

# A Study of the Transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1

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## Introduction

This study set out to provide an evidence base concerning the effectiveness of the transition from the Foundation Stage (which applies to children aged three to five years) and Year 1 (for children aged five to six).

## Key findings

The findings suggest that there are some issues that present challenges for children, staff and parents during children's transition to Year 1.

- ▶ Teachers said that they were able to manage the transition, but felt that some areas remained problematic. The biggest challenge was posed by the move from a play-based approach in the Foundation Stage to a more 'structured' curriculum in Key Stage 1. The introduction of the full literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson was identified as challenging because it was difficult to get young children to sit still and listen to the teacher.
- ▶ School staff thought that children needed certain skills in order to make a good start in Year 1. These included being able to care for themselves and to carry out tasks without adult support, an ability to listen to the teacher and to sit still.
- ▶ While staff thought that most children coped well with the transition to Year 1, certain children were identified as more likely to experience problems. These included children who were younger/less mature, were less able, had special educational needs or spoke English as an additional language.
- ▶ Interviews with children highlighted the influence of the curriculum and pedagogy on children's enjoyment of learning. Children valued their experiences in Reception and regretted the loss of opportunities to learn through play. Some were worried by the workload expected in Year 1, found writing difficult and were bored by the requirement to sit and listen to the teacher. On the other hand, children enjoyed the status of being more grown up, and some welcomed the learning challenges presented in Year 1.
- ▶ Parents wanted more information about transition. They wanted to know what would be expected of their children, so they could help them prepare for Year 1. They would have liked to meet their child's new teacher before the beginning of Year 1.
- ▶ The case-study schools had adopted a variety of strategies aimed at smoothing transition. These tended to focus on three areas: induction of children into Year 1; continuity of practice between Reception and Year 1; and communication between staff, parents and children.
- ▶ Staff said that they would welcome training about the transition to Key Stage 1, especially for those working in Year 1.

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## Aims

The study had two main aims: to provide a solid evidence base about the effectiveness of the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1; and to improve understanding about how best to support children's learning during this transition.

## Background

In *Excellence and Enjoyment: A Strategy for Primary Schools* (DfES, 2003) the government set out its intention to ensure continuity between the areas of learning in the Foundation Stage and the Key Stage 1 programmes of study. It also made a commitment to gaining a better understanding of whether there were still difficulties about the transition and whether teachers need more support.

Transition involves moving from one environment and set of relationships to another. In most European countries, transition to school (commonly at age six) is aligned with a transition from a play-based, exploratory curriculum to a more formal one. In England, children tend to make the transition to school at a younger age (usually before their fifth birthday). The transition to a more formal curriculum takes place a year later, when children begin Year 1.

## Research Findings

The process of transition may be viewed as one of adaptation. This study has shown that the best adaptation takes place where conditions are similar, communication is encouraged, and the process of change takes place gradually over time.

The fact that the transition to more formal learning does not coincide with the transition to school in England offers both opportunities and challenges. Potentially, it could make transition to school less difficult for children, as the curriculum requirements

are similar even though children are moving to a new setting. However, there is a danger that the move to Year 1 may not be sufficiently recognised by school staff as a time of anxiety for children and their parents.

Children, staff and parents in this study were largely content with the quality of children's experiences of the Foundation Stage. The main difficulties were associated with the introduction of a more formal, subject-based and teacher-directed approach, with less time for child-initiated activities, choice and play. Children's skills of independent learning, acquired during the Foundation Stage, were not always being capitalised upon in Year 1.

Some teachers found it challenging to introduce the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson and would value guidance on how this can be done in ways suitable for young children. Staff in Year 1 pointed out that they had less support from teaching assistants than their colleagues in Reception.

Schools' transition practices included 'induction' activities, such as opportunities for Reception children to visit Year 1. In order to provide continuity of experience, Reception and Year 1 teachers adopted similar routines and activities. Schools provided Year 1 children with opportunities for play-based learning and a few schools arranged for staff to 'move up' to Year 1 with their class. Strategies designed to ensure good communication about transition included meetings between staff in the Foundation Stage and Year 1, communication between staff and parents, and discussions with children about their expectations of Year 1.

## Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations for schools and policy makers.

- Schools staff should view transition as a process rather than an event.
- School managers should enable staff in the Foundation Stage to meet with staff in Year 1 to discuss individual children and to plan to meet their needs.
- Staff should communicate with parents and children about transition to Year 1 before the end of the Foundation Stage including visits wherever possible. Schools should provide guidance for parents on how they can prepare for and support their children's learning in Year 1 and take into account the concerns of working parents and those who have EAL.
- Schools should encourage staff to adopt similar routines, expectations and activities in Reception and Year 1. School managers should allocate resources to enable children in Year 1 to experience some play-based activities that give access to opportunities such as sand and water, role play, construction and outdoor learning.
- Teachers should consider the needs of younger/less mature children, those who are less able, have SEN or EAL. They should be ready to provide these children with additional support during the transition to Year 1.
- Policy-makers should provide advice to teachers on how to continue elements of the Foundation Stage curriculum and pedagogical approach into Year 1.
- The amount of time children in Year 1 spend sitting still and listening to the teacher should be reduced. Year 1 teachers should be encouraged to increase opportunities for active, independent learning and learning through play.
- Teachers of Reception and Year 1 need guidance on how to introduce literacy and numeracy activities in ways suitable for young children.
- Guidance is needed to help reduce the emphasis given to children recording their work in writing at the beginning of Year 1.
- There should be more provision for training about this transition, especially for teachers in Year 1.
- There is a need for further research to broaden the evidence base on effective transition practices.

## Methodology

The study used three methods of data collection: literature review; telephone interviews and case-study visits.

The literature review included systematic searches of databases and websites, hand searches and contact with experts in the field. It focused on material published between January 1993 and December 2003.

The NFER drew a national sample of schools, stratified to reflect geographical region, school type, size and achievement band at Key Stage 1. Interviews were conducted with staff in 60 schools. Half of the interviewees were Foundation Stage Coordinators and half were Year 1 teachers.

The NFER team selected 12 case study schools from the interview sample. In order to track children's expectations and experiences of the transition to Year 1, visits took place on two occasions: during the summer term (when children were in Reception classes) and again during the autumn term of 2004 (when the children had begun Year 1). Interviews were conducted with 70 children and their parents. The research team

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also interviewed 80 members of school staff (teachers, support staff, Foundation Stage Coordinators and headteachers) and eight school governors.

## Reference

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS (2003). *Excellence and Enjoyment: a Strategy for Primary Schools*. London: DfES.

## Additional information

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