

# Pastoral care system support students education essay



The term 'transition' is synonymous with 'change', but with regard to education this phrase is specifically used to describe 'progression' (Measor and Fleetham, 2005, p. 10). The Educationalists Lynda Measor and Mike Fleetham develop upon this point and state that 'transition refers to the movement of a pupil as they progress into the next year group or Key Stage' (2005, p. 10). I believe that this is a particularly interesting definition as their use of the word 'progress' highlights the fluidity of this change and suggests that 'transition' is a process, rather than a single event (2005, p. 10). Within the context of this study I intend to focus on student transition from Year 6 to 7 and to explore some of the ways in which schools support pupils as they journey, or 'transfer', from primary to secondary school (Measor and Fleetham, 2005, p. 10).

## **1.1 Two Views of Transfer**

Student transition from Key Stage Two to Three is a deceptively complex process that involves a wide range of people, practices and policies. The success of a pupil's transfer into secondary education is dependent on a number of factors and can vary according to the system or schemes implemented within a school to support its students' development. Although 'success' is difficult to quantify, it is reported that 'the effectiveness of a transition programme is often measured in two ways' (Measor and Fleetham, 2005, p. 14). The first is on the basis of whether there has been 'a noticeable drop in the academic performance of pupils', whilst the second depends on pupils' feedback in response to 'the question of whether they feel settled', both of which are 'judged at the end of the autumn term in Year 7' (Measor and Fleetham, 2005, p. 14). Focusing on this point, Measor

and Fleetham draw upon the work of Galton, et al. (1999) and identify ‘ five bridges that pupils must cross during the transfer process in order to progress successfully from Year 6 to 7’ (p. 12).

Within his article titled Bridges to assist a difficult crossing Michael Barber explores ‘ the five bridge theory’ in greater depth (1999). He states that ‘ the different bridges, or areas of activity, can help prevent students from losing momentum, or regressing in terms of their achievement, when moving from one institution to another’ (Barber, 1999). It is important to note that ‘ although there is some shared content and an overlap between the five bridges, they divide roughly into two sections’ (Measor and Fleetham, 2005, p. 12).

The first section consists of:

The bureaucratic bridge

The social and emotional bridge

The curriculum bridge

Collectively, these are referred to as ‘ the social, or organizational bridges’ (Measor and Fleetham, 2005, pp. 12-13).

The second section is comprised of:

The pedagogy bridge

The management of learning bridge

These are otherwise known as ‘ the academic bridges’ (Measor and Fleetham, 2005, p. 12).

While ‘ the academic bridges deal with approaches to teaching and encourage independent learning’, ‘ the social or organizational bridges focus on the development of links between pupils, parents and schools’ (Measor and Fleetham, 2005, pp. 12-13). In accordance with the work of Measor and Fleetham, ‘ an effective transfer programme will involve activities that relate to each of the five bridges’ and ‘ provide opportunities for pupils to adapt to the new arrangements and learning styles in secondary school’ (2005, pp. 12-13). Although I understand the importance of ‘ a balanced transition scheme’, for the purpose of my study I have chosen to focus specifically on the strategies used to support pupils’ welfare as they cross ‘ the social and emotional bridge’ (Measor and Fleetham, 2005, p. 12).

## **The Concept of Pastoral Care**

‘ Pastoral care’ is the term commonly used within schools to describe ‘ support to assist the well-being and development of students’ (Calvert, 2009, p. 267). In recent years the provision of pastoral care is reported to have been ‘ aided and influenced by the Every Child Matters (ECM) initiative’ (DfES, 2003). This Government policy, implemented in 2003, aims to ensure that ‘ all children and young people, regardless of their background and individual circumstances, have the support they need to:

Be healthy

Stay safe

Enjoy and achieve

Make a positive contribution

Achieve economic well-being' (DfES).

The ECM initiative emphasizes the importance of 'information sharing' and highlights the 'need for schools to work in partnership with other services and establishments in order to support their students' (Calvert, 2009, p. 268). This emphasis on 'multi-agency work' has directly impacted on 'the structure of pastoral systems and the distribution of care' (Calvert, 2009, p. 269). Whereas 'the social and emotional health of students used to be of greater interest to Heads of Year and Form Tutors', now 'all individuals working with children have a duty to promote and safeguard the welfare of those within their jurisdiction' (Calvert, 2009, p. 269). Although the five ECM goals are intended to encourage teachers and practitioners from within schools and Local Authorities (LAs) to share in the care of every pupil, 'the level and nature of the care they provide still differs' (Calvert, 2009, p. 269).

Developing upon this point, I support the work of the theorist Michael Fine and his argument that 'a single definition of 'pastoral care' is misleading, in part because it suggests that the term refers to one set of values and a series of concrete strategies' (Fine, 2007, p. 2). In reality the concept of 'pastoral care', like 'transition', 'covers a range of interactions and activities' (Fine, 2007, p. 4). Within his study of *The Meaning and Practices of Care in Education* Mike Calvert states that 'in some schools, pastoral care is provided on an individual basis by Guidance Counsellors and Children's

Services, who offer students pragmatic help and advice at points of crisis’ (2009, p. 271).

It has been noted that other types of pastoral care involve ‘meeting the needs of individuals in group situations’ (Calvert, 2009, p. 271). These activities include ‘working with Tutors in form periods and engaging in tasks or discussions with support staff’ (Calvert, 2009, p. 272). Although it could be argued that providing pupils with group-based support merely categorizes their social or emotional needs, I believe that there are definite benefits to this form of pastoral care. For example, offering pupils advice and guidance in the presence of other individuals, with similar issues and concerns, can create a stronger support network and encourage learners, as well as practitioners, to share information and contribute to the pastoral care process.

It is interesting to note that these individual and group-centered approaches to pastoral care appear to provide support that focuses on helping pupils with existing needs and caring for individuals after an issue or problem has arisen. I aim to explore whether these general frameworks are used to support pupils during their transfer from primary to secondary school, or whether pastoral practice during transition involves different strategies and a more intuitive form of care.

## **The Issues Affecting Student Transition**

As previously mentioned, the transition process from Year 6 to 7 is a complex right of passage. ‘Whilst schools face pressure from their LA to maintain and improve targets in terms of child performance, pupils are also

expected to continue their academic and social development' (Frost, 1996, p. 187). For certain individuals this process can be further complicated by their age and physical well-being. A pupils' transfer to secondary school can coincide with the onset of puberty and these 'developmental changes', combined with changes in their education, 'can cause stress and anxiety, which often result in behavioural difficulties' (Frost, 1996, p. 175).

The social and emotional issues often affecting pupils as they transfer to secondary school have been explored in greater depth by the Teacher and Theorist, David Frost. Within his study of student development Frost reflects on his own daughter's transition from Year 6 to 7 and outlines the different problems that he believes she experienced during this process. Frost states that his daughter's 'overriding concern' was 'her desire to fit in and be considered "normal"' (1996, p. 175). This fear of being marginalized is reported to have influenced 'her choice of friends, her behaviour and ultimately her approach to learning' (Frost, 1996, p. 175). Frost's daughter is said to have been affected by the belief that 'in order to avoid being bullied' she should 'avoid being the only pupil to complete an in-class or homework task properly' (1996, p. 175). This lackadaisical approach to the completion of work 'had a dramatic effect on her end of term, summative assessment levels and caused considerable tension within the family' (Frost, 1996, p. 175). Frost uses the experiences of his daughter to highlight the link between academic success and pastoral care issues, and argues that 'pupils cannot learn unless they feel supported by both staff and their immediate peer group' (1996, p. 175).

Aside from problems relating to friendships and self-motivation, pupils are also said to be affected by organizational issues. Within their transition report the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) also address the challenges facing pupils as they transfer from primary to secondary education. In this study Evangelou, et. al, (2008) focus on the fact that in recent years ' the expansion of secondary school sites has resulted in lessons being further apart and exacerbated the issue of pupils struggling to arrive in the right location, with the correct equipment, for each class' (p. 30). It is reported that ' across Britain a secondary school student will have on average 12 different teachers and lessons based in 15 classrooms' (Frost, 1996, p. 175). This is a dramatic contrast to most primary school timetables and can cause ' organizational difficulties that may result in feelings of anxiety and directly impact on pupils' well-being' (DCSF, 2008, p. 30). Although there are a number of similarities between Frost's study and the DCSF report, there is also one key difference. While both texts address a social or emotional issue affecting pupils during the transition process, Frost asserts his own opinions and Evangelou, et. al, focus their findings on ' pupils' perceptions' (2008).

I believe that the pastoral issues that have been identified can be grouped into three sections:

The first section consists of those issues that relate to the physical health of a child.

The second section focuses on the issues affecting a pupil's social, emotional and mental well-being.

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The third section is based on the issues surrounding a pupil's daily routine at school.

Although it can be argued that issues concerning a pupil's health and routine are likely to impact on their social, emotional and mental well-being, for the purpose of my study I have chosen to differentiate between these three areas in order to identify the different support that they require.

## **A Pastoral Care System To Aid Student Transition**

The DCSF transition report challenges any assumption that individual and group-centered approaches to pastoral care simply provide support for pupils after an issue has arisen. The document highlights the importance of the role some primary schools play in initiating the transition process and preparing pupils for their transfer to secondary education during Years 5 and 6 of Key Stage Two. It is argued that 'a successful pastoral care system to aid student transition will involve primary teachers providing all pupils with advice and guidance on the day-to-day structure of secondary school' (DCSF, 2008, p. 22). This is designed to address any concerns the pupils may have about the issues surrounding transition and the prospect of starting Year 7. It is hoped that by helping pupils understand the changes they will face in approaches to learning and the expectations of staff, that they will be 'adequately prepared to embrace the daily challenges of a secondary school routine' (DCSF, 2008, p. 22).

Primary teachers can also offer effective pastoral support by working in partnership with secondary school staff. 'Links between schools' is described as one of the eight areas identified by McGee, et al. (2004) as having 'a

direct impact on student transfer' (DCSF, 2008, p. 4). These theorists are reported to believe that ' Key Stage Two and Three teachers can aid and assist all pupils in preparing for secondary school and overcoming their anxieties about change, by organizing taster days' (DCSF, 2008, p. 10). These days involve pupils visiting feeder schools in order to meet existing students and specific members of staff, and often allow pupils to participate in ' demo lessons' (DCSF, 2008, p. 10). They also provide an opportunity for schools to ' offer pupils information and advice on issues such as time management and bullying' (DCSF, 2008, p. 11), in the hope of helping individuals to address these problems before they affect their social and emotional well-being.

Although taster days are designed to support the welfare of all pupils during the transition process, I believe that they are vital for individuals with Special Educational Needs (SEN). For these pupils, visiting their prospective school helps them to become acquainted with the support staff, to familiarize themselves with their new surroundings and to mentally prepare for the move. I also believe that it is essential for continuity to be maintained between primary and secondary school in terms of the type and level of support that pupils with SEN receive. This continuity of care is largely achieved through ' the sharing of information between schools in line with their confidentiality policy' (DCSF, 2008, p. 11). While pupils visit secondary schools, ' some local authority areas also employ dedicated transition workers to visit Year 6 pupils in their primary classes' (DCSF, 2008, p. 11). Focused visits enable these individuals to ' talk to parents and teachers about pupils' needs' and to ' work with children to devise strategies for

supporting their social and emotional development' (DCSF, 2008, p. 11).

Regardless of an individual's SEN status, I feel that personal data concerning all pupils should be shared between institutions to ensure that the appropriate secondary school staff are aware of any medical conditions or child protection issues that could influence the pastoral care they provide.

In 2002 Ofsted published an Evaluation of the effectiveness of transfer arrangements at age 11. Focusing on the findings of this report, it is argued that 'Year 7 pupils should attend follow-up receptions with their primary teachers to discuss the experience of changing school' (Ofsted, 2002, p. 7).

Although an important part of pastoral care involves encouraging individuals to talk about their feelings and experiences, it is thought that 'only a limited number of primary teachers have the time to meet with past pupils in their new setting' (DCSF, 2008, p. 4). In light of this, 'secondary schools should ensure that Form Tutors, Heads of Year, Heads of House, SEN support staff and outside care agencies are available for pupils to talk to' (DCSF, 2008, p. 4). Aside from encouraging pupils to verbally communicate their emotional anxieties and hopes about secondary school, it is also considered 'good practice' for individuals to express their feelings through 'written tasks', such as 'the creation of a diary' (DCSF, 2008, p. 8).

My research has shown that the majority of pastoral care practices are tailored to the needs of the many. This is largely through necessity and although there will always be pupils who require individual support, the practical constraints of caring for a large number of children means that support is often given to groups. In order to explore in greater depth the use

and effect of these transfer arrangements, I have looked at their application within Hardenhuish School.

## **School Context**

‘Hardenhuish’ is an 11 to 18 co-educational Comprehensive school, based in Wiltshire. After an Ofsted inspection in the spring term of 2008 the School was graded ‘Outstanding’ and this status is reflected in the level of teaching, facilities and quality of care that the School provides. The inspector’s report draws particular attention to the School’s support system and states that over the course of five years ‘the leadership group has completely rethought its approach to pastoral care’ (Ofsted, 2008, p. 5). Hardenhuish School is noted for having employed staff as ‘non-teaching Pastoral Managers – at least one individual within each year group whose role it is to support the social and emotional development of pupils’ (Ofsted, 2008, p. 5). In order to care for the health and welfare of pupils these individuals are expected to manage behaviour, to monitor attendance and to strengthen the School’s relationship with parents and carers. The Pastoral Managers work in close partnership with Learning Support staff, the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), Child Protection Officers, the Nurse and Form Tutors, to ensure that there is a consistency of care across the School. They also liaise with outside agencies within the LA to make sure that the care they provide is in accordance with Government guidelines. It is reported that ‘communication links between Pastoral Managers and other practitioners are particularly strong in Year 7’ and have been praised by Ofsted as forming part of ‘an excellent pastoral care system to aid student transition from Year 6 to 7’ (2008, p. 4). Having read Ofsted’s positive

evaluation of the School's induction programme I wanted to explore in greater depth the success of this system and the specific strategies that are used to support pupils during a period traditionally marked by some uncertainty and change.

## **Information Gathering**

In order to identify how Hardenhuish School has created an effective pastoral care system to support pupils during transition, I focused on two key areas:

The social and emotional issues affecting pupils as they transfer from primary to secondary school.

The strategies implemented within Hardenhuish School to address these issues and ensure that the well-being of pupils is maintained during this process.

I decided that in order to identify the issues associated with primary transfer I would ask a cohort of Year 6 pupils to specify their hopes and concerns about starting secondary school. I also wanted to encourage Year 7 pupils to reflect on their experiences and identify the ways in which they believe Hardenhuish School supported their transition. Aside from the attitudes and opinions of pupils, I hoped to gain an insight into the perceptions of Form Tutors and their pastoral care practices. In all three cases my areas of enquiry focused on subjective opinions and required a qualitative form of data collection. In light of this, I resolved to gather all information through the use of questionnaires, focus groups and individual meetings.

Having previously identified two key areas of study, I decided that the respondents of my first questionnaire would be the Year 6 pupils at Redland Primary School. I chose to focus on this particular institution because of its close affiliation with Hardenhuish School. Essentially, I believed that by focusing on this feeder-school I would develop an awareness of the pupils' hopes and concerns regarding transition, which would enable me to understand why certain pastoral care practices are implemented by the Year 7 teaching and support staff at 'Hardenhuish'. When creating this questionnaire I spent a considerable amount of time amending the structure and presentation of the text. Ultimately, I wanted to ensure that the questions were clear and concise, appropriately targeted at the age and ability of the respondents, and directly linked to my research topic. The final format of this questionnaire was based on a three-part structure known as 'the sandwich theory' (Sharma, 2010, p. 24) (See Appendix A). In accordance with this theory, the initial questions were 'closed ended' and 'designed to ease the respondent into the question and answer process by simply circling 'YES' or 'NO' (Sharma, 2010, p. 24). The next set of questions was 'subject specific' and required the pupils to draw upon their own experiences whilst beginning to extend their answers (Sharma, 2010, p. 24). Finally, the closing questions were 'designed to elicit a detailed personal response' (Sharma, 2010, p. 24). I believed that this was a logical structure and an effective way of ensuring that the Year 6 pupils could access the questionnaire and contribute their own opinions and ideas.

Amongst other issues, my literature review highlighted the importance of pastoral care practices to support the transition of pupils with SEN. In order

to explore in greater depth the social and emotional issues affecting these individuals as they transfer from primary to secondary school, I held a number of focus groups with Year 6 pupils who have global needs. These pupils were identified by Redland Primary School as needing additional support with their social and emotional development, and in terms of their learning were unable to access the questionnaire completed by their peer group. In light of this, the small group discussions provided these select pupils with an opportunity to express their views verbally in a supportive environment. They were able to openly discuss their hopes and concerns about starting secondary school without the pressure of having to communicate these feelings in written form.

The Year 7 questionnaire also provided an opportunity for these pupils to describe the feelings and emotions that they experienced prior to starting secondary school, but focused in greater depth on the tasks and events that were used to support their transition. The pupils were asked to identify their involvement in activities during Year 6 and their first term at 'Hardenhuish', which helped them to prepare for the move and settle into secondary school life. I thought that the pupils may have struggled to recall all the ways in which they were supported and so provided a set of fixed responses from which they could choose the various options that applied to them (See Appendix B).

To gain a greater insight into the pastoral care policies and practices implemented within Hardenhuish School, I met with the Year 7 Learning Manager. Our meeting focused on the verbal and physical exchange of information between settings and the use of induction activities to support

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pupils' health and well-being during their transfer from primary to secondary school. Particular attention was paid to the role of the Tutor and the invaluable support they provide in Year 7 and throughout a pupil's secondary education at Hardenhuish School. I wanted to ask these staff members about their individual approach to pastoral care, to identify how they believe their role impacts on the personal development of pupils during the transition process. In order to do this, I created a third questionnaire designed to elicit this information through the use of open-ended and 'filter', or contingency questions, which do not require an answer from all recipients (See Appendix C).

## **5. 2 Findings**

All three forms of data collection generated a range of interesting and useful information.

### **Pupil Feedback**

With regard to the Year 6 questionnaire, feedback showed that at the point of administering this survey 57% of pupils did not have their secondary school place confirmed. Apart from the uncertainty surrounding this placement, it appeared that there were five other aspects of starting secondary school that caused the pupils concern. The pupils' worries were all centered on the issues of friendship and organization, and consisted of 'struggling to find the location of different classrooms', 'being late to lessons', 'losing contact with existing friends', 'not making new friends' and 'being bullied'. From the cohort of pupils who completed the questionnaire, the vast majority were worried about being unable to navigate their way



around a secondary school site, whilst the smallest percentage had concerns about bullying.

When asked if the pupils had spoken to anyone about these concerns, 57% answered ' YES'. Despite reluctance on the part of some individuals to talk about these issues, it was encouraging to see that 79% of pupils stated that their Year 6 teachers had provided them with information to help them prepare for secondary school. I believe that by offering advice and guidance, these teachers have laid the foundation for their pupils' future pastoral care. They have helped to demystify the transition process and address common concerns before they become issues that affect the pupils' health and well-being at secondary school. In this way, the primary teachers are working in partnership with secondary support staff and in the words of McGee, et al. (2004) ' creating a link between schools' (DCSF, 2008, p. 4).

Feedback from individuals during the Year 6 focus groups supported the findings from my questionnaire and showed that the pupils' main concern about starting secondary school was the prospect of " getting lost". Although these focused discussions confirmed my previous findings, they also challenged my assumption that to have a sibling at a prospective secondary school would be an asset. I believed that of all the Year 6 pupils questioned, the 64% who were identified as having a sibling at the school they hoped to attend were likely to receive greater help and support, and to have a clearer understanding of the next stage of their education. These preconceived ideas were confounded by the comments made by one particular group of individuals. Complaints were made about siblings having exaggerated descriptions of the stresses and strains of secondary school, which resulted

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in increased and unnecessary anxiety, and highlighted an issue affecting students that I had not previously considered.

The Year 7 questionnaire encouraged individuals to reflect on their feelings and emotions prior to starting at Hardenhuish School and showed that these pupils were equally affected by issues such as “ making new friends” and “ finding different classrooms”. In contrast to the Year 6 results, the Year 7 questionnaire also showed that 23% of pupils expressed concerns about interacting with older students.

Although the Year 7 questionnaire highlighted the emotional anxieties about change that affected these pupils, the survey was largely intended to show the strategies that were used to address such concerns and support their transition.

The pupils were asked to choose from a set of fixed responses in answer to the question ‘ Did you do anything at primary school to help you get ready for the move to secondary school?’ There were 12 options from which the pupils could select their answers and the percentage scores for how many people engaged in each activity are listed in the table below.

## **Key**

### **1**

Visited schools

### **2**

Took part in subject activity days

**3**

Asked other Year 6 pupils about their thoughts on starting secondary school

**4**

Spoke to Year 7 students about their experiences at secondary school

**5**

Spoke to teachers about the things I looked forward to

**6**

Spoke to teachers about the things I was worried about

**7**

Started work in lessons that I would finish in Year 7

**8**

Learnt ways of planning my time and organizing my work

**9**

Learnt about the different rules and rewards secondary schools use

**10**

Learnt about the different extra-curricular clubs schools have

**11**

Wrote to my Year 7 form tutor

**12**

Met my subject teachers

The column chart shows that 96% of pupils who completed the questionnaire visited potential secondary schools as part of their primary preparation for starting Year 7. I have previously discussed the benefits of scheduled visits and the importance of their role in aiding student transition, within my literature review. Drawing upon this information, I believe that the chart suggests that the majority of schools support the principles of the DCSF and their belief that ‘taster days are an effective way of helping to support all pupils, and to address any concerns or apprehension they may have about the prospect of change’ (2008, p. 10). It was also interesting to see that 77% of pupils had entered into discussions with their primary teachers about ‘the different rules and rewards secondary schools use’. I believe that making pupils aware of the expectations of their prospective secondary schools sets the requirements for their entry into Year 7 and ensures that incidents such as bullying are kept to a minimum.

The pupils were also asked to choose from a set of fixed responses in answer to the question ‘How do you think Hardenhuish School has helped you get used to being in Year 7 and at secondary school?’ The results were as follows

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## **Key**

### **1**

By giving me information on the School’s facilities

### **2**

By giving me a map to help me find my way around

**3**

By giving me information on the School's rules and use of rewards

**4**

By helping me plan my time and organize my equipment

**5**

By offering advice to help me complete my work

**6**

By encouraging me to take part in extra-curricular clubs and activities

**7**

By encouraging me to talk about any problems I am having

**8**

By getting students from across the School to offer help and advice

These results show some of the ways in which Hardenhuish School supported its pupils on entry into Year 7. To explore in greater depth how the School's pastoral system offers outstanding care during the transition process, we should look at the feedback offered by tutors and the Year 7 Learning Manager.

## **Practitioners Feedback**

It is important to take note of the variation in the pupils' answers to question 4. These results were described by one particular Year 7 Tutor as "evidence that the School's pastoral care system does not promote a 'one-size fits all' approach to the provision of help and support". In contrast, the system is

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designed to offer group and individual based support that takes into account any information from primary schools and provides different pupils with different advice and guidance, depending on their social and emotional needs.

I have previously addressed the problems associated with individualized care and focused on the practical constraints affecting schools with a large intake of Year 7 pupils. Although 252 Year 6 students transferred to Hardenhuish School at the start of the academic year 2010/11, efforts were made to ensure that each pupil received individualized pastoral support. During my meeting with the Year 7 Learning Manager it was explained that before implementing strategies to support the social and emotional development of these pupils, the pastoral team created a personal profile for each child. Data was gathered from each primary setting and pupils were encouraged to create a 'Passport' detailing facts about their 'interests and hobbies, friendship groups, previous visits to Hardenhuish and worries about starting secondary school' (See Appendix D). Collectively, this information was used to help bridge a gap between Year 6 and 7, and to address pupil concerns before they develop into a potentially more