

Moving to Secondary School

Advice and activities to support transition

Lynda Measor
with Mike Fleetham

HAWKER BROWNLOW
EDUCATION

Contents

Authors' acknowledgements	2
Introduction	4
1 Approaching the bridge	8
Chapter 1 What is transition?	9
Chapter 2 The five bridges	11
Chapter 3 Organizing a transition programme	14
Chapter 4 Through the eyes of a 12 year old	16
2 Preparing to cross the bridge: Year 6	19
Chapter 5 Managing feelings	20
Chapter 6 Friends and bullying	34
Chapter 7 School organization and teachers	42
Chapter 8 Teaching and learning styles	51
Chapter 9 Marking ceremonies	59
Photocopiable resources	62
3 Crossing the bridge: from Year 6 to Year 7	78
Chapter 10 Orientation days	79
Chapter 11 Helping parents with transition	93
Chapter 12 The summer holidays	96
Chapter 13 The curriculum	98
Chapter 14 Ways of learning programmes	100
Photocopiable resources	112
4 At the other side of the bridge: Year 7	116
Chapter 15 Settling in	117
Chapter 16 Friends and bullying	124
Chapter 17 Teaching and learning styles	136
Photocopiable resources	142
5 Wrong bridge? Wrong time?	150
Chapter 18 Supporting disengaged students	151
Conclusion	156
References	158
Recommended reading and resources	159

Introduction

‘ *It's like starting a new life going to the other school.* ’

This book has been written for those involved in the transition of children from primary school to secondary school – Year 6 to Year 7. It aims to help teachers, support staff, students and parents by developing an understanding of how children feel about changing schools and by bringing together information about high-quality transition activities and projects being carried out in schools and by related agencies.

We have taken the experience of children as the starting point for the book. The emphasis of the advice in this book is on the importance of *really* listening to what children say about changing to secondary school. Taking account of the perspectives that students have about changing schools is important. To highlight this, the book includes many quotes from transition-age children, expressing their feelings about changing schools. Schools are not all the same, and children are not all the same – but there are experiences they are likely to have in common.

Transition policy

Effecting successful school transfer is now firmly on the educational agenda. The government has become aware of the importance of transition in the educational ‘career’ of children. By far the most significant transition children make in this career is between primary and secondary education. Research has made it clear that this transition is a stage when some students first seriously disengage from the educational process (Templeton and Hood, 2002).

Enjoyment and well-being

A number of studies suggest that young people are not very happy in secondary education. In one study, 65 per cent of children at primary school rated their experience as positive, while only 27 per cent did at secondary school. This chimes with most adults’ own experience – when asked to remember if they were happier at primary or secondary school, many people opted for primary.

One survey found that almost a third of the children interviewed at secondary school were so miserable that they were vulnerable to depression, as made evident by the recent increase of diagnosed clinical depression in teenagers. Nic Marks (2004) questioned 1000 children in the UK and found their well-being slumped dramatically when they started secondary school, and it didn’t change once they had settled in. In Australia, secondary schools have also noted the increase in absenteeism and decrease in motivation of students during this period of schooling.

While there is other research that disagrees with the despondency of these findings, such as Wragg and Haynes (2002) who found that 80 per cent of the children they interviewed said they were

enjoying school quite a lot, the overwhelming evidence is that children do find difficulties in adjusting to secondary school.

It is also important to note that parents tend to worry more about their children's well-being at secondary school than they did during primary school. Research has made it clear that children's successful transition is partly dependent on their parents' reactions to the situation, and teachers need to be alert to these reactions.

Activities

This book provides practical strategies and activities to help you ease children through transition. These are based on the experience and knowledge of teachers, researchers and other practitioners working in this field. A variety of models of good and innovative transition practice are described. There is a considerable body of research on changing schools, and conclusions from that research inform the models and the activities.

A theme that is becoming more important in terms of successful transition is the continuity of teaching and learning approaches between schools. Throughout the book, strategies and activities are suggested, reinforced by case studies, that use up-to-date knowledge of teaching and learning to support the transfer process.

NB: When working on the activities, an alternative way of recording thoughts and feelings should be offered to children who have difficulties with writing – drawing pictures, creating concept maps, using a computer or recording their reactions on tape.

Section 1

Approaching the bridge

This section:

- ◆ looks at the big picture of transfer/transition
- ◆ explores the 'five bridges' model of transition
- ◆ considers who is involved in transition and what their responsibilities might be
- ◆ notes how to appreciate how the world looks from a 12 year old's point of view.



Chapter 1

What is transition?

Transition in an educational context means progression to the next year group. Transfer is an aspect of transition that involves a change of schools. In this book, we are considering the *transition* from Year 6 to Year 7 and therefore the *transfer* from primary school to secondary school. The words are used interchangeably throughout.

How does transition affect children?

Transition from primary to secondary school is one of the most important and significant steps in children's lives, and one that provokes profound feelings. Year 6 children feel both excited and scared, saying things such as:

“ *It's like starting a new life going to the other school.* ”

Although apprehensive of the change, they are also full of optimistic expectation:

“ *Primary school just prepares you for the upper school, that school prepares you for life.* ”

“ *It seems more grown up. You're sort of more important and I know that happens because when I see people from the upper school in the street you kind of look away.* ”

The move is a challenging time for both children and their parents and, inevitably, produces various stresses.

Students' anxieties concern both organizational and informal aspects of school:

- ◆ Organizational aspects are the areas of a student's experience of school relating to goals, values and tasks specified by *teachers*.
- ◆ Informal aspects are the areas of a student's experience relating to goals, values and ideas specified by *other students* and young people.

Children's apprehension revolves around five major issues:

1. The size and more complex organization of the new school
2. New forms of discipline and authority
3. New demands of work
4. Making new friends
5. The prospect of being bullied.

Both organizational aspects (the first three points above) and informal aspects (the last two) are represented here, illustrating the fact that, in effect, students have to make more than one transition. This book explores all these areas of concern at several different stages of transition.

The academic dip

Transfer from primary to secondary school is responsible for a dip in academic performance in the first year of secondary school, and there is evidence that children who fail to make a successful transition are more likely to become alienated from school and to truant or create difficulties and disruptions at school.

However, academic matters are not the only important issue. Children change school just as they begin to become adolescent. Transfer to secondary school is thus entwined with transition to teenage life, which complicates it not only for children and parents, but also for schools.

How long is transition?

Studies indicate that teachers need to rethink the meaning of transition. Schools tend to think of the transition as completed in roughly a week each at the end of the final term of Year 6 and the first term of Year 7, whereas research increasingly shows that transition is something that takes place over a long period of time. Research argues that schools need to think of children taking longer to become accustomed to secondary *school*, but more specifically to the characteristics of secondary *education*, which remain rather different from primary education.

It means that longer-term programmes that induct children into the patterns of secondary education are needed. These programmes should focus on each of the five bridges. Galton, Gray and Rudduck (1999) argue that post-transfer programmes, which follow the induction programmes and take place in the first term of Year 7, should be more widely developed. Their objectives are academic, to induct children into the patterns of secondary education and to sustain the excitement of learning.

This does not mean however that schemes that focus on emotional and social aspects of transition can be ignored. All the bridges need to be included for transition to be made effectively. It is worth reiterating that children undergo two transitions at this time – to secondary education and to being a teenager – and both must be considered and provided for. Any scheme that focuses only on the academic bridges will fail children at an important stage of their lives.