

## **Trauma-Free Transition – *A Guide to Building a Meaningful Transition Experience***

### **Introduction**

This CD-ROM contains an INSET training session designed to ease children's transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. The underlying principle behind all good quality transition is communication and an understanding of the needs of the pupils experiencing it. The principles within this CD-ROM can, therefore, be extended to elements of transition within primary schools, for example the transition between Nursery and Foundation Stage or Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Though the transition example on this CD-ROM makes reference to other year groups, this training course is primarily concerned with the movement from primary to secondary phases, so does not mention other elements of transition. As your staff become more familiar with the issues involved in effective transition, you may wish to apply the principles of this training course throughout your school.

### **1. The rationale that underpins this CD-ROM**

Year in and year out, children arrive in Year 7 in a state of general confusion about what the big, new school they are joining is all about. Try putting yourself in their new shoes and ask: how ready, academically and perhaps more importantly psychologically, would you be to enter such a daunting world? The answer, in the majority of cases, would be 'not very'. Inevitably, pupils have to become part of their new school, over-sized blazers and all, and the transition practice offered by your and the other high schools in your area must make them feel ready. However, even if other local high schools do not share your desire to improve the transition process into something more useful, there are plenty of things that you can be doing as an individual school (or as a cluster) to prepare your Year 6 children for the enormity of the changes ahead.

Since the educational agenda has been heavily focused on aspects of personal and social development and citizenship, the same question has been brought up by local authorities and central government: how can children be better equipped to cope with the challenges that affect them during perhaps the most important transition period of their school lives? Addressing the gap between primary and secondary school attainment has exposed the inadequacies and inequalities of the transition process.

The problem lies in a lack of effective communication and an over-emphasis on progress. Firstly, the pressure is on primary schools to ensure that children make adequate progress, in accordance with their various abilities, during their seven years of primary education. Similarly, at the other end of the process, secondary schools have to get pupils on track to five A–C GCSE grades. They need to show that the children they 'receive' from their primary colleagues continue to make progress, and it may seem to them that a child's ability in the learning environment does not correspond with their

assessment grade from Key Stage 2. Let's be honest, from an outsider's perspective, and in particular from that of the parent/carer whose child is experiencing transition, it can seem that each sector of the education system is only concerned with its own department. It's the old justification; 'if the secondary school can't see that the work we've done is value for money, then so be it, our self-evaluation form (SEF) and assessment systems show that we are doing all right'. Sadly, the persistent lack of communication between primary and secondary schools and deficient understanding of each other's roles has led to only more testing of children and a consistent lack of trust.

Again, I would like to stress that even if your local high schools are unwilling to engage in consultations regarding the quality of transition, there are still a wealth of methods that will help your Year 6 children adjust. These methods will help your pupils make the transfer from the SATs to a Year 7-style curriculum more easily and simplify small, but important, things like helping them work out their route to school, preparing them for the amount of homework they will receive and getting the different things they will need for each subject.

As teachers and school leaders, we all feel we need to prove that we are worth our salaries. Consequently, we live by the sword and, if our continuous monitoring, evaluation and assessments do not achieve test results that match our opinions of our schools, die by it.

### **However, there is another way!**

Remember that the only ones to really suffer throughout all of this are the children themselves. Following two and a bit terms of SATs talk, much boosting and refreshing and then finally sitting their exams, Year 6 pupils have only a brief window to feel proud of their level, before being made to re-sit more exams in Year 7 to prove that grade justified. Then new uniforms, getting lost between lessons, squeaky shoes and more tests. You have to feel sorry for them.

The fact that the gap between Year 6 and Year 7 attainment is so big is, in no uncertain terms, our responsibility. If you look into it, Year 7 actually covers a very similar curriculum to Year 6, especially in core subject areas. Year 6 consolidates everything learnt throughout a pupil's primary years and culminates in a formal assessment of this learning. Year 7 is often spent revising the same Key Stage 2 principles to ensure they are embedded with the result that children experiencing transition effectively study the same core concepts for another year. Going over the same ground to ensure that pupils are ready to move into Key Stage 3 wastes a lot of time. In Year 6, children are so full of level expectations, homework and boosting, that they have little time to even think about the next step in their educational journey. Why? Because primary schools are continually under pressure to prove their worth by churning out level fours and fives. In Year 7, so much time is spent re-testing children to ensure that they are appropriately streamed and integrated into their high school's protocols and expectations, that they are occasionally in danger of being put off learning altogether. The more vulnerable