often based on the structure of a pyramid of schools.

Catchment area: the area which a school serves, as designated by LAs.

Progression: pupils develop academically and personally from year to year and from one key stage to the next in a way which builds on what has already been achieved.

Continuity: academic and pastoral arrangements are made in a way which ensures progression. Pupils' past experiences and knowledge are taken into account when planning provision for them.

1. Introduction

Transition from primary to secondary school is acknowledged as a key issue in educational policy in Wales and elsewhere. Recent research has examined various aspects of transition, including the development of curriculum links and pastoral support for pupils.

This report presents the findings from a research project sponsored by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to explore evidence of good practice in transition in Wales.

This chapter describes the background of the research and outlines the structure of the report.

1.1 The educational context

The issue of transition

The importance of effective and appropriate arrangements for the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary schools as a means of ensuring curriculum continuity and progression in pupils' education is now widely recognised as a crucial factor in school improvement. The research published in the area reflects its importance in the educational policy debate in the United Kingdom.

Schagen and Kerr (NFER, 1999) examined the issue of continuity and progression in the context of the National Curriculum and its emphasis on curriculum continuity. Their research examined how transition in the National Curriculum was affected by issues such as open enrolment and the lack of a tradition of cooperation between schools in cross-phase projects. They found that practice in some aspects of the transition process had improved considerably following the introduction of the National Curriculum, especially in terms of pastoral arrangements, and in the ways schools marketed themselves where there was competition for pupils. Even so, problems were identified where secondary schools received pupils from a large number of

primary schools, due in part to the practical difficulties of working with so many feeder schools.

Schagen and Kerr (NFER, 1999) found that curriculum links between schools were weaker than the pastoral arrangements. There were significant variations in the extent to which cross-phase projects had been developed in different pyramids of schools. Cross-phase teaching was limited because of lack of resources. At the same time significant differences were found in the amount and type of information which was sent from primary to secondary schools and in the way in which it was used.

Mann (EMIE, 1997) refers to the concern that pupils lose momentum as they enter the secondary school and the way the National Curriculum's design sought to address continuity. His research also recognises that despite this emphasis in the National Curriculum, the issue remains to be resolved. Similar conclusions are drawn by Galton *et al.* (2000) who argue that despite its emphasis on continuity, the National Curriculum has had few positive effects on transfer arrangements between primary and secondary schools in England. They noted that: '*Although the intention of those who created the National Curriculum was to ensure continuity between the various key stages, few teachers feel that the links are satisfactory*'.

Mann (1997) refers to the body of evidence which maintains that LAs have a key role in developing strategies for transfer of pupils but notes that the extent to which they are able to do so varies. His research sought to highlight examples of good practice which included:

- joint curriculum projects across the two phases
- joint curriculum projects involving more than one curriculum area
- agreed policies and practices in teaching and learning
- co-ordination of materials and teaching styles.

Even so, Schagen and Kerr (NFER, 1999) found that the role of LAs varied significantly and that although some wanted to play a more central role they were prevented from doing so because of resource constraints. According to some headteachers, this meant that little could be expected of the LAs although some headteachers also believed that LAs should play a more pro-active role.

Galton *et al.* (2000), in an examination of particular strategies to improve transition to secondary schools, raised doubts about some of the practices which have been introduced. For example, they refer to the adoption of primary school teaching methods during the first year of secondary school and clustering certain subjects together in 'foundation' teaching and cite the evidence of the ORACLE survey (1975-1980) and subsequent studies which question the efficiency of some of these strategies.

Furthermore, they note that pressures within schools often mean that procedures are not followed (Galton et al. 2000). For example, they suggest that information forwarded from primary schools is not used effectively in secondary schools and that other priorities take precedence: '*Faced with the increased costs of visiting more schools, it is not surprising that efforts have been concentrated on ensuring that the move to "big school" causes as little stress as possible and that children with "special problems" are catered for.*'

Galton et al. (2000) also found that in many secondary schools '*the head of year's role is mainly a pastoral one and s/he may be concerned that any efforts to promote greater curriculum continuity on his or her part might be regarded as interference by heads of subject departments*'. They conclude that '*There is little incentive, therefore, for the subject teachers to draw up teaching programmes that take account of the information passed on by the feeder schools*'.

Moreover, other research questions whether the focus on the transition from primary to secondary schools is diverting attention from other equally serious problems. Doddington *et al.* (1999), note the 'dip' in performance of pupils in the middle years of both the primary and the secondary phases of education while Demetriou *et al.* (2000) refer to the need to examine transition within schools, especially secondary schools, rather than concentrating solely on the entry and exit years. Their work devoted considerable attention to the effect of de-motivation in Year 8 and they draw on evidence that factors such as peer influence and the onset of adolescence have a greater impact on pupil performance than any arrangements made by the schools.

Transition policies in Wales

Education policymakers in Wales have recognised the importance of transition. During the research which led to the '*Narrowing the Gap*' report for

the National Assembly for Wales, a number of LAs said that urgent attention should be given to the issue of continuity between the primary and the secondary phases of education in order to identify good practice. It was felt that this would be an important contribution to:

- Ensuring academic achievement.
- Ensuring the continuity of pastoral care.
- Ensuring continuity in terms of language, policy and practice.

Transition's importance was recognised in the Education Act, 2002 (Estyn, 2004b) and was seen as a key feature of the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to raising standards at KS3 in ways which built on achievement in primary schools. Estyn (2004b) noted one survey undertaken by an LA in Wales which noted that '*Key Stage 3 is the time when the tendency towards disaffection either begins, accelerates or is prevented*' (cited in Estyn, 2004b). In 2004-05 the Welsh Assembly Government consulted a range of stakeholders about proposals that would '*require maintained secondary schools and their feeder primary schools to establish a plan to facilitate the transition of pupils from primary to secondary school at the end of Year 6*' (WAG, 2005).

At the same time, Estyn and other stakeholders produced advice and guidance to support schools with this work. In January 2004 Estyn, together with ACCAC, the Welsh Assembly Government and other stakeholders (the Basic Skills Agency and BBC Wales) published *Moving On... Effective Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3* (Estyn 2004a). This sought to build on the cooperation between ACCAC and BBC Wales which had developed videos and booklets to support basic skills at KS3.

Progress in addressing the issue

Estyn (2004a) acknowledged the need to improve performance at KS3 through a range of measures including:

- improving continuity in teaching and learning
- creating more opportunities for teachers to observe the work of colleagues teaching other phases
- encouraging secondary schools to build on good practice in developing whole-school approaches to literacy and numeracy evident in primary

schools, including the use of catch-up programmes (such as those supported by the BSA's Strategic Intervention Grants Programme)

- planning schemes of work in secondary schools to take account of the teaching and learning that has taken place in primary schools
- developing bridging units begun in KS2 and completed in KS3
- ensuring effective transfer of data from primary to secondary schools and maximising its use
- ensuring appropriate methods to support the personal and learning needs of pupils with SEN when they moved from primary to secondary school.

In a baseline review of transition arrangements, Estyn noted *'Many families or 'clusters' of primary schools and their related secondary school(s) have good links, developed over a number of years. These links ensure that pupils are socially well prepared for transfer and feel secure in their new school'* (Estyn 2004b).

Some schools had also piloted changes to the way in which the KS3 curriculum was organised (such as reducing the number of teachers who taught pupils in Year 7 and reducing the number of room changes), and enhancing the role of form tutors, for example through mentoring programmes with pupils in Year 6.

The use of data to inform teaching in the secondary school was advocated by Estyn (2004b) who noted that '*Compared with a few years ago, primary and secondary schools now share more information about individual pupils' achievements and attainment and the contributory factors, such as attendance and behavioural difficulties or family and social issues. Where primary and secondary schools have effective arrangements to do this, secondary teachers start teaching at the right level for pupils at the beginning of Year 7. Teachers do not waste valuable teaching time finding out information that is already available about their pupils' needs*'. However, it was also found that the amount of data passed on to secondary schools and its usage varied.

Planning was identified by Estyn (2004b) as an essential ingredient in effective transition and found good practice where '*joint policies include a clear statement of the arrangements*' for transition.

Estyn (2004a) noted that '*Most progress* [in improving transition] *is made where there is a well-planned strategy to improve transition in the school development plan. Some primary and secondary schools have developed joint plans for the purpose'.* Although recognising that organising transition was easiest in areas '*where primary school pupils go to the same secondary school and where secondary schools receive pupils from a relatively small number of primary schools'* even so it noted that there were still benefits from closer working where the pattern of transition was '*more complex*'. They found evidence of good practice where:

- all staff were involved in the process
- there was a strong commitment from senior managers and the process was led by a designated member of staff with senior status in a school.

Estyn (2004a) also drew attention to the development of cross-phase programmes such as *Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE) and Cognitive Acceleration in Mathematics Education (CAME),* and it highlighted examples where ICT was used to support teaching and learning in secondary schools in a way which built on pupils' familiarity with it in primary school.

Estyn (2004b) and ACCAC (2004) emphasised the need to build on good practice in developing pupils' thinking skills and the use of assessment for learning. They highlighted the need for this to be done in ways which informed the planning of teaching and learning and took account of the need for continuity and progression from primary to secondary school.

Advice and guidance on how to develop effective bridging units were published by ACCAC (2004) in conjunction with the Welsh Assembly Government and Estyn. This identified the key criteria which such units should contain. These included:

- clear learning objectives that were agreed by both the primary and secondary school
- linking learning in primary schools to that in secondary schools but adopting a '*fresh approach*' in the secondary schools
- providing opportunities for children to develop the skills that pupils needed to develop in the secondary school
- addressing the need for differentiation and support

- ensuring that they were '*interesting and exciting for pupils*'
- developing units that had intrinsic value in themselves.

The need for partnership and dialogue between primary and secondary schools in developing these units was deemed essential. According to ACCAC (2004) '*Developing a unit requires regular discussion between teachers who agree about the specific objectives of the unit and tailor it to meet the needs of all those involved. Decisions need to be jointly made. For a secondary school, for example, just to provide a unit of work and expect its partner primary schools to work through it with their pupils may have some benefits – but it is unlikely to meet the real needs of the learners or to promote further understanding by teachers of their partners' knowledge and practice*'.

ACCAC (2004) highlighted the need to plan bridging units in ways which reflected pupils' own needs. They noted that '*In designing a bridging unit, teachers need to take care to make the requirements as flexible and open-ended as possible so that pupils can approach it in the way that best suits their abilities and learning styles*'. Moreover, they emphasised the importance of effective and rigorous evaluation.

The role of LAs was recognised by Estyn (2004b). They highlighted evidence where LAs had taken the lead including, for example:

- developing transition arrangements which were included in LAs' Education Strategic Plans
- formalising the arrangement of schools into consortia based on 'families' of schools and arranging LA support teams around such structures
- allocating specific responsibility for transition to an officer with senior status in the LA
- sharing and disseminating good practice, and involving a range of stakeholders in the process, including governors.

The impact of these arrangements was examined by Estyn (2004c) who noted that progress was being made by schools in addressing the need to improve transition arrangements. However, they concluded that there was a need to go further, by developing more comprehensive schemes, and by improving the evaluation processes. They also concluded that the amount of information that was shared continued to vary from school to school. Moreover, they drew

attention to the need to build stronger links between staff in order to facilitate a greater awareness of what was being taught by teachers in different phases. It was also found that arrangements were strongest within 'families' of schools.

Estyn (2004c) also found that some schools had made progress in developing structured programmes to promote thinking skills but that there were still examples where '*secondary schools do not teach thinking skills and are not building on the good work that pupils have done in primary school*' (Estyn, 2004c). In a number cases where this was done, LAs played a key role. They concluded that where schools had provided time for teachers to assess work with colleagues teaching other phases, better understanding between those staff was evident.

Developing transition

As noted above, the Welsh Assembly Government consulted with a range of stakeholders during 2004-05 on proposals to require schools to develop transition plans (WAG, 2005). It was proposed that such transition plans should be in place by September 2007 and that in September 2008 pupils would begin transferring to secondary schools on the basis of such plans. The consultation found that there was general support for:

- including all categories of maintained schools in the requirement
- ensuring that each primary school was only required to develop a plan in conjunction with one secondary school each year
- ensuring that governors and parents were involved in the process, although not necessarily in an operational role
- including LAs in the process
- developing core requirements for each plan, including joint curriculum planning
- adopting a three-year planning cycle.

Some concern was expressed at the impact of the requirement on small schools, not least because of a fear that some schools would have to change the plans on an annual basis. It was also felt that challenges could occur where schools had relationships with more than one secondary school, an issue to be addressed by guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government.

1.2   Structure of the report

Chapter 2 of this report sets out the aims and methodology which underpinned this project. Chapter 3 presents statistical evidence about performance at Key Stage 2 (KS2) and Key Stage 3 (KS3) in Wales and compares the pattern in Wales with that in England. It also examines the reasons why practitioners in Wales believe that pupil performance dips in many subjects in KS3.

LA policies on transition, including the use of additional funding from the Welsh Assembly Government, and schools' response to those initiatives are discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 examines the range of information which is given to parents and pupils about secondary schools and the reasons why parents choose certain schools. Chapter 6 explores the links which have been developed between primary and secondary schools in Wales, the strategies to improve liaison between them, and specific initiatives such as bridging projects and links between school governors. It also describes the kind of information which is passed by primary schools to secondary schools, the way it is used and the processes which have been introduced to ensure pupils become familiar with their new schools. This chapter also considers the arrangements which are made for pupils with SEN and to ensure continuity in the teaching of Welsh.

Chapter 7 presents the conclusions drawn by the research team from the data collected. The Appendix to the report contains four case studies, two primary and two secondary schools whose transition procedures are described and analysed in detail.

2. Aims and methodology

2.1 Project aims

The aims of the research were:

- to review current arrangements in Wales for the transition of pupils from KS2 to KS3

- to identify good practice in transition in the particular areas of a) planning and policy, b) academic progression, c) pastoral care, d) linguistic continuity

- to present recommendations for the further development of good practice in transition arrangements from KS2 to KS3.

2.2 Research methods

The project used a combination of research methods, including the collation of statistical data, a desk-based documentation review and face-to-face interviews with LA officers, headteachers, teachers and pupils in the primary and secondary school sectors.

The research was organised in three strands.

First strand

The first strand involved a review of documentation on issues surrounding transition from primary to secondary schools in the United Kingdom. This included information about pupil attainment at KS2 and KS3 in each LA in Wales and in each government region in England. This information was obtained through the NFER Library at its headquarters in Slough.

Second strand

The second strand involved the design of semi-structured interview schedules and the conduct of face-to-face interviews with the following:

- senior LA officers with responsibility for KS2 to KS3 transition issues

- LA advisers
- secondary school headteachers
- secondary school transition coordinators
- secondary school heads of department
- secondary school heads of year
- primary school headteachers
- Year 6 teachers
- Year 6 pupils
- Year 7 pupils.

School sample

A representative sample of nine LAs, eight secondary schools and 12 primary schools was selected. It was intended that pyramids of schools (i.e. a secondary school and some or all of its feeder primary schools) should be visited as part of this research. However, due to a variety of reasons, only one pyramid of schools was able to take part.

Table 2.1: School sample

Secondary schools	No on roll	Primary schools	No on roll
School 1	1220	School 1	55
School 2	585	School 2	99
School 3	1200	School 3	116
School 4	440	School 4	161
School 5	1160	School 5	238
School 6	785	School 6	383
School 7	896	School 7	420
School 8	1365	School 8	395
		School 9	325
		School 10	46
		School 11	200
		School 12	94

The secondary schools varied in size from a school with 440 pupils on roll to a school with over 1,300 pupils. Three of the schools taught most subjects through the medium of Welsh, including one designated Welsh medium

school in South Wales. The sample included schools representative of different socio-economic contexts and geographic locations.

The primary schools visited ranged in size from 55 to 420 pupils. As in the case of the secondary schools, the sample was chosen to reflect different types of schools in Wales. They included seven schools where the headteacher undertook some teaching although their teaching commitment varied from 20 per cent to 80 per cent.

All of the secondary schools had a designated primary cluster. However, some drew pupils from outside their catchment areas. The smallest catchment area comprised three primary schools and the largest 13. The proportion of pupils from the designated catchment area attending each secondary school varied from 85 per cent to 98 per cent.

Most of the primary schools visited fed into one secondary school. However, five primary schools said that their pupils had transferred to at least three secondary schools during the previous academic year.

Third strand

The third strand involved the collation and analysis of all data collected from statistical sources, the literature and the fieldwork and the production of the project report.

3. Pupil performance at KS2 and KS3

3.1 Pupil performance in Wales and England

The following table shows the percentage of pupils in maintained schools in England and Wales who achieved the target level in statutory national assessment of Level 4 at KS2 and Level 5 at KS3 in 2002

Table 3.1: Pupil performance at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 statutory assessment, 2002

AREA	English		Mathematics		Science	
	KS2	KS3	KS2	KS3	KS2	KS3
North East	72	65	73	64	86	63
North West	75	67	75	66	87	65
Yorks & Humber	72	64	72	64	85	64
East Midlands	74	65	73	68	86	68
West Midlands	72	65	71	65	85	65
East of England	76	67	73	70	87	70
Greater London	73	63	72	63	85	61
South East	76	69	73	70	87	70
South West	75	68	73	70	87	70
England	**74**	**66**	**73**	**67**	**86**	**66**
Wales	**79**	**61**	**73**	**62**	**86**	**67**

Source, DfES, 2003

A higher percentage of pupils achieved the target level in Wales in English at KS2 (79 per cent) than in all maintained schools in England (74 per cent) and the figure for Wales was higher than in any English region. However, at KS3 the percentage in Wales who reached the target level (61 per cent) was lower than the average for maintained schools in England (66 per cent) and lower than in any English region. A total of 79 per cent of pupils achieved the target level in English in KS2 but 18 per cent fewer pupils did so at KS3 (61 per cent). This difference was greater than in any region in England.

In mathematics, the percentage who achieved the target level in Wales (73 per cent) was the same as the average for England and was higher than the figures for two English regions –the West Midlands and Greater London. However at KS3 five per cent fewer pupils in Wales achieved the target level (62 per cent) than in England (67 per cent). This figure was lower than for any of the English regions. The difference between KS2 and KS3 (11 per cent) was higher than in any English region.

In science the percentage of pupils in Wales who achieved the target level was the same as for England at KS2 (86 per cent) and fractionally higher at KS3 (67 per cent). The difference between the percentage of pupils who achieved the target grade at KS3 compared with KS2 was 19 per cent, marginally less than the figure for England.

These figures demonstrate that the performance of Welsh pupils at KS2 matches or exceeds that of pupils in England. However, it is also clear that pupil attainment falls significantly in Wales at KS3, especially in English and mathematics.

The following tables indicate the percentages of pupils achieving the Core Subject Indicator (CSI) at KS2 and KS3 in the Welsh LAs in 2002. The CSI is determined by the percentage gaining the target grade in science, mathematics, and either English or English and Welsh in combination.

Table 3.2: Core subject indicator by LA, 2002: KS2 and KS3

	KS2: % of pupils	KS3: % of Pupils	Difference KS2-3
Anglesey	70	49	-21
Gwynedd	71	53	-18
Conwy	69	51	-18
Denbigh	65	51	-14
Flint	69	52	-17
Wrexham	68	47	-21
Powys	69	60	-9
Ceredigion	72	56	-16
Pembroke	73	54	-19
Carmarthen	69	55	-14
Swansea	71	49	-22
Neath Port Talbot	64	51	-13
Bridgend	69	50	-19
Vale of Glamorgan	76	60	-16
RCT	67	47	-20

Merthyr Tydfil	66	40	-26
Caerphilly	63	45	-18
Blaenau Gwent	60	41	-19
Torfaen	64	46	-18
Monmouth	72	56	-16
Newport	68	46	-22
Cardiff	66	50	-16
WALES	**68**	**50**	**-18**

Table 3.3: Core subject indicator by LA, 2002: boys

	KS2: % Boys	KS3: % Boys	Difference KS2-3
Anglesey	66	44	-22
Gwynedd	67	49	-18
Conwy	64	47	-17
Denbigh	61	47	-14
Flint	66	49	-17
Wrexham	66	43	-23
Powys	67	53	-14
Ceredigion	69	52	-17
Pembroke	70	52	-18
Carmarthen	66	49	-17
Swansea	68	44	-24
Neath Port Talbot	62	48	-14
Bridgend	70	46	-24
Vale of Glamorgan	75	59	-16
RCT	66	44	-22
Merthyr Tydfil	63	36	-27
Caerphilly	59	42	-17
Blaenau Gwent	58	33	-25
Torfaen	61	38	-23
Monmouth	69	51	-18
Newport	64	42	-22
Cardiff	64	47	-17
WALES	**65**	**46**	**-19**

Table 3.4: Core subject indicator by LA, 2002: girls

	KS2: % Girls	KS3: % Girls	Difference KS2-3
Anglesey	74	54	-20
Gwynedd	75	56	-19
Conwy	74	54	-20
Denbigh	69	55	-14
Flint	71	56	-15
Wrexham	70	51	-19
Powys	71	68	-3
Ceredigion	75	60	-15
Pembroke	75	57	-18
Carmarthen	72	62	-20
Swansea	74	53	-21
Neath Port Talbot	66	53	-13
Bridgend	68	53	-15
Vale of Glamorgan	77	62	-15
RCT	67	50	-17
Merthyr Tydfil	70	44	-26
Caerphilly	66	48	-18
Blaenau Gwent	62	48	-14
Torfaen	67	53	-14
Monmouth	76	62	-14
Newport	71	50	-21
Cardiff	68	52	-16
WALES	**71**	**54**	**-17**

In 2002 the percentage of pupils in Wales who achieved the CSI was 68 per cent at KS2 but only 50 per cent at KS3. The percentage of girls achieving the CSI was higher than boys in both key stages: 71 per cent to 65 per cent at KS2, and 54 per cent to 46 per cent at KS3.

The percentage achieving the CSI was higher at KS2 in all Welsh LAs, although the difference varied considerably across the LAs, indicating that the drop in performance at KS3 was more marked in some authorities. The smallest differences in performances were recorded in Powys (9 per cent), Neath Port Talbot (13 per cent), Carmarthenshire (14 per cent) and Denbighshire (14 per cent).

The greatest subject differences in performance between KS2 and KS3 were in English and science (18 per cent). The fall in mathematics was lower (11 per cent), while the difference in Welsh was only 4 per cent.

The figures demonstrate variations in pupil performance across LAs although there is not always a clear correlation between variations in performance and the socio-economic characteristics of individual LAs.

3.2 Reasons for the decline in pupil performance from KS2 to KS3

LA officers, headteachers and teachers were asked why, in their opinion, the percentage of pupils who achieved the target level at KS3 was lower than at KS2.

The primary perspective

The primary headteachers (12) felt that some of the work which was set in Year 7 was unchallenging. They felt that some of it was often easier than work set in Year 6 and that it involved some repetition of work already undertaken. Other suggested reasons for the dip in performance were:

- pupils being more focused in Year 6 because they were aware that they would be sitting KS2 tests and were being taught with a definite aim in mind (9)
- the way some children became dislocated and took time to settle into their new environment (9)
- the pastoral system in the secondary school was less effective because the pupils were not with their class teachers most of the day and their pastoral support was therefore not always available (8)
- the need for pupils to adapt to the different teaching and learning practices in the secondary school, in particular being taught by different teachers and having to be more self-reliant (3)
- the amount of homework made some pupils became disaffected, which led to wider disengagement (3).

A representative comment by one primary headteacher was

> *In the primary school the teacher is responsible for the child for the whole of the day and therefore they know what their capabilities are in each subject area. They won't accept a piece of history written in unpresentable handwriting from a child, but when they get to high school, one of the factors is that the staff don't know them and some children will hand in work that is not of the best standard and the teacher wouldn't know that necessarily. I think it's the freedom they get in high school. It can work for them or against them. Some children are mature enough to be able to deal with the choices and the freedom that they get. Other children are not. I think they need a stronger pastoral system.*

Some primary heads suggested developing a new approach to the way in which the curriculum was taught in KS3. This would involve one teacher taking responsibility for a group of subjects and teaching most of the

curriculum in Year 7, with specialist support if required. The amount of contact with one teacher would be reduced in Year 8 and in Year 9 when most subjects would be taught by different teachers.

A large number of primary headteachers also believed that there was 'regression' during the long break between the KS2 tests and tasks and entry to secondary school: '*There is a post-SATs effect. Pupils do very little writing and so on during the second half of the summer term in Year 6 ... and this can affect pupil performance in Year 7*'. Others felt that there was a tendency for some secondary schools not to 'stretch' pupils from the beginning with the result that they lost momentum early on. A representative comment was '*I don't believe that the Year 7 teachers fully appreciate how much we need to invest in those young people*'. Another explanation was that there had been a tendency to deploy less experienced staff to teach in Year 7 and to focus on '*using imaginative teaching and learning strategies with older children and teach out of the textbook in Year 7*'. However, the secondary school headteachers said that they sought to ensure that experienced staff taught pupils in Year 7 and that teaching styles were exciting and imaginative.

The secondary perspective

The secondary school headteachers and teachers offered other reasons and often assigned them different degrees of importance.

The issues mentioned included:

- the way pupils were 'taught to the tests' at KS2 (8)
- the loss of momentum between the end of the KS2 tests and the start of the secondary school (8)
- 'peer pressure' at KS3 which could discourage high performance, especially amongst boys, through the influence of disinterested pupils on others ; 'working hard is not cool.' (8)
- the fact that pupils were not taught by the same teacher (4)
- pupil disillusionment after the initial burst of enthusiasm for the new school (4)
- the need to merge different cultures of the various primary schools to which pupil were used (4).

Several secondary respondents maintained that the 'dip' at KS3 was due to 'inaccuracies' in the SAT assessments at KS2. so that the KS2 assessments

represented unrealistic levels of attainment: for example, some pupils obtaining a level 4 at the end of KS2 were still assessed as level 4 at the end of KS3 even though they had progressed during those three years and had obtained a much better level 4 than they had in Year 6. The breadth of attainment within National Curriculum (NC) levels was felt to be sometimes responsible for this. The perceived lack of progress was said to produce a vicious cycle in which pupils lost momentum and became disaffected. One view was that the KS3 'dip' would not appear if KS2 assessments were more accurate.

Many secondary school practitioners believed that there was a need to address the curriculum at KS3 and maintained that there should be more flexibility than was the case at present.

Key findings

The 2002 results for statutory tests and tasks indicated that performance at KS2 in Wales compared well with England but was generally lower at KS3.

The percentages of pupils achieving the Core Subject Indicator (CSI) at KS2 and KS3 varied markedly across Welsh LAs. However, in all LAs the percentages were higher at KS2 than KS3.

The perception in primary schools was that pupil performance declined at KS3 because:

- pupils were more focused in Year 6 because of the importance attached to KS2 tests
- work set in Years 7 and 8 was not always challenging and sometimes repeated work which children had already done during KS2
- the pastoral system in secondary schools lacked the close class teacher/pupil link in primary school
- pupils needed to adapt to different teaching styles and a range of different teachers in KS3
- some pupils became disaffected with school generally during KS3.

Many secondary school practitioners felt that:

- pupil achievement at KS2 could be exaggerated by 'teaching to the SATs'

- some pupils' progress in secondary school was not accurately recorded by the KS3 tests and tasks because NC levels were so broad

- youth culture and personal development impacted on pupils' attitudes to study

- many pupils needed time to become more independent learners at KS3.

4.   LA approaches to transition

The LAs were asked whether they had developed formal policies to facilitate the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school, what initiatives they had developed in this field, how schools had responded, and what extra-curricular links they supported.

4.1   Policy on KS2-KS3 transition

Very few of the LAs visited had developed a formal written policy to underpin the transfer of pupils from primary to secondary school. Most said that they had worked with schools to develop initiatives which included contributing to INSET programmes (including the additional day allocated by the Welsh Assembly Government to examine transition), developing standardised approaches to the transfer of information about pupils, and working with schools to develop bridging and induction programmes.

One LA said that developing effective transition arrangements was by no means a new thing and maintained that the National Curriculum should have given transition arrangements a new impetus. However, it was felt that some of the impetus had been lost as schools became 'bogged down' in delivering the curriculum content with the result that less attention had been devoted to issues like transition.

The extent to which LA officers take a proactive role in relation to transition varied and depended a great deal on the culture of the LA as regards intervention in schools. For example, in some areas schools were said to be extremely jealous of their individuality and independence and the LA's role was as a '*facilitator not as an instigator*'.

A proactive role had been taken by one LA serving an industrial area in South Wales which had highlighted transition as one of its priorities for action because of the under-achievement at KS3 compared with KS2. It had developed a '*multi-faceted*' range of initiatives with a focus on pupils in Years

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6, 7 and 8. This involved a key role for the LA in working with schools through the School Improvement Groups which examined transition alongside other issues related to school improvement. The LA had identified '*specific priorities for action .... aimed at improving the curricular links between primary and secondary schools. A key priority is to promote further continuity and progression from Key Stage 2 and towards Key Stage 4, focusing particularly on ways of making the best use of the last year of Key Stage 2 and the first and second of Key Stage 3'.* To meet these objectives, the LA has made transition a major focus of its generic school improvement initiatives. Examples of the kind of programmes which have been developed in schools in that authority are given in Case Study 6.

One LA was developing a policy to achieve two things. Firstly, to standardise documentation and develop bridging projects and, secondly, to harmonise teaching styles in Years 6 and 7. This would be done by bringing primary and secondary teachers together and working with them to develop common approaches.

An LA serving a rural area had developed a detailed approach to transition which built on its notion of 'families of schools', which it defined as one secondary school and its feeder primary schools. The LA officer interviewed said that the area divided naturally into families of schools because of geography. Documentation provided by the LA defined a family of schools as: '*a group of schools, usually in the same locality, working together and with the County Council to ensure effective curriculum and organisational arrangements for children and young people ... They constitute, at the local level, an effective education community aiming to provide a seamless process of learning and achievement through collaboration and the shared use of resources'.* Documentation provided by the LA defines the aims of its policy as being to:

- *ensure continuity and progression in learning as part of school improvement and raising the achievement of children*
- *promote mutual respect, partnership and professional development within and between schools and teachers across the local educational community*
- *ensure that educational programmes include curricular and organisational arrangements for transfer*
- *reduce underachievement and disaffection due to the problems of transition*

- *ensure effective deployment of resources and support staff across the family of schools*

- *encourage best practice in the transfer and use of data between schools*

- *build on the existing strengths of schools through local ownership, commitment and the further development of an integrated programme of school improvement*

- *share best practice between all schools with a particular focus on transition between Key Stages but also with a general focus on mutual support*

- *recognise shared responsibility for the educational community and to enable participation and contribution beyond traditional boundaries*

- *contribute to service change and the development of a focus on learning and customer need.*

The LA in question has worked with schools to develop a number of bridging projects, including a science passport, and has facilitated INSET based on families of schools.

4.2   Use of additional Welsh Assembly Government funding

Most of the LAs had used additional funding received from the Welsh Assembly Government to develop extra INSET focusing on transition. In one INSET the training had given primary and secondary teachers the opportunity to consider their own arrangements in the light of presentations from others with an expertise in the field, including LA and ESTYN staff and researchers. Staff were also assisted to work together to develop action plans to take the process forward in their own schools.

Another LA delegated its allocation to specific pyramid groups which allowed them to drive the agenda on the priorities identified by the LA. Other LAs invited pyramids of schools to bid for funding to support INSET activities with a focus on transition. Those LAs used the application forms or evaluation information to monitor the way that the money was used and the outcomes of the meetings between teachers.

In a number of cases LA advisers had provided valuable advice about transition, produced both by themselves and materials produced by the Welsh

Assembly Government and others. One advisor had spent a day with a secondary headteacher discussing transition issues arising in the core subjects.

The LAs had sought to ensure that schools addressed both pastoral and curriculum issues. For example, in several LAs the priority had been to improve continuity in schools' literacy and numeracy strategies. Pyramid groups were asked to consider what '*strategies and approaches at Key Stage 2 that are successful that could be applied to Key Stage 3 in that specific area. They also look at successful planning regarding the continuity between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 in these areas. This impacts on planning and raising standards of achievement and quality*'. In another LA, primary schools had worked with colleagues in the secondary sector to examine weak areas identified by the KS2 tests assessments. These had then been taken on board by the secondary schools which had focused on those weak areas during the first term of Year 7.

A number of LAs referred to the way that they supported specific initiatives. One had appointed a member of staff to work on literacy. The post-holder taught in all schools within a pyramid of schools, including in the secondary school. Another had appointed a teacher to teach science in the primary schools and in the secondary school in one pyramid of schools. Others had developed teacher study groups in key curriculum areas such as literacy and numeracy in which KS2 and KS3 teachers examined those issues together.

4.3   Schools' response to LA initiatives

LAs were asked how schools had responded to any initiatives introduced to improve transition. Around half of the schools were said to have been '*very positive*' while '*there was a lot of goodwill*' about what the LA was seeking to achieve. In other areas the LAs said that the process had been more challenging and that some schools had shown a greater willingness to cooperate than others. For example, one noted that primary schools were more willing to cooperate than the secondary schools. The LAs emphasised the need for schools to have a sense of ownership of the process: the vast majority felt a need to strike the right balance between compulsion and encouragement in this as in other aspects of their relationship with schools.

The difference in the extent to which LAs were or were not able to be proactive in respect to transition was reflected in the views of headteachers. For example, three of the secondary headteachers believed that the LAs should have a minimal role in relation to transition. They believed that the most important task for the LAs was to set the standard admission number for a school and to deal with appeals from parents who had not been allocated a place at the school of their choice. Another view was that the LA's role should be to provide information to the school particularly in relation to SAT assessments. Another secondary headteacher said that he would not want key decisions in relation to transition to be taken centrally by the LA and emphasised the need for local discretion. The importance of respecting schools' autonomy was also emphasised by some primary headteachers. One of them said that improving transition arrangements should be '*driven from the bottom up*' and that there was a need to avoid a '*knee jerk*' reaction which resulted in schemes being developed which placed an added bureaucratic burden on schools.

Other headteachers welcomed their LAs' contribution and thought that they should do more to assist schools, especially dealing with aspects that were time consuming for schools. '*I think that they should be facilitating discussion about key areas particularly in terms of the core. They could be drawing together groups of people',* was one comment. It was felt that LAs could provide a valuable overview which was not available for staff more familiar with their own catchment areas. For example, one headteacher working in a large LA in South Wales said:

> *I think they should play a part ... otherwise you get the drift of pupils to schools that are perceived to be better, leaving other schools with falling rolls and perhaps a more difficult and challenging catchment areas. Certain schools can be sent into a spin where numbers are reducing so rapidly they are having to reduce staff and it can be the cause of schools going into special measures.*

Some headteachers felt that LAs had an important role in helping schools which lacked the capacity to undertake some of this work themselves. According to the headteacher of a school with fewer than 50 pupils:

> *I think it is very difficult [examining effective transition practice] especially as a teaching head myself and for the secondary school heads ... that is something the LA could put in, it could put in an advisor for primary/secondary liaison and transition, and if that*

person saw good practice elsewhere ... then they could advise. Instead of us all trying to make our own decisions and draw up plans, we could be given a good lead.

Another headteacher of a small rural school concurred and said that the LA should do more to support the exchange of knowledge alongside data as individual schools lacked the capacity to address the issue.

4.4   Links between pupils developed before transfer

Many LAs said that pupils had opportunities to meet informally before they transferred to secondary school through extra-curricular activities. Events through which contact had been made included:

- sports events and tournaments
- choirs, orchestras and music festivals
- Urdd Gobaith Cymru
- visits to residential centres
- IT clubs delivered at the secondary school
- a project delivered in conjunction with Welsh National Opera which was based in a youth centre on the campus of the secondary school which most pupils would be attending.

Key findings

Few LAs had developed formal written policies on transition but most sought to play a pro-active role to develop arrangements with schools, depending on the circumstances and culture of individual LAs.

The Welsh Assembly Government's grant to support additional INSET activities had acted as a catalyst for several effective projects, usually involving pyramids of schools working together. These projects were seen to be relevant to both pastoral and curriculum issues.

There were some differences in the views of headteachers on LA involvement. Some felt that transition initiatives should be left to individual pyramids of

schools. Others believed that the LAs should play a more pro-active role, as schools lacked the capacity to drive those projects themselves.

Only a minority of LAs had introduced formal arrangements to enable Year 6 pupils to meet socially before they transferred to secondary school. However, many said that pupils met through extra-curricular activities.

5.   Information for parents and pupils

The research examined what information was provided for parents of primary school children about different secondary schools, procedures for familiarising pupils with the new school, and the reasons for parents' choice of secondary school.

5.1   Information and support to parents

None of the LAs visited provided brochures on all schools for parents. A few provided information about the transition process but not about individual schools. Many said that the main source of information for parents was the individual school, and the brochures and prospectuses provided there. Typical examples of these included:

- a general introduction to the school, its staff and the National Curriculum
- registration procedures, including where to go at the start of the first day
- information about the number of lessons each day
- details of what equipment the pupils would require
- lunchtime arrangements
- what was needed in terms of school uniform and where it could be purchased.

All the secondary schools organised parents' evenings to introduce the school to parents of Year 6 children, although the frequency and timing varied. Parents could also request individual interviews in the majority of cases. Several secondary schools had introduced an appointments system whereby prospective parents could visit the school before making a decision as to where their child would go. For example, one school also arranged individual interviews between parents/guardians of Year 6 pupils and Year 7 tutors to discuss issues which concerned parents and also to provide information about the school, its structures and procedures before they made a decision about which school the child would attend. It was therefore possible for parents/guardians to arrange to meet with representatives of this school on two

occasions. The primary schools had little involvement with this process which tended to be led and organised by the secondary schools.

Two of the secondary schools visited referred to how they involved parents in the transition process by arranging opportunities for them to visit the school. One secondary school felt that inviting parents to the school was very productive, but emphasised that the links needed to be maintained throughout the pupils' time in KS3:

> *I think the home--school agreement is very valuable, because it involves the parents, and the form tutors. I think sometimes the parents come up and they look very anxious, they are the sorts who perhaps haven't had very good times themselves or perhaps bad experiences with the primaries, or they're just the type who feel uncomfortable walking into a school. I think it helps to bring down that barrier ... Our hope is that the parents, because they've made contact with the form tutor, will feel happier about contacting us, and particularly, we encourage the form tutors to phone home after about a month, six weeks, to speak to the parents, if not before, just to have how are things going sort of chat.*

In one rural school it was said that the open evening was well attended by parents whose eldest child was going to the secondary school. However another LA had found that '*parents ... have found visiting schools very helpful, but it's not always practical, for example, if parents work*'. An LA serving an industrial area of South Wales said that strong social links existed between schools and parents and that the LA tried to be involved as much as possible in those activities. A great deal of advice was given informally in those contexts.

None of the LAs had systems to monitor parents' satisfaction with the transition process although all said that they received few formal complaints about the arrangements. A few urban authorities said that the LA received a number of appeals against refusals of preferred placements.

5.2 Reasons for the choice of school

In most of the primary and secondary schools it was said that the vast majority of parents chose the assigned secondary school for that primary school cluster. Where parents chose a different secondary school a number of reasons influenced their decision, the most important of which were:

- religious affiliation
- the reputation of a particular school for academic excellence
- convenience for people working outside the area where they lived
- linguistic medium of the secondary school
- moving house and delaying changing school until a child was at the end of KS2.

In one part of South Wales it was said that more pupils had transferred to schools out of the catchment area in the past due to the '*perceived good reputation*' of certain local secondary schools. This was said to be less apparent in recent years because the schools with a good reputation were full. However, some factors specific to individual areas were also identified. In other primary schools the reputaion of the secondary schools was not a factor in choice. One headteacher remarked that *'Our parents haven't a clue what the results of the local secondary schools are. Even if they did, it wouldn't affect most of them.'*

Pupils at primary schools located close to the border between two LAs might attend secondary school in either of the LAs. In one such case, pupils had the choice of attending a designated Welsh medium secondary school or an English-medium school which offered Welsh as a First Language but not subjects through the medium of Welsh. Because of tradition and geography a number of the school's pupils have also attended a third secondary school in a neighbouring LA.

The linguistic medium in the secondary sector was a factor in some areas. In one primary school the secondary school chosen by most of its pupils taught mainly through the medium of Welsh. However, some parents chose to send their children to a school in a neighbouring town which taught mainly through the medium of English.

Another school was situated close to the boundary of two catchment areas. Pupils transferred to three secondary schools –an English medium school, a designated Welsh medium school and a 'traditional' Welsh medium school. Because of the nature of the primary school's catchment area most pupils went to either of the schools which taught through the medium of Welsh. The choice between these these three schools was said to be largely dependent on

where parents worked, which secondary school parents had attended and the choice of friends.

5.3 Pupils' information about secondary school

All the Year 6 pupils interviewed said that they had met with staff from the secondary school which they would be attending. In most cases this had been the Head of Year 7. Some of them had also met with some Heads of Department from the secondary school. A few groups had experience of bridging projects whereby a teacher from the secondary school came to teach a lesson or series of lessons in the primary school. Most pupils felt that this was beneficial as it was a way of getting to know at least one member of staff at the secondary school.

Around half of the Year 6 and Year 7 pupils interviewed said that they had also received information about the secondary school from unofficial sources such as older friends, siblings or other relatives. Indeed, this was an important source of information for many pupils about the personalities of different teachers. According to one '*its a way of finding out who you've got to watch out for*'. However, these informal sources were also the font of much of the misinformation which had been implanted in some minds.

Most of the Year 6 pupils said that they had been to their prospective secondary school for a one-day visit. A typical experience had been to go through the registration process, meet class tutors and have experience of lessons, especially science, technology, PE and ICT. Some groups had shared those experiences with Year 6 pupils from other schools. A number of Year 7 pupils said that they would have enjoyed the chance to talk with children from other primary schools during these preliminary visits. Two of the schools visited organised a system whereby secondary pupils sent letters to Year 6 children at their former schools which the Year 6 pupils said they had found useful. Some Year 7 pupils would have derived greater benefit from those visits had they been introduced to the teachers who actually taught them in Year 7. They also referred to the desirability of knowing to what classes or sets they had been allocated before beginning in the secondary school.

Most pupils said that the information they received had been sufficient. Some pupils said that they would like to be given a map of their new school as a

common fear was that of getting lost in the new school. This was recalled by some of the Year 7 pupils. According to one of them: '*I think you should know what rooms you're going to be in. When you come here you keep wondering where you're supposed to* be'. Another said '*I just got completely lost the first day*'. However the vast majority said that they had realised quickly where they were supposed to go.

Key findings

All secondary schools provided information and organised evening visits for parents and pupils, and parents could arrange personal interviews

Where parents chose a secondary school outside the pyramid it was often for reasons unrelated to education, such as moving house or convenience to work. However, religious affiliation, linguistic medium of the secondary school, and academic reputation of the secondary school were other factors.

Visits by secondary school staff to the primary schools to meet and give lessons to Year 6 classes were a useful two-way process ; a means of allaying pupils' apprehensions about KS3 teachers and methods and of familiarising secondary teachers with KS2 pupils and approaches.

6. Continuity between KS2 and KS3

The research examined school-based practitioners' awareness of KS2 and KS3 practice in other key stages and strategies for teaching staff and pupils aimed at improving continuity of pupils' experience between KS2 and KS3.

6.1 Current cross-Key Stage awareness

Teachers' awareness of the curriculum content and teaching methods used in the 'other' sector - primary or secondary - still varied considerably, but was more developed now that was previously the case. This was attributed to the increase in joint in-service training (INSET) and to cooperation in bridging projects and joint schemes of work and staff visits across KS2 and KS3.

Even so, many teachers felt that the links needed to be developed further. According to one secondary teacher '*It's mostly staff with children of primary school age and NQTs*' who knew most about KS2. Several felt that there was more awareness of curriculum issues than classroom teaching and learning styles and that this needed to be addressed. One primary school teacher said that she had received most information about the KS3 curriculum as a parent, not a teacher. Several felt that matters had improved in recent years but that much still depended on the extent of the links between the primary and the secondary schools. According to one primary headteacher:

> *I don't think they [secondary teachers] were very aware prior to the transition network. They seem to have thought we were just playing at things which is why they would start at a set point for every child. Whereas now they've seen what goes on and how much the children are doing, especially with science. I think it's opened their eyes and I'm sure it will leads to better cooperation and better planning for the children when they start in high school.*

Teachers felt that shared cross-key stage understanding was at present stronger among headteachers than other staff because they had a greater involvement in pyramid meetings and the development of transition strategies than classroom teachers. This was not confined to curriculum matters but included the ethos of

schools. For example, it was felt that some secondary schools needed to build on the ethos of close relationships which was built up between staff and pupils in the primary schools.

6.2   Strategies for KS2/KS3 liaison

Most schools had held joint INSET where it was said that a great deal of work was done in sharing good practice and standardising procedures. For example, one pyramid of schools had held a training day focusing on performance management and another on curriculum matters. Another example was an annual training day where staff from each feeder school met with department staff at the secondary school to develop cross-phase projects. This day had been more effective than in previous years because the meeting centred on examples of work of individual pupils and were therefore more focused than the general discussions which had been held in the past and described by one headteacher as a '*talking shop*'.

In one secondary school many staff had not been convinced of the need to devote a training day to transition. However, it had been found that the event had given staff new perspectives and had enabled some important projects to be conceived and taken forward. A similar message about the value of the training day devoted to transition was reflected in comments by another school '*We started off talking about schemes of work. Looking at continuity, some of them talked about methodology and that was a very useful day ... Some of them were going to take that on further. I know that history for example have already had a follow-up meeting'.*

Other links which had been developed between secondary and primary school teachers included:

- termly meetings between primary school headteachers and staff
- meetings between primary school curriculum area leaders and the relevant staff in the secondary school
- links between secondary learning support staff and the primary schools
- pastoral links
- more extra-curricular activities, for example sports and music.

In one school history teachers had met with the history coordinators in each primary school to discuss different approaches to teaching the subject. Some had been able to standardise some schemes of work and to develop links whereby examples which had been used in primary schools were referred to in secondary schools.

In most areas the links were strongest in the core subjects. For example, mathematics, English and some science departments were often cooperating more with their primary colleagues, although there were also some examples of good practice in other subjects such as RE, Welsh and history.

However, even in the core subjects, the amount of contact between staff varied. Some met each half term while others met on a termly basis. In one pyramid of schools the staff of all feeder schools met with the staff at the secondary school on a termly basis. In another catchment area a joint staff committee had been established which met every half term to examine common issues of concern. In another pyramid of schools teachers had examined examples of pupils' work at different key stages and discussed ways of enriching the teaching and learning process.

Another school said that they had established curriculum coordinator support groups for mathematics, science and modern languages. Secondary school teachers had visited the primary schools to observe practice and it was intended that the primary school staff would replicate the visit. In one case the curriculum links had focused on identified areas of weakness. In another pyramid of schools the science coordinator at the primary school worked closely with the science teachers at the secondary school. This had included classroom observation by the secondary teachers and the development of a transition project bridging KS2 and KS3.

One respondent said that the effectiveness of a bridging project had been reduced because some primary schools in that pyramid fed into different secondary schools so that some pupils had begun the project but had been unable to complete it. Another issue raised was that in some primary schools the curriculum leaders for some subjects were KS1 teachers which meant that they were '*a long way from the secondary school*'. Several schools said that the links were in their infancy and that it was too early to evaluate their effectiveness.

A number of LAs and practitioners felt a need to build on the existing initiatives to improve transition arrangements by encouraging primary and secondary staff to work together more closely. Among the initiatives which had been developed or discussed were:

- opportunities for teachers to visit other schools and observe the teaching methodologies used by colleagues teaching other phases
- cooperating to develop schemes of work for the primary schools or to bridge the KS2/KS3 transition
- supporting links in certain subjects
- pastoral training sessions
- action research projects
- cooperation in developing literacy and numeracy strategies
- use of the NQT induction delivered on a cross-phase basis

Individual examples included where primary and secondary teachers had worked together to develop a reading list and scheme of work for a particular module which had been taught in the primary schools which fed directly into the work of the secondary school's English department.

In another secondary school, NQTs were given experience of teaching Year 6 pupils in feeder primary schools during their first year of teaching in order to gain a better perspective of the teaching methods and potential of those pupils.

6.3   The role of transition coordinators

In all of the secondary schools visited the key role in relation to transition was undertaken by the member of staff who had operational responsibility for transition. The position of the individual who undertook this role varied. In some schools it was allocated to a deputy or assistant headteacher, in others to the Head of Year 7. In one school the Head of Year 7 performed the same role each year while in others the individual 'moved' with pupils through the school. In some a post of Transition Coordinator or Transition Manager had been created.

Despite different arrangements, there was considerable consensus on the responsibilities of the coordinator role. One school defined it as being to:

- *attend primary/secondary headteachers' meetings with the headteacher and liaise with feeder schools*
- *organise and coordinate a variety of induction events including two parents' evenings, to facilitate smooth transition of pupils from primaries to secondary school*
- *support the Head of Year 7 in circulating partner and preferred placement primary schools to collect KS2 data*
- *support Head of Year 7 in circulating partner and preferred placement primaries to obtain information on new intake pupils*
- *liaise with SENCO regarding special needs provision of individual pupils*
- *liaise with SENCO regarding staffing needs of Special Needs groups and support staff*
- *liaise with Curriculum Coordinator to finalise groups*
- *liaise with timetabler and Head of Year 7 regarding timetabling implications*
- *work with clerical staff and timetabler to set up a data bank for new intake pupils*
- *in conjunction with Head of Year 7 and timetabler to analyse results and information and place pupils in appropriate bands, teaching groups and tutor groups*
- *liaise with Head of P.E. to place pupils in appropriate house groups.*

Most of the coordinators described their roles as being to ensure smooth transition from KS2 to KS3 and to ensure that Year 7 pupils settled into their new environment easily and quickly. One coordinator described the role as being:

> *to visit the primary schools to speak to pupils and staff. To arrange various functions here in the year preceding Year 7 ... and then to put them into their forms here ... then to see them in September, to get them settled, hopefully, and give a little input into the PSE programme.*

Another described her role as follows:

> *I visit the primary schools - I usually go the week after the Whitsun holiday. I make arrangements with the school previous to that. I go to cluster meetings. I'm always in contact with primary schools so I actually make arrangements several weeks beforehand, It could even be months beforehand of the time that I actually go out. So I visit all 6*

feeder schools during the week and any others we have pupils coming from, and I talk to the children. Then I talk to staff about the ability of the children. They give me a list of the children in rank order. They also give me the teacher assessment levels for KS 2. They talk to me about the children -any problems, any medical problems, any behavioural problems and so on.

6.4 Links between governors

Few LAs had established formal links between the governors of schools in particular pyramids of schools. However, joint training was organised for all governors. This was especially true of LA appointees. Several LAs felt that joint training on the basis of pyramids of schools had merit but required time to develop. '*We're only just at the start of the long-distance run*' was one comment on the idea. In general the LAs felt a need to obtain the right balance between generic and phase-specific training for governors.

There were no formal links between governors of the secondary schools and their feeder primary schools in any of the cases studied although there were examples where individuals served on two governing bodies in the same catchment area. Most secondary headteachers did not think it would be possible to forge closer links between governors. According to one headteacher the notion was a '*complete non-starter*' because governors were already being asked to commit long hours for little reward and it was difficult to find people who would take on the role. Several others felt that there would be little to be gained by involving governors in transition arrangements.

6.5 Transfer of data on academic attainment

The kinds of information on pupil attainment supplied by primary to secondary schools were:

- national KS2 test and task levels
- national KS2 test marks
- teacher assessments
- reading ages for pupils with SEN
- teacher comments

Many schools said that their LAs had developed standardised procedures to transfer pupil information from primary schools to secondary schools. The LAs specified what data should be transferred and in some cases copies of pupil-level data was sent to the LA as well as to secondary schools. This was intended to ensure that all secondary schools received the same amount of data and that it was sufficient for them to take informed decisions about pupils' pastoral needs and academic requirements, including determining attainment targets for individual pupils. For example, in one LA in North Wales primary schools were required to:

- provide details of the teacher assessment for the core subjects, and the statutory KS2 test mark and test level for the core subjects
- ensure that copies of all tests and mark schemes for the individual tests are available
- transfer pupils' scripts
- provide analyses of individual scripts on a standardised proforma
- send a copy of each pupil's Year 6 report to the secondary school
- give the outcomes of any written standardised tests undertaken during Year 5 and Year 6
- ensure that Individual Learning Plans for pupils with SEN, pastoral programmes and Personal Learning Plans are sent to the secondary school
- give examples of pupils' best work in the core subjects
- provide information about attendance.

The LA in question provides a written analysis of the information based on the actual KS2 assessment. This can be used by schools to set targets for pupils.

The primary school headteachers felt that the amount of information which they sent to the secondary schools was adequate, although a minority felt that there was a need for a more holistic picture of each child to be presented. Many felt that the information was sufficient for the secondary schools to make informed decisions although none were sure what those decisions were. However, two primary school headteachers said that the secondary schools to which their pupils transferred allocated pupils to Year 7 teaching sets on the basis of the information received from the primary schools.

Most secondary schools felt that the information which they received on pupils' academic attainment was sufficient. Several of them said that the

introduction of standardised pro-forma by their LAs, which was used by each primary school, had helped by providing the required information in one format. However, some secondary schools said that their feeder primaries varied in the information which they sent and that there was still a degree of inconsistency which could often be attributed to specific factors in individual schools such as staff absence.

Several secondary school coordinators said that the information provided by the primary schools was used to inform decisions at the secondary school. Some schools said that they produced a booklet with details of each pupil. For example, a Welsh-medium school produced one which was handed to every teacher who taught Year 7 pupils and included pupil background information. However, the coordinator insisted that these were '*worded very carefully*' in order to ensure that every pupil started with a clean slate and was not stigmatised in any way. In another school the information was passed on to pastoral staff and heads of department only. All the secondary schools said that they used the information when placing pupils in different classes in Year 7. For example, one school emphasised the need for mixed ability classes in Year 7 and said that the data provided by the primary schools was essential for this. Others had introduced a system of 'banding' pupils throughout KS3 in the curriculum subjects based on information from primary schools, whilst retaining mixed ability registration classes.

Most of the secondary Heads of Department who were interviewed said that they used the information provided by the primary schools in two ways: to inform decisions about banding pupils according to ability and to compare their own baseline assessment of pupils with the end of KS2 results. The information was also used to identify which pupils required additional support in certain areas such as literacy and numeracy. Most of the Heads of Department said that much more use was now being made of the information sent by the primary schools than in the past.

However, some primary schools were concerned that not enough use was made of the information which they gave to secondary schools. According to one primary headteacher '*The trouble is that I don't think they get to the right places. I think those files end up somewhere called pastoral care and I don't think they're ever looked at unless there's a big problem*'. Another said '*If you send them things they're not going to use it's just a waste of paper and time.*

6.6   Transfer of pupil background information

The type of pupil information passed on to secondary schools included:

- information about pupils' strengths and weaknesses
- attendance
- extra-curricular activities
- friends
- language used at home
- health
- behaviour
- potential for sport
- musical or performing talents.

Two secondary school transition coordinators said that more pupil background information would be useful, especially about issues such as family background and the involvement of Social Services and Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) with individual cases. However, it was recognised that these were often sensitive subjects which primary school teachers felt could not be divulged, especially where they had been given the information in confidence.

In one school all personal information was held by the Head of Year in a locked cabinet and was only accessed when required. This included instances where it was necessary to plan support for a pupil. However, in other schools the background information was used more widely. According to one coordinator:

> *We did have a system years ago where it was deemed only the pastoral staff should really have that information until something blew up, whereas now we feel teachers are forewarned and perhaps the blowing up won't happen.*

6.7   Visits to primary schools

All secondary school coordinators said that they visited their feeder primary schools to meet with Year 6 pupils and a growing number of them met with Year 5 pupils as well. Visits were also arranged by the SEN coordinators at the secondary school. In some areas, secondary schools' Heads of Department

visited the primary schools although in no case did every Head of Department attend every primary school. Examples of the role of Heads of Department in the development of curriculum links which promote good practice in transition are provided in the Case Studies. All schools said that they met pupils as a whole class. Two coordinators said that they had tried to meet pupils individually but had found that it was too time consuming. However, it was possible for individual sessions to be arranged where parents requested them. Two transition coordinators thought that because there was more competition for pupils in the area than had been the case in the past there was a greater emphasis on promoting the school and ensuring that the arrangements for transfer of pupils were enhanced.

The extent to which visits took place varied. One school which had 13 feeder primary schools referred to the logistical problems of visiting all of them on a regular basis because of the work this entailed in terms of setting up visits and working around each primary school's timetable.

The type of information which was provided by secondary school teachers to Year 6 pupils included:

- what equipment was required
- the requirements in terms of school uniform
- who taught which subjects
- arrangements for teaching PE
- the way the school is organised
- timetables
- extra-curricular opportunities.

The issues most often raised by Year 6 pupils were:

- concerns about bullying
- queries about school uniforms
- queries about discipline
- queries about new subjects.

One of the most important functions was to allay any fears which pupils had about the secondary school, often misconceived ideas. According to one coordinator: *Its the same old thing, have we got a ghost, do they push your*

head down the toilets, do we set too much homework, do we set detentions.
Significantly: '*Bullying is always an issue; I always bring it up if they don't bring it up.*'

All primary school representatives said that visits by staff from the secondary schools were a key feature of the process. One headteacher said '*I think it's very important. It allays the children's fears and gives them an opportunity to ask questions in the environment in which they feel very secure because there are still the old stories, the urban myths about what happens in high school and they are quite concerned about it*'.

More than two thirds of the schools said that secondary aged pupils were taken to meet Year 6 pupils to talk about the school and to answer any questions. The different arrangements included:

- taking Year 7 or Year 8 pupils who had attended those primary schools
- taking prefects
- taking pupils who would be good ambassadors for their schools.

Several primary headteachers commended the practice of inviting Year 7 pupils to meet the primary school pupils. In most of the schools it was said that the secondary pupils took a responsible attitude. For example, the headteacher of a small school in rural Wales said '*These are nice kids –they wouldn't dream of upsetting the others*'.

6.8   Year 6 visits to secondary schools

All schools arranged for primary school pupils to visit the secondary school before Year 7. The arrangements varied. In many schools the pattern was for the secondary school to hold an open evening for pupils and parents during November and then in July a full day's visit including a sample of taster lessons. In another school the pupils went to the secondary school for two days of lessons as a whole class and also in pairs for two days with pupils from other schools.

Several schools organised a timetable which gave prospective pupils a wider experience of school life. This meant following a timetable where a lesson

lasted for half of the time of a normal lesson, giving them experiences of laboratory and workshop work, use of IT, modern languages and of things such as the dinner hour, and using school buses. In one case pupils went to the secondary school for science and technology lessons while another school had bought software designed for primary schools to use during the Year 6 pupil visits. Two schools also organised these visits for Year 5 pupils. In four-fifths of the sample schools Year 6 pupils visited the secondary school at least twice.

6.9   Bridging projects

Several pyramids of schools had worked together to develop bridging projects to assist with transition from primary to secondary school. Most of these were begun in Year 6 under the guidance of the primary school teacher and completed in Year 7 under a different teacher. However in a minority of schools secondary teachers taught the bridging programme in the primary school and in one case primary school pupils attended lessons in the secondary school.

In one case the LA had developed a 'science passport' which included personal information, and asked pupils to answer questions such as:

- *What science skills do your family and friends use in their jobs?*
- *How do you like to learn science? This could be from your teacher, from books, by doing experiments, talking with your friends or by thinking about problems your own way.*
- *Explain what you think science is.*
- *Explain why you think science is important.*

Other sections included:

- pupils' self-analysis of their skills in science
- their practical skills
- their knowledge of laboratory safety rules
- a diagram of a bunsen burner
- investigations which they had undertaken in Year 6
- investigations which they had undertaken in Year 7.

One pyramid of schools developed a bridging programme in English. Each teacher at the secondary school worked with a group of Year 7 and Year 8 pupils who were asked to identify their favourite book. They were expected to read passages from their book, talk about it and answer questions from other pupils. Groups of pupils from the secondary schools then visited the primary schools to show Year 6 pupils how to talk about a favourite book. The primary schools worked with Year 6 pupils asking them to prepare readings and to talk about their views. In the summer term the pupils were brought to the secondary school for a session where they met with Year 7 and Year 8 pupils and exchanged views about their favourite books. By this means it was hoped to:

- *stimulate an interest in reading for pleasure*
- *help prepare Year 6 pupils for their future*
- *develop much stronger links between staff in all schools, in particular peer observation of lessons and teaching styles.*

The development of common schemes of work was underdeveloped in a number of schools although the staff interviewed recognised that this could be an important development. In some areas the process was hampered by a lack of LA advisers for the subject.

6.10 Induction and counselling

Several secondary schools emphasised the role of induction events and the continuous support which was given to pupils in Year 7. For example, two schools organised an induction course for Year 7 and Year 12 entrants. One organised a two-day programme for Year 7 entrants which sought to develop a positive relationship between the older and youngest members of the school and to help Year 7 pupils settle in their new environment. Another school referred to an '*on-going induction delivered during the first term*' including how to organise yourself, how to prioritise work, how to work with others, and how to develop individual talents, which was delivered through PSHE as a cross-cutting theme in the curriculum.

The key role in counselling Year 7 pupils was played by the form tutor supported by the Head of Year 7. One school also described how support staff

in the school were receiving training on counselling. Some schools had introduced a peer support system whereby pupils were assigned as mentors for Year 7 pupils and given training in counselling them.

In a minority of the secondary schools a buddy system was in operation. This meant that each new pupil was allocated a mentor from an older year group. The older pupils advised and supported the newcomers mainly in the pastoral sphere, but also in curricular work, including the management of homework. There were examples of older pupils being designated to listen to Year 7 pupils reading aloud, especially those with special educational needs.

6.11 Policies on SEN transition

Several LAs said that they had well-developed policies to ensure smooth transfer for pupils with SEN. This was based on a history of close cooperation between school staff, supported by the LA, to develop effective procedures to support pupils with SEN in the move to secondary school. One LA organised a summer literacy and numeracy programme which sought to support the transition for pupils with SEN alongside other pupils.

All the secondary schools ensured that the SEN coordinator at the secondary school visited all feeder primary schools. They attended statement reviews and discussed individual pupils with the primary teachers and familiarised themselves with educational psychologist reports, ILPs and other documentation.

One primary SEN coordinator (SENCO) said: *The SENCO from the secondary school visits us every year to get to know our Year 6 pupils with special needs. All our data on these children is passed on to the secondary special needs department when the pupils transfer. We think this works well.*

Some schools expressed concern that while the arrangements for statemented pupils were adequate the same was not true of those with SEN who were not statemented. They felt that this issue should be examined more closely in order to ensure that these pupils received adequate support. One school sent out letters to all primary schools at the beginning of March requesting information about non-statemented pupils and asking for their recommendations on the

amount of support those pupils would need. Relevant information was then circulated to relevant teachers. In one school all pupils with SEN were placed in one set in Year 7. In other schools pupils with SEN were integrated into all classes but withdrawn from certain lessons, such as mathematics and English, to work individually with support teachers.

The need to ensure that information about pupils with SEN was disseminated effectively to all staff in the secondary school was also noted. For example, in one primary school it was said:

> *We have a child here with Asperger's Syndrome and we've coped with him here in the mainstream, but my suspicion is that when he goes to [the secondary] school, he's going to be excluded because the child is an intelligent boy but he does have challenging behaviour and there are certain triggers that set him off and we know these and we avoid them. But if he goes into a classroom or is in the corridor misbehaving and a teacher doesn't know he has Asperger's Syndrome, it could quite easily escalate from a confrontation to a situation that might lead to his exclusion…they (teachers) don't treat him differently, they make allowances.*

6.12 Progression in the teaching of Welsh

Few LAs had a policy to ensure appropriate progression in the teaching of Welsh from KS2 to KS3. The only national regulations referred to were that pupils attempting the statutory Welsh KS3 assessments were obliged to sit the First Language Welsh GCSE examination at the end of KS4. However, there was no obligation for pupils assessed in (First Language) Welsh at KS2 to be entered for the statutory Welsh (First Language) assessments at KS3.

Because of this, three secondary schools which taught Welsh as a First Language said that they placed some pupils in Second Language sets although they had taken the KS2 Welsh (First Language) statutory assessment. This was attributed by one headteacher to '*pressure from parents*' and was of concern to some primary schools because it was felt that '*good learners were not continuing with the language as they should*'. In one school in North Wales which taught Welsh as a first language, one-third of its pupils transferred to a local Welsh medium school but the others went to a school which was not designated Welsh medium where they were taught as second language pupils.

This, the primary school staff felt, undermined their work in getting those children to the level of First Language speakers.

The one designated Welsh-medium secondary school maintained very close links between its Welsh department and its feeder designated Welsh-medium primaries, and had developed common schemes of work in Welsh, including the language patterns to be taught, for implementation across the primary cluster

Most primary and secondary schools in the sample only taught Welsh as a Second Language. Links between the secondary Welsh departments and the feeder primary schools were the exception rather than the rule. For example, only a minority of the secondary Welsh departments arranged for their feeder schools to teach to a common scheme of work in KS2 to ensure that all pupils began Welsh in Year 7 on a similar level of experience. One frequent difficulty in ensuring progression in Welsh from KS1 through to KS3 was a shortage of qualified Welsh teachers in the primary sector. In some of the schools the teacher responsible for teaching Welsh at KS2 was not fluent in Welsh. Where pupils arrived at secondary school with very different experiences of learning Welsh as a Second Language at KS3, the Welsh department was often obliged to take pupils back to a common point of departure which had a negative impact on the progression of the most advanced pupils.

However, a number of schools highlighted transition initiatives in which they were involved. One LA serving an area with a high proportion of Welsh speakers did recommend to schools that all pupils who studied Welsh First Language in KS2 should continue to do so in KS3. This LA had developed assessment instruments to measure performance in Welsh as a Second Language in Year 6 which were administered during the same week as the statutory assessments. The results of the tests were passed on to the secondary schools. This was accompanied by a teacher assessment of ability in Welsh as a second language which was undertaken in Years 2, 4 and 6. The officer said that most schools had adopted this policy in that LA. However, the LA warned that this had to be resourced properly in order for pupils to be supported adequately in the secondary schools.

Several LAs referred to bridging projects in Welsh which had been developed by specific pyramids of schools. For example one LA had supported one pyramid of schools' development of a bridging project whereby pupils started on the production of a magazine which was completed in Year 7. In another pyramid of schools a focus had been placed on sharing good practice in teaching Welsh as a Second Language through collaborative working between the primary school teachers and the Welsh teachers at the secondary school.

6.13 The issues for pupils

At least one group of pupils in each primary school were asked about their feelings regarding moving to the secondary school. Most of them said that they were looking forward. The reasons cited included:

- the chance to make new friends
- the study of new subjects, including modern languages
- gaining new perspectives on subjects like science and technology and sports through better facilities
- a new environment
- freedom to choose food at dinner time
- moving around from teacher to teacher
- a greater variety of sports
- more opportunity to compete e.g. in cultural and sports competitions.

Their main concerns were:

- having to rise earlier to catch the school bus
- the more challenging nature of certain subjects in the secondary school
- more homework
- the danger of bullying
- being the youngest in the school.

Year 6 and 7 pupils were asked whether they felt confident about who to approach to seek help in the new school. Most said that their first port of call if they had any difficulty in the secondary school would be the form tutors. Most Year 7 pupils said that it had been made easier because all other children were

in the same boat. The most important factor was a form tutor who had been helpful and assisted them to settle down. The negative experiences included:

- a pupil had been put in a class where she did not have any friends
- adapting to the need to be more self-reliant, for example being set detention for being late for lessons
- forging relationships with so many teachers whereas in the primary schools it was only necessary with one or two.

There were mixed views about the work which was set in secondary school, Around half of the Year 7 pupils felt that the work which they were expected to complete was not as difficult as they had thought it would be: '*When we were coming up I thought it would be really hard, but it's not*' said one. Another said '*The hardest thing is worrying about it. It's not hard when you're here. You worry about it because you don't know what is going to happen*'.

A minority said that they had completed some of the work in primary school. Significantly, some pupils who had repeated work in Year 7 were in classes with pupils for whom the work was new. This indicates that different primary schools were still providing different learning experiences for their pupils, despite the guidelines and intentions of the National Curriculum.

In some schools pupils felt that the range of work was so much broader than in primary school which meant that they had to work much harder. In particular they referred to starting new subjects, such as modern languages, as being particularly challenging. Some felt that certain subjects were introduced more theoretically than in Year 6. For example, one pupil group had been taught more about colour and texture in art in secondary than primary school where most of the work had been practical.

One group of Year 7 pupils felt disappointed at the different styles of teaching used in the secondary school. One comment was '*In primary school history was more fun, now it's just writing*'. A related point was mentioned in another school where pupils said that there was a more relaxed atmosphere in the primary school and much more '*silent working*' in the secondary school.

LA officers, staff and pupils were asked what they judged to be the main challenges confronting pupils as they transferred from primary to secondary school. All three groups of respondents referred to the issue of getting to and from school, especially when pupils were travelling on school buses. Pupils were worried that they might miss the bus and some feared bullying on buses.

The size of the secondary school compared with the primary school was also mentioned by LAs, staff and pupils, especially in cases where pupils transferred from very small primary schools. Indeed, '*getting lost*' and '*finding your way around*' was regularly raised by pupils in Year 6 and the Year 7 pupils who recalled their first days in secondary school. Fear of bullying was another factor raised by all respondents, and the transition coordinators said that they devoted considerable time to allaying pupils' fears about bullying and explaining the procedures which pupils should follow if they fell victim to it.

Settling in and making new friends was mentioned by a large number of staff and pupils. None of the schools visited said that the secondary school had a policy of placing classes of pupils from the same school together but many had a policy of ensuring, where possible, that friendship groups from each feeder primary school were placed in each form. Although there was some apprehension on the part of Year 6 pupils before transfer, Year 7 pupils said they had settled in quite quickly.

The three groups of respondents said that the different teaching and learning styles used in secondary schools often caused concern to pupils. In particular, the need to forge relationships with new teachers and be taught by different teachers in different subjects was a challenge for many pupils.

Key findings

Mutual knowledge and understanding between KS2 and 3 teachers was developing, but still considered largely inadequate

Joint in-service training and subject planning meetings between KS2 and KS3 staff were effective in promoting greater cross-sector understanding. Many of these were supported and valued by the LAs.

The cross-key stage curriculum links which had been developed were strongest in the core subjects.

In all secondary schools the key role in relation to transition was allocated to a transition coordinator although the position of that individual could be a deputy headteacher, Head of Year or other member of staff.

Few formal links had been developed between primary and secondary school governors although there were examples where individual members sat on both bodies. Strengthening governor links was not viewed as a priority.

All the secondary schools received KS2 test and task results and other pupil data from their primary feeders. Standardised forms were sometimes produced by the secondary schools for this purpose.

In general, the information transferred was adequate. Some secondary schools used this information as the basis for forming registration groups and setting pupils. Although primary schools felt that their information was used more effectively than in the past many still believed that secondary schools did not maximise the potential of the data.

Sensitive information about pupil background was usually given verbally and teachers emphasised the need for it to remain confidential on a need-to-know basis.

An important part of their role was to visit Year 6 and sometimes Year 5 pupils, provide information, get to know primary staff, and arrange for pupils to visit the secondary school. However the extent to which these visits took place varied considerably.

All pupils were given opportunities to visit the secondary school before the end of Year 6. Usually this took place through class visits during the summer term after the statutory KS2 assessments, but sometimes the previous autumn before pupils selected their secondary school. Pupils usually followed a shortened timetable of lessons, often in new subjects, during visits.

A number of schools had introduced bridging projects and in a minority of them this included teachers from the secondary school teaching Year 6 pupils. However, common schemes of work had not been developed extensively.

Some schools organised special induction events for new Year 7 pupils. All referred to the importance of providing on-going counselling and pastoral support for pupils.

More formal policies on the transfer of pupils with SEN had been developed which reflected a history of cooperation between primary and secondary schools, and which also involved the LAs. As a rule, secondary and primary SENCOs met once a term. In some areas arrangements to transfer pupils with SEN who were not statemented needed attention..

In teaching Welsh Second Language, few pyramids had developed policies to ensure continuity in the teaching of Welsh. In a number of cases it was said that pupils who studied Welsh as a First Language in primary school studied it as a Second Language in secondary school. There was concern that this could undermine the work done in primary schools. The designated Welsh-medium secondary school maintained close links with its designated Welsh-medium feeders and ensured common schemes of work for teaching the language there.

The main challenges described by LA staff, school practitioners and pupils related to matters such as travel, settling into a new environment, making new friends, becoming accustomed to a large school, studying new subjects and having to relate to a larger number of teachers. Most Year 6 and Year 7 pupils said that they would be confident in seeking help and advice from their form tutors.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Performance statistics

The results of the statutory KS2 and KS3 assessments indicate that lower percentages of pupils are attaining the expected norm for the key stage at KS3 than KS2. This difference in performance is more marked amongst boys. The view of most teachers in the research confirmed this dip at key stage 3.

7.2 Factors affecting lower performance at KS3

A range of factors contributed to this lower pupil performance at KS3:

- certain factors beyond schools' control, including social influences, peer pressure and personal physical development at puberty

- the loss of the close teacher/pupil relationship existing at KS1 and 2 when pupils are taught by a variety of teachers in secondary school

- different teaching and learning styles at KS3 where more whole-class teaching occurs and more independent learning is required

- a lack of awareness amongst many KS3 teachers of teaching and learning practices at KS2, and vice versa, which accentuated the newness of pupils' classroom experience in KS3

- the demands of more homework at KS3

- the repetition of some areas of work already taught during KS3 in Years 7 and 8, leading to a certain loss of interest in pupils

- the long period between KS2 statutory assessments and entry to secondary school, encompassing a more relaxed atmosphere at the end of Year 6 and the six-week summer vacation.

7.3 Accuracy of KS2 and National Curriculum assessments

There was a feeling amongst many secondary school teachers that the perceived decline in performance at KS3 was accentuated by drawing comparisons only in the core subjects. Pupil attainment may become inflated during the intensive atmosphere of Year 6 with its emphasis on the core

subjects and practice in sitting tests in preparation for the KS2 statutory tests and tasks. At KS3 the teaching emphasis was spread across the whole range of curriculum subjects. National curriculum levels were felt to be too broad to reflect pupil progress with accuracy.

7.4 LA involvement

The degree of support provided by LAs in transition arrangements varied considerably. A number of them highlighted the role which their advisers had played in supporting joint INSET days on transition, bridging projects, pastoral links, and standardising transition procedures. LAs felt that they could develop this role further in collaboration with schools, although a minority of schools felt that the matter should be left to them

7.5 Importance of transition procedures

However, there was a consensus in the secondary schools that pupil progression through the key stages was often uneven in Years 7 and 8 and could be improved. It was recognised in the primary and secondary sectors that effective procedures for pupil transition had a crucial role to play in ensuring pupil progression.

7.6 Improving transition arrangements

Schools had generally made considerable efforts to improve and develop transition arrangements for pupils and a wide range of initiatives to support pupil transition were being implemented. Secondary schools were gradually investing greater staff time and other resources to transition and induction procedures for new pupils.

7.7 Strategies for improvement

A variety of successful strategies to support pupil transition were identified, including:

- the allocation of a transition coordinator role to a member of staff in the secondary school

- the transfer of pupil performance data from the primary to the secondary school; some LAs have stipulated what information should be sent to secondary schools.

- the oral provision of background information on pupils to the secondary school where this was of a sensitive nature

- meetings between secondary school subject departments and primary staff with responsibility for that subject to devise schemes of work providing consistency across different primary schools and continuity across the key stages

- the provision by secondary schools of prospectuses and other written information on the school for Year 6 pupils and their parents

- open evenings for parents of Year 6 pupils to visit the secondary school and receive information on them

- visits by secondary school staff to their feeder primaries to meet pupils, talk about the secondary school, and teach lessons, sometimes in new subjects such as modern languages

- class visits by Year 6 pupils to their prospective secondary schools, including following an abbreviated lesson timetable and eating a school meal

- Year 7 pupils talking to Year 6 children, on the campus of the secondary or the primary school, about the procedures and expectations awaiting them in the new school, which often carried greater authenticity for the Year 6 pupils

- placing new Year 7 pupils together in small friendship groups within the class, based on primary school friendships

- mentoring or buddy systems for new Year 7 pupils which provided the support of older pupils on a one-to-one basis

- bridging projects of classwork in a variety of subjects whereby pupils began a programme of work in the primary school and completed it in Year 7; often taught in the primary school by secondary teachers.

There was some feeling, particularly in primary schools, that some of the transition initiatives implemented by the secondary schools, such as pupil and parents' visits, were in part motivated by the desire to attract the maximum number of pupils from the primary sector as well as the need to ensure progression in pupils' learning experiences.

7.8   SEN arrangements

Procedures to endure continuity in provision across the key stages for pupils with SEN were generally well-established and effective.

7.9   Pastoral and educational needs

Arrangements to meet the pastoral needs of pupils were on the whole more advanced and satisfactory than those to ensure continuity of educational experience.

7.10 Pupil perceptions

Pupils were generally satisfied with the arrangements made to assist their transition. The apprehension of Year 6 pupils before transfer centred on matters such as:

- travel
- having to make new friends
- getting lost in a large school
- studying new subjects
- relating to a large number of teachers
- bullying.

Year 7 pupils said that their apprehensions before transfer had largely proved groundless and that they had settled reasonably quickly in the new environment.

7.11 Primary-secondary school links

Transition procedures were usually more effective where there was a strong link between a primary school and a single secondary. Arrangements and efficient links were more difficult when Year 6 pupils could attend one of a number of secondary schools.

7.12 Cross-Key Stage teacher awareness

Some lack of awareness existed amongst teachers of practice in other key stages. Primary teachers felt that their work was often undervalued by the secondary schools who did not always appreciate the amount of curriculum covered at KS2 in the various subjects, did not always have faith in the assessment judgements made at KS2, and did not always make full use of the pupil data provided on pupils transfer. There was also a certain feeling in secondary schools that KS2 teachers overestimated the attainment of their pupils. The secondary schools usually administered their own assessments to Year 7 pupils shortly after their entry because of a belief that KS2 assessments lacked the necessary degree of differentiation.

7.13 Joint INSET and subject meetings

However, many LAs had begun holding joint INSET sessions which brought primary and secondary teachers together, and these were improving the mutual understanding of the nature of teaching and assessment in the two key stages. There was considerable consensus that such INSET days, together with other cross-key stage meetings in specific subject areas, were a valuable tool for improving the continuity of pupils' learning experience, although some primary teachers thought that these sessions were usually driven by the needs of the secondary school. Teacher visits to observe teaching in a different key stage were less common, but useful. However, the release of teachers to observe lessons and for visits generally was easier to arrange in secondary schools.

7.14 The teaching of Welsh

In the case of Welsh, links across the key stages were often underdeveloped in the area of Second Language provision, although staffing difficulties were sometimes a stumbling block here. The linguistic progression of pupils within the designated Welsh-medium sector was well-planned in the only pyramid of this type included in the sample. However, outside the designated Welsh sector, some primary schools teaching Welsh as a First Language saw numbers of their pupils transfer to be taught in Second Language sets at

secondary level and the appropriate linguistic progression for these pupils was not being ensured. Parental choice was an important factor in these situations.

7.15 Future research needs

This project took a very broad perspective of transition from KS2 to KS3. The need for further research into more specific issues became evident but could not be met within the constraints of this project. In particular there is a need to examine issues such as:

- good practice in ensuring progression in individual subjects, especially in the core subjects
- how pupils' learning skills are influenced by the transition from primary to secondary schools and how they can be supported as effective and reflective learners.

7.16 Progress in transition arrangements

It is useful to compare the findings of this project with previous research undertaken by the NFER in the area of transition, particularly Schagen and Kerr (1999). That report highlighted issues which were of general concern in both England and Wales. This research indicates that there has been no fundamental change in philosophy or approach to transition, but that progress has been made in Wales in developing certain strategies further and disseminating their practice more widely.

In particular, there was more evidence:

- that more teachers were aware of the importance of good transition arrangements, and it was not considered an issue for transition coordinators and headteachers only
- that joint INSET for primary and secondary teachers is more common, and that more LAs saw this as a priority and were willing to allocate resources to it
- of a recognition that the National Curriculum orders alone are not enough to ensure curriculum progression
- that some LAs were supporting schools to transfer data more effectively by establishing set criteria of what information should be provided

- more evidence of cross-phase teacher meetings to plan schemes of work and compare teaching and learning styles/methods

In other areas the situation remained similar to that described by Schagen and Kerr. These included teachers' lack of awareness of curriculum orders in phases other than those they taught, the limited use of previous key stage attainment data in planning differentiated work for pupils, and the potential for a more systematic process of reviewing pupils' work in across key stages. The role of LAs in planning and coordinating such work could also be developed much further.

Appendix: Case studies of good practice

Case study 1

Background

This primary school, with 238 pupils on roll, is situated in north-west Wales in an area which has a majority of Welsh speakers, although Welsh is not the first language of most children who attend the school. Pupils from the school transfer to two secondary schools, one of which is Welsh-medium. However, the links are much stronger with the other school.

Primary-secondary links

The school was working more closely with others in its pyramid than in the past. Staff attended meetings to discuss a designated curriculum area on a termly basis and in-service training was also delivered to staff as a pyramid group. There was also considerable contact between the headteacher and the Head of Year 7 at the secondary school, at least every half term. However, no common schemes of work had been developed to date although the school was aware that the LA was keen for this to happen as a means of securing a standardised approach in primary schools. On the whole, staff at the school felt that the links with the secondary school were '*adequate*' and provided a basis for further development. They believed that they were further ahead in this respect than some other pyramids of schools.

One development had been to design a bridging project in science which pupils in all of the primary schools would begin at the end of Year 6 and complete in Year 7.

Staff at the school felt that the amount of mutual understanding between primary and secondary teachers was increasing. 'It has improved since we started the links project – we have gone through different curriculum areas which means there is more knowledge and understanding than in previous years'. This was felt to be very important as there was a need for secondary schools to know exactly what children achieved in the primary schools in order to maximise the potential of every pupil. It was also felt that primary

school teachers were becoming more aware of what their colleagues in the secondary school were doing, and that greater commonality of experience for all pupils feeding into a secondary school was required.

The LA had allocated £2000 to the pyramid group and its advisory service had helped to develop the bridging project in science. It also advised all secondary schools on how to use and interpret the data provided by the primary schools.

Although links between the school's governors and the secondary school's governors were limited at present it was intended that two governors from each school would meet on a regular basis. However it was stated that governors' involvement in transition to secondary school was limited.

Arrangements for teaching Welsh

The school taught Welsh as a First Language to all pupils and referred to the hard work which was done to support all pupils to become fluent speakers. However most of the children then studied Welsh as a Second Language in the secondary school where it was felt that the ethos was more English: for example, there was little use of Welsh as a teaching medium in the secondary school.

Arrangements for the transfer of pupils with SEN

The SEN coordinator (SENCO) at the secondary school was invited to the primary school before Christmas each year to discuss children who had statements of SEN. They also met with parents to discuss any special arrangements which would need to be made for them. The system was felt to work well at present especially because of the emphasis placed by the secondary school on pastoral care for pupils with SEN.

Data transfer

The data transferred to the secondary school on academic achievement included:

- KS2 test results
- KS2 test scripts
- an LA booklet
- a sheet stating pupils' strengths and weaknesses
- a sample of work in Welsh and science

- a copy of the final report to parents.

The school felt that enough information was given to the secondary school although they were not sure how much use was made of it. One teacher felt '*they don't look at half of it*'.

The school did not provide any written information about the background circumstances of pupils but gave that information verbally. This included information about issues which had arisen with a child's home situation, pupils' friendship groups and pupils with whom they were not friendly. The school felt that the amount of personal background information which they gave was sufficient.

Contact with secondary school

The school described its transition arrangements as '*effective*'. The main point of contact with the secondary school was the Head of Year 7 and the SENCO there. The secondary headteacher also visited the pupils once before they transferred.

Induction arrangements

While in Year 6 the pupils attended the secondary school twice or three times for PE lessons. Year 5 pupils visited the school once. Year 6 pupils visited before the end of the autumn term and at the beginning of July for one induction day.

Parents were invited to the secondary school early in the Year and they could also make appointments to be shown around the school.

Perceptions of dip in performance

The staff felt that the main reason for the dip in performance at KS3 was that pupils lost momentum after their success in Year 6. At the same time they believed that it was difficult for staff at a large secondary school to become wholly familiar with each child and their individual skills and needs. This was recognised as a major problem which was difficult to resolve quickly. Teachers also felt that pupils went through physical and emotional changes during KS3 which affected their performance.

Case study 2

Background

This primary school, with 420 pupils on roll, is located in an urban area in South Wales. The catchment area was described as '*middle of the road*' and consisted mainly of private terraced houses.

Primary-secondary links

The majority of pupils transferred to one secondary school. However, a number transferred to two other schools, one of which was a denominational secondary school. In the past up to a third of pupils had transferred to other secondary schools which '*had extremely good reputations academically*'. However, there was less evidence of this recently. A number of pupils also transferred to other schools for reasons such as parents moving house.

The headteachers of all schools in the pyramid met, and joint in-service training had been held which had focused on transition and the teaching and learning process. The main focus of the school's own work with other primary schools, and the secondary school in the pyramid group, was to develop a mathematics project. The teachers had discussed schemes of work and were '*moving towards*' a more uniform approach which would draw on the strengths of different schools. Staff from the school had also visited the secondary school to observe mathematics lessons. It was intended that the secondary school's mathematics teachers would visit the primary schools.

It was felt that these projects had forged closer links between the schools which had not been strong in recent years and it was hoped that this would continue and extend beyond the area of mathematics and that '*it should happen in all subjects*'. However, the headteacher emphasised that a more uniform approach should be introduced in a way which respected the '*individuality of each school*'.

In general, it was felt that the amount of common knowledge shared between teachers of different phases was increasing but that it was still limited at present and that better understanding needed to be nurtured.

The LA had given considerable support for the pyramid group's transition projects by designing a 'science passport' and a 'Welsh passport' which pupils

began in the primary school and completed in Year 7. The school's link adviser had also discussed the need to address issues related to transition with staff at the primary school. The headteacher felt that LAs should ensure that schools worked to a common format in terms of the way information was presented to the secondary schools and what information was included. It was also felt that LAs had a key role in developing more joint in-service training on agreed themes to all schools within a pyramid of schools.

Arrangements for teaching Welsh

The school taught Welsh as a Second Language, which was also the case in the secondary school. With the LA's support, a Welsh passport had been developed to strengthen the continuity of teaching across key stages.

Arrangements for the transfer of pupils with SEN

Meetings were held with the Head of Year 7 at the secondary school and with the SEN coordinator to discuss pupils with statements of SEN. These formed the basis of decisions at the secondary school regarding the teaching groups in which those pupils should be placed.

Data transfer

The school said that in the past a file of evidence had been transferred to the secondary school about each pupil. However it had been scaled down considerably in recent years and now included evidence of writing, mathematics work, and each pupil's Record of Achievement. The data which was transferred included the KS2 test results, with the teacher assessment. The scores of standardised reading tests were also given.

The school discussed issues such as which pupils should not be grouped together and some background information about each child, information about health issues and, in a minority of cases, family background.

Contact with secondary school

The school felt that they had passed on too much information in the past but that the right balance had now been struck between what was needed for the secondary school to make informed decisions without over-burdening them with information which they could not digest.

Induction arrangements

The Head of Year 7 in the secondary school visited the school to provide background information. Former pupils of the school usually accompanied the Head of Year. The pupils then visited the secondary school twice before they left Year 6. On one of those days pupils would pursue a model curriculum, usually IT lessons, technology and science.

Perceptions of dip in performance

It was felt that there was some 'levelling off' in performance in KS3 given that some pupils achieved a level 4 in Year 6 and still achieved a level 4 in Year 9. The staff also felt that children took time to adapt to their new environment: '*They have to get to grips with so much, their learning is bound to suffer.*' The most important aspect was felt to be the loss of contact with one teacher: one teacher suggested that there was a need to address this by arranging the teaching in Year 7 in a way which reduced the number of teachers who taught the children and reducing the number of rooms at which they were taught.

Case study 3

Background

This is a Welsh-medium school in South Wales. It is an 11-18 school with approximately 1,200 pupils on roll and draws pupils from seven Welsh-medium primary schools.

Primary-secondary links

The headteachers of all schools within the catchment area met on a termly basis. Subject area meetings were also held although their frequency varied, with much greater contact among the core subjects. The Head of Year 7 visited each feeder primary school every year to discuss the transition arrangements.

For example, members of the school's English department met with their colleagues in the primary schools during the summer term and met all Year 6 teachers to discuss a bridging project. Pupils began studying a piece of English poetry in Year 6 and completed the work in Year 7. However, the school had not as yet worked with the primary schools to develop common

schemes of work although it had sought to ensure agreement about what reading materials children will have accessed before they transfer.

Teachers from the primary school had observed lessons in the core subjects and some subject coordinators had also been to the school. A senior member of staff believed that these links needed to be strengthened and that further work was required to develop a more widespread understanding of schemes of work in different schools. In particular it was felt that secondary schools had a lot to learn from primary colleagues: '*So much good work is being done in the primary schools – we have a lot to learn*'.

A number of the teaching staff said that they were not aware of how their subjects were taught in KS2 but thought that it would be beneficial if they had more opportunities to learn. For example, one issue which the English teachers wished to learn about was the use of Welsh and English as teaching media for the subject in primary schools. They also felt that more dialogue would promote a better understanding of the application of different teaching methods.

Many teachers saw a need for greater uniformity in the learning experiences which pupils have before coming to secondary school. However, a member of the school's Welsh Department felt that it would be difficult to standardise the work undertaken by primary and secondary schools because the way they worked was so different. Moreover, it was felt more beneficial to have agreement on general principles and allow each school to work out the details themselves. It was felt that developing a system of teacher exchange could mean that more teachers were taken out of the classroom at a time when contact time with pupils was already being reduced by other demands.

Arrangements for teaching Welsh

A great deal of work was undertaken to find out how pupils had developed their skills in Welsh during their time in primary school. For example, a member of the Welsh Department visited each primary school to gain an understanding of how pupils were able to use the past tense, mutations, how they had developed a style of writing and what examples of written Welsh they had read. Audio tapes were also sent to primary schools for pupils to gain an understanding of what was expected in the secondary school. Pupils were also required to compose a piece of work describing their experiences at

the new school during Year 6. This was marked by the primary school teachers and passed on to the secondary school.

Arrangements for the transfer of pupils with SEN

A member of the school's SEN Department accompanied the Head of Year on visits to the primary schools and collected information about pupils who have SEN. The support given in the school was based on this information. For example, in some subjects pupils with SEN were taken to work in small groups or were given support to help them to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

Data transfer

The information which the school received from primary schools included:

- KS2 tests results with marks
- the scores of any reading tests
- examples of pupils' work.

The school intended to begin using a standardised reading test which would be administered to pupils in Year 6 and Year 7 to identify attainment in both Welsh and English. This would be used to inform decisions about differentiation within the school. The school had recently taken the decision not to set pupils in mathematics in Year 7 as it felt that this had disheartened some children. Similarly the school's English department did not set children in Year 7 but did so on Year 8. A number of the staff who were interviewed said that the KS2 tests results offered an indication of pupils' ability but that it was not a wholly reliable indicator '*because of the wide difference in the standard of work produced by pupils who have obtained a level 4*'. They believed that the teacher's assessment was of greater value in this respect. This comment was echoed by members of the school's Welsh Department who maintained that the KS2 test levels were too broad.

The school believed that the amount of information which it received from its feeder primary schools was adequate at the moment and was glad that it had taken the decision to reduce the amount of information which it collected which had become burdensome and unusable.

Contact with primary schools

The staff believed that contact was on the whole good and that there was a very professional relationship between them and their primary colleagues. However, the need for sensitivity in relationships with primary colleagues was recognised in order to avoid giving the impression that the secondary school was attempting to dictate an agenda.

Induction arrangements

The Head of Year 7 had the key role in relation to transition. She met with Year 6 pupils twice. The type of information given to these pupils included general background about the school, issues relating to uniform and housekeeping arrangements, and she also invited questions from the pupils. The school did not interview pupils individually. One day's induction was organised at the secondary school where a varied timetable was pursued, largely determined by which Year 11 teachers were available at that time. Pupils and their parents were also invited to an open evening. Older pupils did not speak to Year 6 children before they transferred.

The school asked their Sixth Form pupils to assist Year 7 pupils to settle into their new environment. The arrangements included a day where only the Year 7 and Year 12 students were present, which allowed the new pupils to become familiar with their new environment.

Perceptions of dip in performance

The staff felt that this was a phenomenon which manifested itself more in Year 8 than in Year 7. Pupils who entered the school were felt to be enthusiastic about their new surroundings but tended to fall back the following year, especially boys. There was some evidence that they became switched off in certain subjects.

Case study 4

Background

This secondary school is an 11-18 school in the South Wales valleys. It draws pupils from communities which have been identified as being among the most deprived in Wales. The challenging nature of the work confronting the school has led it to become involved in a broad range of initiatives to enrich the educational and social experiences of its pupils and to engage with community regeneration initiatives.

Primary-secondary links

A key role was undertaken by the school's transition manager. The postholder had overall responsibility for transition and was the first point of contact for the school's feeder primaries. Representatives of each school in the pyramid met once every half term and the transition manager met with the headteacher of each primary school once every fortnight. According to the postholder, it was important that the secondary school shouldered as much of the burden of work as was possible since the primary schools faced a heavy workload. She emphasised the need to develop a rapport with primary school staff based on a continuous dialogue.

It was felt that there was a growing awareness of what teachers were doing in different key stages. The school felt that this had increased considerably since it had introduced its initiatives (see below) to improve the coordination between primary and secondary schools. It was hoped that these projects would increase the amount of cooperation and that teachers would observe and learn from one another. Although the staff were keen to cooperate, the main obstacle was said to be the practical difficulty of arranging cover and time out of class.

Arrangements for teaching Welsh

The Head of Welsh worked closely with the LA's advisory service to provide a continuum of teaching of Welsh as a second language. It was said that this was an aspect of the school's work which could be developed further although there was a need to be careful about what could be achieved in a short period of time.

Arrangements for the transfer of pupils with SEN

The school's SEN coordinator visited each primary school accompanied by the member of staff with responsibility for Looked After Children. Parents could make arrangements to meet the SEN coordinator at the primary school. Information about each child's needs was disseminated to each faculty.

Data transfer

A pro forma had been developed which included:

- KS2 tests results, including the level, score and teacher assessment
- the results of standardised reading tests
- a section on pupils' strengths and weaknesses
- a section on health
- comments about conduct/attitude
- reference to Special Needs
- swimming ability
- a record of attendance.

Each head of faculty was provided with the KS2 test results which some departments used to set children in Year 7. These were also used to set targets for individual pupils. The transition manager felt that the amount of information they received was adequate although it would be desirable to have more examples of pupils' own work in mathematics and English in order to moderate pupils' work. Personal background information was given to the Head of Year and form teachers on a 'need to know' basis which emphasised the need for some information to remain confidential.

Induction arrangements

The transition manager made regular visits to each primary school throughout the year during which she informed pupils about the type of facilities which were available in the secondary school, such as sports facilities and the extra-curricular opportunities provided there.

The school operated an ambassador system whereby former pupils of each primary school visited and talked to Year 6 pupils about life at the secondary school, how issues were resolved and the opportunities which were available.

In addition, a number of specific projects had been developed which were designed to facilitate transition from KS2 to KS3. The projects included an e-learning initiative, a science course and the production of a pupil-led interactive magazine.

An e-learning project involving each Year 6 class used interactive whiteboards and laptop computers to undertake a project in different aspects of the curriculum. For example, in 2002-03 projects were undertaken in English, mathematics, science, geography, Welsh and art

A science project had been developed in conjunction with primary schools who wished to make use of specialist teaching and learning facilities at the secondary school. The aims of this project were:

- *for Key Stage 2 pupils to be introduced to practical science in a laboratory to instil good practice in teaching and learning within science*
- *to assist with the process of transition between Key Stages 2 and 3*
- *to raise levels in science SATs at Key Stage 2/3.*

Each primary school's Year 6 group made five visits each year to the secondary school where they pursued a learning programme developed in conjunction with their school. The type of work undertaken included a safety lesson and lessons on topics such as the use of materials, solubility, filtering, evaporation and the use of a bunsen burner. Year 5 pupils also had a science lesson in the secondary school. The Head of Science remarked that there had been a noticeable improvement in pupils' practical skills and that they knew what was expected of them on entering a laboratory

An inter-active magazine of two issues per year was designed and produced by pupils. It included contributions from pupils at KS2 and KS3 and reflected pupils' own interests and concerns.

An open evening was also held for prospective pupils and their parents where they were introduced to the curriculum and the types of activities which they would be undertaking. Pupils were introduced to the Head of Year 7. The school also operated a buddy system for new pupils and provided training for those who carry out that role.

Year 7 pupils were also taken on residential visits during the first term in the secondary school.

Perceptions of dip in performance

Representatives at the school felt that some of the difficulties which pupils experienced at KS3 could be attributed to physical developments at that age, and to other social and family pressures on many pupils which militated against learning.   It was felt that promoting ambition was an important contribution which the school could make.

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