



Connect's Parent Survey on Transitions (Changing Schools, Classes etc)

Effective and successful transitions – from one setting to another and from one class to another – are crucial to children's learning and their wellbeing.

We frequently hear from parents about poorly-handled transitions, when information about prior learning or about support is not shared at the right time to create a smooth transition. So we were keen to find out about families' experiences as these changes are very important times in a child and their family's lives. In our survey, these changes or transitions included

- moving from nursery to another nursery or to school
- moving from one class to another
- moving from one year group into another
- moving from one school to another
- moving from secondary school on to college, work or university

We had **295 responses**, of which

- **5%** were from parents with children at nursery
- **73%** were from parents with children at primary school
- **19%** were from secondary school parents
- **3%** were from parents with children in college/work/university

Of these

- **4%** referred to children who had **started nursery**
- **17%** referred to children who had **started primary**
- **12%** referred to children who had **started secondary**
- **60%** referred to children moving **from one class to another**
- **3%** referred to children moving **from secondary to work, college or university**
- **5%** referred to children moving **from one nursery or school to another.**

Of the children who had moved nursery or school, most were due to moving house..

The changes (transitions) experienced were

- **19%** experienced a transition as a result of changes in the class composition (eg merging classes)
- **76%** moved up a year in the usual way
- **5%** moved for other reasons (relocations, teacher job shares, bullying, additional support needs, class re-organisation.

Summary of Survey Results

It is clear from our survey results that there is good practice in transition planning and handling. However, there is so much more that could be done. Communication is key and parents almost always want more information about practical school matters but also about their child and whether they have

settled in. It is really disappointing to read that establishments/schools are not taking on board crucial transition information about individual children and their support needs.

The failure by many schools to share information about anti-bullying approaches (or positive behaviour approaches) from the start must be addressed. It is not bad publicity – it empowers children and parents and helps everyone understand what acceptable and positive behaviour looks like and how to encourage and support it.

We call on Scottish Government, local authorities and schools to improve transitions by

- **making sure parents and children have the information they need, at the time they need it**
- **establishing clear communication channels and contact points for parents**
- **making sure schools are implementing the Scottish Government's School Handbook Guidance**
- **making it obligatory for schools/teachers to read and act on transition information – this failure to share information about previous learning and about support needs and/or to act on it has been happening for decades!**
- **sharing information on positive behaviour/anti-bullying approaches with families from the outset, to establish a shared understanding of positive behaviour.**

Help Provided to Families

The help provided by the nursery/school to support the family with the transition included

- a visit to the new school/establishment by the child before the move (**37%**)
- a visit by the parent(s) before the move (**33%**)
- the child met the new teacher(s) before the move (**70%**)
- the parent(s) met the new teacher before the move (**20%**)
- an information pack was provided by the new establishment (**32%**)
- a key contact was provided for the child/parent by the new school/establishment (**19%**)
- don't know (**14%**)

When an information pack was provided, **66%** of respondents felt that it contained all the information they needed; **33%** felt that it did not.

Of the **33%** who felt they did not receive the information they needed, the following comments were made

- only told teacher's name/class
- wanted to know the name of the Wellbeing Officer/useful contact for discussing child's needs/guidance staff details
- curriculum information was not given
- no information on school day timings, uniform, pick up/drop off arrangements, where to line up on the first day/staffing (multiple respondents mentioned these)
- no information on help for parents on low income
- no information on positive behaviour management
- no information on class merger
- secondary school did not give parents any information for 16+ child
- no information on play approaches and other school strategies
- no information on school clubs
- no information about homework expectations
- no information on best communication methods for contacting the school
- no information on school meals
- no information about PE days and kit

Information sharing

We asked parents about key pieces of information and whether or not they had received this information. The percentages listed below show the respondents who **had** received the following information

- absences/illness/lateness procedures **75%**
- how to contact your child's teacher **59%**
- who/how to contact regarding health and wellbeing concerns **59%**
- anti-bullying/positive behaviour policy **41%**
- Parent Council/PTA information **68%**
- Extra-curricular activities/clubs **53%**

From the replies we received, **84%** of children settled easily. However, **16%** did not.

For those who struggled to settle, **66%** of the schools/nurseries/establishments had procedures to help with this. However, **34%** reported there were no procedures or they did not know about them..

Sharing previous learning

We asked about the sharing of children's previous learning by the former school/class to the new school/class.

- **53%** said that children's previous learning was shared
- **9%** said that previous learning was not shared
- **38%** said that they didn't know

We then asked if the information on previous learning was shared with the respondents (parents).

- **33%** said it was shared
- **56%** said it was not shared
- **11%** didn't know

Moving on from School

Our penultimate question asked about the transition from school into college/work/university.

- **25%** said they and their young person had received advice from the school/careers advisor about a range of choices
- **10%** said this happened at the right point in their child's school career
- **10%** said they and their child had the right information to make their choices
- **21%** said they and their child had an opportunity to visit potential next destinations (workplace, college, university)
- **46%** felt their child's next step was a positive one
- **43%** felt that their child's next step was not a positive one

The reasons given for this included

- communication from school does not arrive in good time
- a son with autistic spectrum disorder had no next steps lined up for him, despite achieving qualifications
- a parent with a child with additional support needs got no help from the school and had to find the right course and support themselves
- parents were not involved at all in their son's uni choice
- young person not understanding work ethic to get results
- struggling son not validated or supported by school.

Experiences of young people with Co-Ordinated Support Plans

Our final question asked parents with children with Co-ordinated Support Plans (CSPs) about their experiences of transitions. Of the responses to this question

- **43%** said they were fully involved in planning for the change
- **29%** said the professionals involved were the right ones
- only **6%** said the statutory processes for school leavers with CSPs were not followed
- **26%** feel that the next step for their young person is a positive one
- **40%** did not feel that the next step was a positive one.

Reasons given for feeling the next step was not a positive one were

- uncertainty
- poor transition from primary to secondary, when the support plan put in place was not followed by the secondary school
- the CSP was not passed on and followed; promises were made but none were delivered
- the local authority refused to provide a school place so college was the alternative
- parents were included in the process but all the decisions had already been made
- parent not involved and the new teacher did not know their child had ASN until too late
- new teacher was unaware of son's additional support needs and was unable to answer questions.

Additional comments on transitions and suggestions for improvements included

We received many comments in our survey,

Listed below are the themes drawn from comments in which parents and/or children had negative experiences. These included

- composite class splitting friendship groups and causing upset
- poor behaviour management systems
- lack of a head teacher; changes in class room teachers
- failure to share important information when moving from nursery to primary or primary to secondary
- poor/no communication about: additional support needs, school transport, school contact for questions/concerns, PE kit
- last minute information about primary class teachers
- teacher shortages lead to uncertainty and worry when there are lots of teacher changes/cover
- medical training was not put in place in time for school start
- children not made aware of toilet locations and procedures, causing anxiety
- lack of support for care-experienced children in school generally and in particular with career guidance and college/work/university applications
- poor handover when family support was needed, like 'starting all over again' at a time of high stress.

Again, organised by theme, parents suggested several ideas to improve transition

- better communication about learning support needs
- key school contact, opportunity to ask questions
- opportunity to meet the teacher early on or getting settling-in update
- make sure transition information is read and acted on by receiving school
- information on anti-bullying strategies
- information could be shared by the school about: school lay-out, the curriculum, late/absent procedures, homework, equipment for the first day
- more career coaching/advice involving parents

- regular monthly visits to high school
- resources to help parents with transition and with supporting their child
- more information for parents on how the handover from one teacher to another is managed, how progress/support needs are shared etc
- buddy system of support by pupils
- class organisation: consider friendship groups; plan/communicate better about composite classes
- end half-day starts for P1s
- clear information about different communication channels used by the school
- a tour of the new school for parents and contact over the summer
- more time with teachers for the parents
- proper inclusion so all children can take part
- communications need to go to both parents if they live in different households.

Further information: Tina Woolnough, Acting Communications Officer, Connect comms@connect.info
07799 416 360