

## Supporting learning in the transition from primary to secondary schools

### Introduction and background

The transition from primary to secondary school is a major life experience for both pupils and their families. For the majority, it is a time of widening horizons and growing independence. However, there is evidence from the findings of this study as well as from previous research that for a significant minority it can be a time when their confidence as learners is reduced and they fail to progress as expected. Schools and teachers can make a difference.

The overall aims of this study were as follows:

- to identify models of best practice which positively support the transition from primary to secondary school;
- to identify and understand programmes which support literacy and numeracy across the transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3;
- to explore how a school culture is created and articulated;
- to identify models which engage parents and which maintain engagement as the pupil moves on to key stage 3;
- to look at how various models of partnership may be context-specific and may or may not transplant from one situation to another; and
- to make recommendations regarding transition to key stage 3, drawing on empirical research, a wider reading of the relevant literature and consultation with stake holders.

The project was mainly focused on Bristol and the surrounding area, with additional research in other parts of the country to highlight particular models of transfer and transition, including a study of all-through schools. The research was comparative, drawing on perceptions and experiences. It was primarily qualitative, supported by quantitative analysis of educational micro-data. Case studies of 17 secondary schools and their linked primary schools were developed. The sample of schools included local authority, trust, academy, faith and fee-charging schools. Teachers, pupils and key members of local authority personnel were consulted.

### Key findings and implications for policy makers

- Differences in culture and organisation between primary and secondary schools add to pupils' fear and uncertainty as they transfer. There is a need to pay particular attention to the social, emotional, curricular and pedagogical needs of pupils for successful transfer.
- In discussions about key stage 2 and stage 3 curricula, there is an unhelpful polarisation of skills based and subject based development. Very little attention is paid to issues of teaching, learning and assessment with respect to transition.
- A typical secondary school receives the majority of its intake from 5 or 6 local primary schools. It makes sense for schools to operate within geographical and community-based partnerships, provided that these partnerships do not create unintended barriers or perpetuate social divisions across the local authority.
- Changing patterns of school governance have injected new energy and ideas into issues of transition, but have reduced the ability of children's services authorities to have

direct control. The appointment of a governor with responsibility for transition in schools would ensure that the issue remains a focal point within the governing body.

- Schools are making extensive efforts to increase parental involvement and there is increasing use of ICT to give parents opportunities to take a more active role in children's learning but little evidence of its systematic evaluation.

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