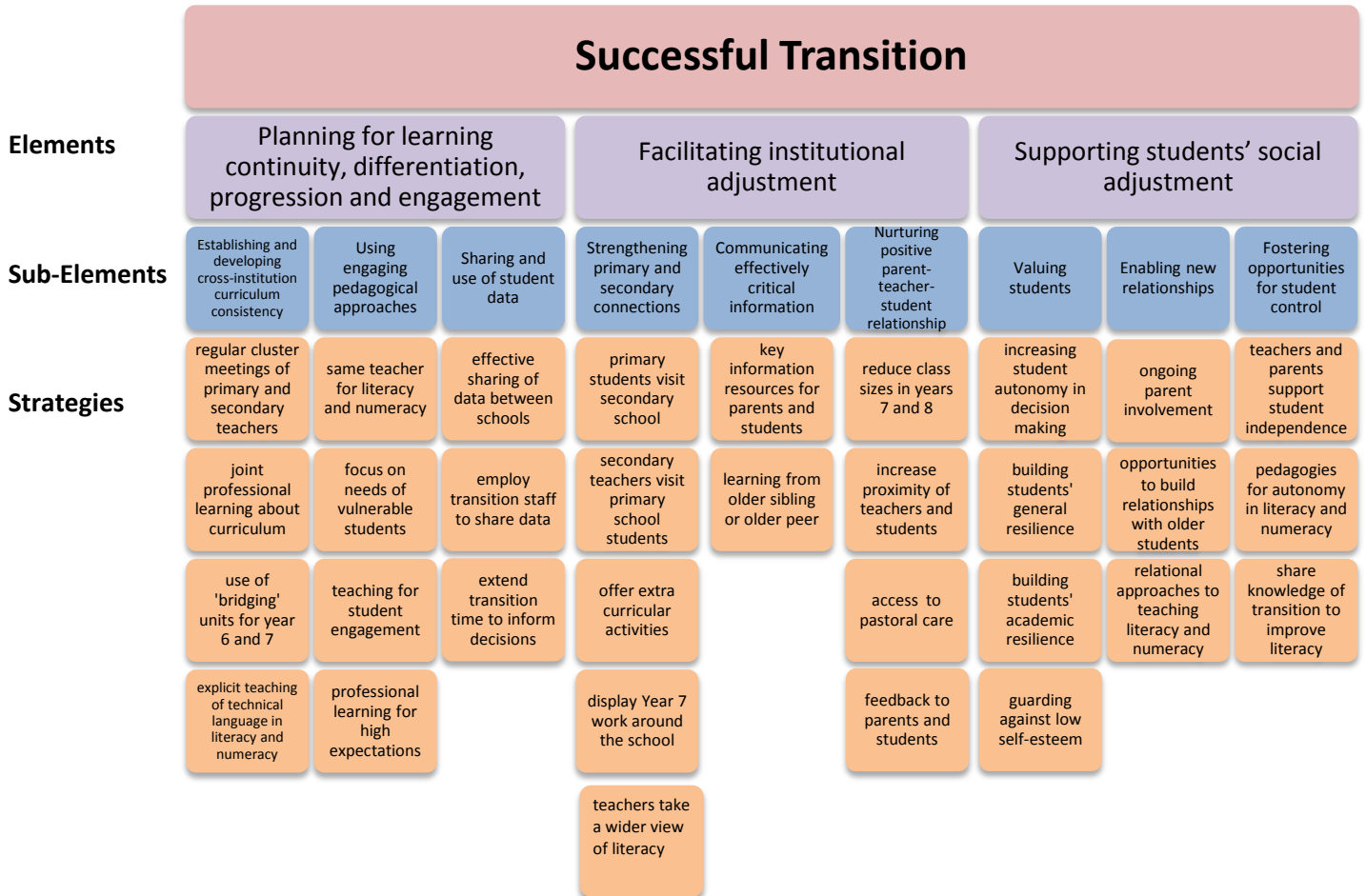


Research and Background to DET’s Middle Years Transitions Framework

The framework was developed from research and projects commissioned by DET on evidence-based transition strategies and practices for students in Years 5-8. Relevant studies were organised, analysed and synthesised to create a typology that characterises successful strategies specific to the primary to secondary transition. The typology as represented below is distilled from documented research evidence of successful transition strategies that have been implemented nationally and internationally.



The typology consists of three main elements:

- planning for learning continuity, differentiation, progression and engagement
- facilitating institutional adjustment
- supporting students’ social adjustment

with three sub-elements for each of the elements as illustrated above. For each of the nine sub-elements, there were 32 successful strategies found to be commonly evidenced in the literature that was reviewed.

DET’s Middle Years Transitions Framework draws on the three elements of the typology, identifying the three main aspects of transition needed for schools and clusters to effectively audit, plan, implement and monitor middle years’ transition:

- **Administration and Information** – *What’s involved in the transition process and what information should schools be providing to students and families?* This aspect of transition includes transition

policies, organisational arrangements, information sharing and communications and is drawn from the typology element Facilitating institutional adjustment

- **Teaching and Learning** – *What do students and teachers need to do to take account of the differences between primary and secondary approaches to teaching and learning?* This aspect of transition includes curriculum, assessment and pedagogy in the middle years of schooling and is drawn from the typology element Planning for learning continuity, differentiation, progression and engagement
- **Social and Personal** – *Where do opportunities and challenges for students lie as they make their way from primary to secondary school? How do we best support students to make a successful transition through this time?* This aspect of transition includes social and emotional issues, personal challenges and resilience building and is drawn from the typology element Supporting students' social adjustment.

These three aspects are also drawn from commissioned research which references the framework by Galton, Gray and Ruddock (1999) identifying five key focus areas or 'transition bridges':

- School policies and organisation
- Information and communications
- Social and personal orientation
- Curriculum and assessment
- Teaching and learning

The three main aspects of transition in DET's Framework incorporate the five focus areas as follows:

FIVE FOCUS AREAS		THREE MAIN ASPECTS
School policies and organisation	}	Administration and Information
Information and communications		
Curriculum and assessment	}	Teaching and Learning
Teaching and learning		
Social and personal orientation		Social and Personal

Using the Framework

Research by Evangelou et al (2008) illustrates the need for school transition strategies to extend beyond activities designed to support social and emotional adjustment to activities that address the nature of the curriculum and teaching. Evidence about the impact of transition on student motivation and learning and the gaps that are evident in current transition practices indicates the need for all three aspects of transition to be considered and addressed at both school and cluster level. The transition materials on DET's website have been organised using this three-part framework to assist schools and clusters of schools to address all aspects of transition.

Definitions

Transition to secondary school is not a point-in-time event, but rather an experience that can extend beyond the last two years of primary school and the first two years of secondary school. In general,

research shows that students look forward to secondary school (Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2003). Since transition is movement from one set of circumstances to another with changes to the environment, relationships, behaviours, routines, roles and expectations, for some students, negative consequences can arise from discontinuities in the environment, educational practices, and social structures to which transitioning students must adapt.

Successful transition is the process whereby students are able to seamlessly shift from primary to secondary school while continuing to learn and develop their social and emotional wellbeing.

Successful Transition

- **For Students**

During a successful transition process, students have the personal characteristics necessary to overcome challenges associated with the transition process. They have built strong relationships with teachers and other students in the school community and can draw on their personal characteristics and skills in exploratory activities associated with learning. From a student perspective, successful transition includes belonging to the school community (positive social relationships, being valued by their peers, coping with their school work) and being able to participate in decision making in the school and in their own learning.

- **For Parents**

Successful transition for parents is indicated by the maintenance or improvement of their child's academic performance; social adjustment to the new school; enhanced well-being; and their child's developed sense of community and belonging to the school.

- **For School Leaders**

From the perspective of school leaders, successful transition means that school leaders have a vision for their transitioning students as part of whole-school improvement, and make this a priority in their planning, organisation and resourcing. For primary school leaders, this means supporting students as they transition out of their school each year with programs that are enacted and owned by teachers, parents and students. For secondary school leaders, this means supporting students who are transitioning into the school so teachers, parents and students all know the role they are playing in making transition a smooth process.

- **For Teachers**

For primary school teachers, successful transition includes collegiate satisfaction with the degree of preparation for secondary school provided by transition programs as evidenced by student and parental satisfaction with these programs. From the perspective of secondary school staff, successful transition includes students building positive relationships with teachers and their peers; adjusting to new routines and academic expectations of secondary school; and maintaining or improving academic achievement over the transition interval.

Transition Concerns

Research indicates that there is a 'performance dip' when students transition from primary to secondary school. Academic outcomes and engagement with school decline after transitioning to

secondary school. Boys' performance declines faster than girls. A brief synopsis of the findings from national and international research into transition practices reveals that:

- Transition to secondary school occurs at different ages in different countries (10-15 years), yet the same pattern in attainment drop occurs – it is the change and not the age that is the cause
- Social orientation is generally well handled but academic orientation is not always well handled at various transition points
- The sharing of curriculum information, teaching programs and pedagogy rarely happens across the primary/secondary school divide
- Continuity of learning for literacy and numeracy can suffer as students transition from primary to secondary school
- Teaching expectations often differ between primary and secondary school
- Joint (primary and secondary) curriculum teams are rarely part of transition support activities.

School and Cluster Transition Planning

One of the most important factors in student transitions is the professional relationships that exist between primary and secondary schools in a cluster. The performance dip experienced by a significant number of students cannot be solved by continuing with a transition model largely based on plans made and executed by individual schools. As far as possible, school clusters need to involve school leadership (secondary school and feeder primary schools), Year 6 and Year 7 teachers of English and Maths and Transition Co-ordinators. A cluster transition strategy plan can play a vital role in addressing the professional barriers between primary and secondary teachers which may impact on successful student transitions.

Selected Readings

Barber, M. (1999) Taking the Tide at the Flood: Transforming Education in the Middle Years, Middle Years of Schooling Conference, Melbourne, 28th March 1999

Barber observed that most students begin secondary school with a wave of enthusiasm so the problem of a drop in performance between Year 6 and 7 is not about the stress of change and loss of friendships, and 'the problem is better attributed to misunderstandings between primary and secondary teachers and low expectations of what students in the first years of secondary school can achieve'.

Evangelou, M., Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P. and Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2008) *What Makes a Successful Transition from Primary to Secondary School?*, Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 Project, Department for Children, Schools and Families
http://www.ioe.ac.uk/successful_transition_from_primary_to_secondary_report.pdf

This report concluded that to ensure children's transitions are successful (and improved where needed), all three areas (social adjustment, institutional adjustment and curriculum interest and continuity) need to be taken into account when planning transition strategies at Local Authority and school levels.

Galton, M., Gray, J. and Ruddock (1999) *The Impact of School Transitions and Transfers on Pupil Progress and Attainment*, DfEE, London

<http://www.musicalbridges.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/The-Impact-of-School-Transitions-and-Transfers-Galton-et-al-1999-.pdf>

The overall finding is that students regress between the last year of primary and the first year of secondary school. They identified five transition bridges to cross the 'river' between Year 6 and 7:

- Bureaucratic
- Social
- Curriculum
- Pedagogic
- Management of learning

They found that the bureaucratic and social bridges were in place in the vast majority of schools but only a small proportion of schools were building the other three bridges.

Holdsworth, R. (2010) *Transition and Engagement*, Research Document 6, Student Wellbeing Unit, Catholic Education Office Melbourne

This document provides a framework within which transitions should be considered and planned, and draws particularly upon work being carried out by schools on the transition of students from primary to secondary school. It cites research indicating that transition planning is most likely to be successful when it supports students with:

- Developing new friendships and improving self-esteem and confidence
- Settling well into the new school life, so there are no concerns for parents
- Showing an increasing interest in school and school work
- Getting used to new routines and school organisation
- Experiencing curriculum continuity.

McGee, C., Ward, R., Gibbons, J. and Harlow, A. (2003) *Transition to Secondary School: A Literature Review*, Report to the Ministry of Education

https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/7560/transition.pdf

This study looked at New Zealand and international literature on transition, and, on this basis, identified issues relating to the impacts of transition upon student achievement and adjustment to secondary school. Data on transition were also obtained through interviews with key informants – people who occupied key roles in education, such as Ministry officials and school principals. The literature and key informant information are reported under eight major themes: academic attainment, social adjustment, linkages between schools, organisational issues, pupil perceptions, cultural factors, socio-economic factors, and gender differences.

New Zealand Ministry of Education (2008) *A Study of Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling*
www.educationcounts.govt.nz/themes/research/transition_primary_secondary

This study found:

- Most students quite quickly adapted to the more immediate changes inherent in a move from a primary to secondary school, such as finding their way around in the new school, moving classes, and becoming familiar with different rules and routines.
- Also, by the end of their first year at secondary school:
 - overall, Year 9 students reported many positive experiences at school;
 - in the majority of cases, students' test results revealed sound or good achievement gains; and
 - few students expressed a desire to 'go back to how things were' at primary or intermediate school.
- But, at the same time, the Year 8–9 transition does represent a time of significant, deeper-level change and can be generally 'unsettling' for students.

- It became evident over the course of the study that although the Year 8 to Year 9 transition seems to be commonly thought of as a particular *'event'*, it should more appropriately be regarded as a *'process'*. This transition requires students to make ongoing adjustments over quite some time: for example, when encountering the different requirements and expectations of their various teachers, when managing multiple homework and other deadlines, and while getting to know new classmates.
- The biggest 'danger period' for students in terms of an increased tendency to be more negative about school, their relationships with teachers, and teaching and learning in general was in the second half of Year 9, and not in the first few weeks following the transition.
- Other significant findings include that for an important minority of students, the Year 8 to Year 9 transition is a particularly challenging time, academically and/or socially, and exacerbated in some cases by emotional issues or difficult home circumstances. Late in Year 9, some of these students continued to express a preference for primary over secondary schooling.

Rice, J. (1997) *Explaining the Negative Impact of the Transition from Middle to High School on Student Performance in Mathematics and Science: An Examination of School Discontinuity and Student Background Variables*. <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED409183>

Rice contends that the negative impact of the transition is presumably a consequence of the discontinuities that accompany the transition. More specifically, the transition from primary/middle to high school may introduce changes in environment, educational practices, and social structures to which students must adapt.

To the degree that there is discontinuity between sending and receiving schools, students may need extra support and guidance to progress successfully through these points in their educational careers. As a result, student academic progress across the transition is likely to depend on background factors such as the level of educational support enjoyed by the student in the home environment.

Rose, D. (2005) *Learning to Read: Reading to Learn*, Submission to the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, 2005, Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training

Rose contends that as students progress through school, the focus needs to shift from them learning to read to them reading to learn. This requires a pedagogical shift and explicit instruction that supports them to make this transition. Rose uses scaffolding techniques to train students in the particular learning tasks and texts - the academic literate discourses - required for and rewarded by schooling.

Victorian Auditor-General's Report (March 2015) *Education Transitions*

<http://www.audit.vic.gov.au/publications/20150318-Education-transitions/20150318-Education-transitions.pdf>

This audit assessed whether the Department of Education and Training (DET), government schools and early childhood education and care providers are effectively supporting children to transition into Prep and from primary to secondary school. It found that DET does not have a strategy or framework for managing middle-years transitions and despite some pockets of improvement, engagement and academic outcomes continue to decline as children move into secondary school.

It concluded that system-wide change is required if consistent long-term gains are to be made, and if issues such as the uneven impact of transitions on male and female students are to be resolved. The report makes seven recommendations, including that DET provide better advice to schools on middle-years transitions and develop better systems for monitoring children's outcomes as they progress through school.

Vinson, T. (2006) *Good Transitions: Through the Eyes of Primary and Secondary Principals*

http://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/bitstream/2123/1916/1/Good_Transitions_Paper.pdf

Transition from primary to secondary schooling provides one of the most consistent challenges to the majority of young adolescents, as students face physical and social dislocation, and an entirely new learning program. Vinson observed that more energy is spent on efforts at acclimatising students and smoothing the transition process than ensuring that pupils' commitment to learning is sustained and their progress enhanced. However it is fairly rare that attention is given to

discontinuities in teaching approaches and helping students to manage their own learning.