



MOVING ON

Transfer and transition to senior school

A guide to good practice drawing on recent ISI inspection reports of HMC schools

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Contents

The national perspective

Concerns about transfer and transition

Implications for independent schools

Moving on in HMC schools

The age of transfer

Feeder schools

Testing and assessment

Entry procedures

National Curriculum tests

Baseline assessment

Continuity in the curriculum

Planning the curriculum

Curriculum links between schools

Languages

Cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities

Teaching and Learning

Record keeping and communication

Induction and pastoral care

Transition arrangements

Induction to the school community

Pastoral care

Introduction

This guide explores issues relating to transfer and transition to senior school, examining current practice in HMC schools and setting this within a national context. It draws examples from recent ISI reports on a representative sample of 30 HMC senior schools and 22 linked junior schools. Unless otherwise attributed, all the highlighted extracts included in the text are taken from these inspection reports.

Information on age of transfer, entry procedures and intake from linked junior schools is based on an HMC survey in 2006 which had returns from 202 schools. In addition, insights have been gained through discussion with representatives of other independent school organisations, including IAPS and ISEB.

The national perspective

Concerns about transfer and transition

In recent years, transfer between the primary and secondary phase has been in the national spotlight, mainly because of concern about under-performance in the early secondary years. Most pupils transfer at the age of 11 in the maintained sector, although a small minority transfer between middle and upper schools at the age of 12, 13 or 14. While discussion has focused mainly on transfer at 11, many of the issues apply at other ages of transfer.

*Continuity and progression in learning as pupils move from primary to secondary schools are longstanding weaknesses of the education system.
(Ofsted 2002 Changing Schools p2)*

Ofsted reports¹ have shown that the quality of teaching is higher overall in Year 6 than in Years 7 and 8. Pupils appear to lose momentum in Year 7, after the gains made in Year 6. Progress in Key Stage 3 decelerates and this can lead to disappointing 'value added' between Year 6 and Year 9. This analysis has fuelled concern for greater ambition in the early secondary years, building on what pupils have already achieved.

It is generally recognised that the social and pastoral dimensions of transfer are handled better than academic and curricular aspects.

*Transfer arrangements from primary schools are managed well in many respects by most schools. In two thirds, induction arrangements for Year 7 pupils are good; they are rarely unsatisfactory. In half of the schools the transfer of information is secure but it is unsatisfactory in one school in six. A weakness in ensuring continuity in the curriculum frequently remains... Curriculum continuity is good in only a quarter of the schools and unsatisfactory in almost a half.
(Ofsted 2004 Standards and Quality 2002/03 – HMCI Annual Report)*

Frequently, teachers do not know enough about what pupils have studied before, the teaching methods used and the standards reached. This can lead to repetition within the curriculum and a lack of challenge in teaching and learning.

*It is not unusual to find that pupils revisit topics they have already covered. On occasion, it can be illuminating to visit old territory and see it in a new light. But, mostly, pupils find it dull.
(DfES 2004 Curriculum Continuity)*

Weaknesses are often masked by an assumption, on the part of pupils, teachers and parents, that secondary transfer automatically brings higher expectations and greater demands on pupils. Adjustment to a new environment can be seen as an

¹ Ofsted HMCI Annual Reports

achievement in itself, and even as justifying a period of marking time in learning. Too little is done to explore the pupils' perspective on their learning and their view of the progress they are making. This applies not only at the point of entry but also to transitions between years.

*Schools give more attention to the exits and entrances years than to the in-between years: Y8, for instance, is widely seen by pupils as unimportant and they adjust their effort accordingly...It can be useful for schools to monitor the messages that they are giving about different years and to check out what pupils' views of the year ahead are and what, retrospectively, they felt they needed more help with.
(Galton 2003 Transfer and Transitions in the Middle Years of Schooling)*

Nationally, the picture has begun to change as issues of transfer have received greater focus. There has been a push for greater continuity of content and approach between Key Stages 2 and 3. Some schools, for example, have made increasing use of 'bridging units' providing work, in English for example, which is started in primary schools and completed in secondary school.

While there has been an emphasis on improving continuity in English, mathematics and science, opportunities continue to be missed in subjects such as modern languages. A new national initiative promoting the learning of a modern foreign language in Key Stage 2 has implications for accelerating the secondary curriculum that have not yet been widely recognised.

*Increasing numbers of pupils have prior experience of learning MFL when they arrive in Year 7, but few secondary schools are yet planning to take account of this in the way in which they organise teaching groups, or in the provision they make for them.
(Ofsted 2005 Standards and Quality 2004/05 – HMCI Annual Report)*

Concerns about pupils regressing or marking time in Year 7 have contributed to the 'Condensed Key Stage 3' initiative.¹ The aims of this project are to increase the pace of learning, to improve transition and to increase flexibility in the curriculum. Pupils complete the Key Stage 3 programmes of study in two years. They can then embark on GCSE courses in Year 9, which extends opportunities across the 14 – 19 curriculum. The acceleration of learning in the early secondary years is predicated on continuity and progression across the primary/secondary divide.

The tracking of progress across the transfer threshold has been underpinned in the maintained sector by the introduction of a Common Transfer File. This includes all results from National Curriculum Key Stage assessments and must be sent to any new school (maintained or independent) to which a pupil transfers.²

¹ Launched as a pilot by the DfES in 2003

² The Common Transfer File includes the UPN (Unique Pupil Number), introduced in 1999 to aid tracking. All pupils who transfer from the maintained sector will have a UPN, although these are not required in independent schools.

Implications for independent schools

National concerns about transfer and transition between primary and secondary phases have implications for independent schools. Indeed, the challenge of building effectively on pupils' prior learning is magnified by the large number and disparate nature of the schools from which pupils are drawn.

Figures from a 2006 HMC survey, which drew a response from 202 schools, suggest that around a quarter of the total entry to HMC senior schools transfers from maintained schools. The proportion is significantly higher in schools admitting only, or mainly, at the age of 11.

Even where much of the intake is home-grown, or the constitution of the school provides for 'built-in' transfer between junior and senior departments, there are important issues to consider. This has been highlighted in an overview of ISI inspection reports.

All-age schools have the same characteristics as the majority of junior and senior schools. They vary as to whether junior and senior departments are seen as single continuous identities. For those that are, there are opportunities to build continuity into passage from primary to secondary. However, often this is not the case and pupils, moving from one to the other, find themselves marking time for a while or repeating work they have done before. This is in large part a failure of curricular planning and needs to be improved. The issue is whether pupils on entry to senior schools get off to the start they should if their teachers take full account of what they have already learned. This is not made easier by the range of backgrounds from which pupils come, even in many all-age schools where there may be a significant proportion of new entry into Year 7 or 9. To that extent, it is an issue no less for separate senior schools than for all-age schools.

(ISI All Round Education in ISC Schools – A Digest of Reports 2000-2001)

There is a strong focus on national tests in Year 6 in maintained schools. Pupils and teachers invest the year with great importance, as the measure of their own performance. In this year, pupils often experience high quality teaching, accelerated progress, strong motivation and clarity of purpose, although the challenge and 'stretch' often comes with a narrowing of the curriculum and an emphasis on revision and test practice.

A similarly contradictory picture may well apply in independent schools in the run-up to transfer exams or Common Entrance, although the latter promotes the maintenance of curriculum breadth. Whether in Year 6 or Year 8, teaching and learning may become more exam focused, but also generate a greater sense of purpose and achievement than the first senior year. At the same time, because the curriculum is dictated by the real or perceived expectations of the senior school, there can be an assumption of continuity across the divide which may not be borne out in practice.

The national focus on accelerating progress in the early secondary years also has implications for independent schools. Common Entrance syllabuses effectively provide for accelerated progress through Key Stage 3 of the National Curriculum in Years 7 and 8, in a wide range of subjects. This is not, however, consistently

reflected in senior schools' planning of routes to GCSE and beyond. A leisurely pace of progress to GCSE, by pupils who are well advanced in subjects at the time of transfer, may be increasingly questioned.

Nationally, the quest for greater flexibility in the 14-19 curriculum, with the notion of more personalised pathways and wider choice, is seen as requiring the setting of a faster pace in the middle years. Whether in maintained or independent schools, this leads back to the need, in Year 7 or Year 9, to build knowledgeably and precisely on pupils' prior learning.

Moving on in HMC schools

Age of transfer

The survey of HMC schools shows that transfer occurs mainly at age 11 or 13, and equal numbers of schools admit at these two ages. Broadly, 20 per cent of schools admit at the age of 11 only, 20 per cent at 13 only, and 60 per cent of schools admit pupils at 11 and 13.

In schools admitting at both 11 and 13, the 11 year old intake is usually the larger. Some schools that admit mainly at 13 make provision for 11-13 year olds in response to local circumstances, occasionally providing parallel provision at both the junior and the senior school. A very small minority admit at other ages, such as age 10, reflecting local transfer patterns. Most schools with an 11 year old intake take a substantial proportion of pupils from the maintained sector, while at the age of 13 only a small minority come from maintained schools.

Feeder schools

A large majority of schools in the survey (77 per cent) have their own junior school or, rarely, more than one. However, the extent of the 'homegrown' entry varies widely. The intake from the junior school, where this exists, averages around 50 percent of the senior school's intake, although this ranges from less than 10 per cent to well over 90 per cent.

Year groups are usually smaller in the junior school than in the senior school, although there are a few exceptions: one school in twenty draws over 95 per cent of its pupils from its own junior school. Exceptionally, a few schools assert a continuous path of progression without a distinct point of transfer between separate schools. At the other extreme, one in twelve of those with junior schools admits less than a quarter of its pupils from this source. Nearly a quarter of the total sample has no junior school to draw on.

Despite the prevalence of junior schools, a distinctive characteristic of transfer in most schools is the large number of different schools, whether maintained or independent, which feed its entry.

Most pupils enter the school at age 11...Pupils come from some 80 maintained primary and independent preparatory schools.

About 40% of of pupils at 11+ come from the Junior School, 16% from other independent schools, and 44% from maintained primary schools.

Approximately a third of those entering at age 13 do so from the junior school. Most of the remainder comes from a wide variety of preparatory schools, although a tenth enters directly from maintained schools.

Schools face the double challenge of ensuring continuity not only, in a majority of cases, with their own junior school, but also with a wide range of other schools (in some cases, more than 100). These schools may be widespread geographically and have little in common with each other, and may have only intermittent links with a particular senior school.

Testing and assessment

Entry procedures

Arrangements for entry are markedly different at 11 and 13. Schools in the survey which admit at 11 rely almost exclusively on their own school examination or other form of assessment. Little or no use is made of Common Entrance at age 11, perhaps because of issues of comparability with the maintained sector. By contrast, 85 per cent of schools that admit at 13 only, and 54 per cent of those that admit at 11 and 13, make use of Common Entrance for their 13 year old entry. Of schools admitting only at 13, 41 per cent set their own exam. Around a quarter use their own examinations in combination with Common Entrance, often for pre-screening purposes.

For unlinked preparatory schools, the diversity of entry procedures presents the challenge of preparing pupils for different exams at different times, while also pursuing a Common Entrance curriculum which not all pupils will be tested against. Senior schools need to be aware of how their entry procedures shape aspirations and achievement in the years before transfer, within or beyond their own junior school, sometimes with unintended consequences.

In some subjects, the scope for outstanding achievement amongst the most able pupils in Years 7 and 8 is held back because the teaching does not extend beyond the requirements of the Common Entrance examination. The school does not prepare its pupils for the scholarship examinations because the Senior School, to which the overwhelming majority of pupils transfer, awards scholarships on the strength of results in the Common Entrance examination.

Common Entrance is a qualifying examination, marked by the senior school and used to check pupils' attainment against its own benchmark. Papers are taken in a wide range of subjects, thus providing information about attainment across the curriculum. The use made of this information, beyond confirmation of admission, varies widely. It is often used for setting, and there may be feedback about individual performance, particularly in scholarship examinations. However, the outcomes are rarely interrogated to guide departmental planning and teaching. Schools' own entrance examinations are usually finely tuned to the needs of selection. The testing of attainment is likely to be limited to core subjects, notably English and mathematics, with the addition of reasoning tests to measure potential. These entrance examinations serve a clear purpose, but do not illuminate achievement across the curriculum, or provide departments with information about pupils' learning to date in their subject.

National Curriculum tests

Only 5 per cent of schools claim to make use of information from Key Stage 2 tests, even though this is available for all pupils from maintained schools and around half of schools in membership of IAPS.¹ The problem is partly one of timing: tests take place in the summer after the 11 year old entry procedure is completed in most schools. However, schools may be missing out on important benchmarking information. Recent research, identifying the five per cent of highest attainers from their scores in National Curriculum tests, has shown that these pupils are significantly more likely to achieve A/A* grades at GCSE and 3A grades at A Level in independent schools than in state schools². Since the Key Stage 2 results of individual pupils are used nationally for tracking value added, this is information which, when available, should not be overlooked in ensuring, and demonstrating, that pupils achieve their potential.

Baseline assessment

Inspection reports show that most schools make use of standardised tests to establish a baseline for its new entry. These tests, taken after pupils join the school, are usually separate from, and additional to, the entry selection procedures.

Many schools use MidYIS (the Middle Years Information System produced by Durham University) which is used by 1500 secondary schools nationwide. Some use CAT (the Cognitive Abilities Test produced by nferNelson) which is used by about 70 per cent of all secondary schools nationally to assess pupils on entry to Year 7, and by about 25 per cent of schools in Year 9. The CAT offers assessment of 'general transferable abilities' and, like MIDYIS, predicts attainment at GCSE.

The use of nationally standardised tests has been driven in many schools by the desire for benchmarks against which to measure the progress of individuals and the school's 'value added'. In some cases this translates into the setting of targets shared by staff and pupils.

The use of baseline assessment [in Year 7], including testing to find the ability of pupils on entry to the school and subsequent value added data, is consistent across departments.

Results of baseline testing in Year 9... are used to assess pupils' abilities and set targets. A good start has been made in the process of assessment when students enter the school in Year 7 and comparative information, such as Midyis, helps to track progress and the planning of courses and setting of students...

Schools vary widely in the extent to which assessment on entry feeds into planning and teaching, and makes a difference to pupils. Sometimes the information collected is kept as a yardstick for the measurement of later attainment. As such, it may remain too much the preserve of senior management.

¹ There is a downward trend in the use of Key Stage 2 tests in IAPS schools, because of concerns over the use of results in league tables

² Professor David Jesson, York University – Associate Director Specialist Schools and Academies Trust: address to annual conference November 2005

The school makes good use of data from MidYIS assessments in Year 9 to analyse subsequent performance in GCSE examinations... However, it does not systematically use MidYIS data to trigger action when individual pupils either under-perform or exceed expectations [or] to set targets for individual pupils.

The school obtains reliable and accurate information on pupils from nationally standardised tests... Good use is made of this database by senior management to monitor the performance of both individuals and groups [but] little use is currently made of it by other staff...

Nationally standardised measurements are used to assess whether pupils have been placed in the appropriate form in Year 7 but these measurements are not usually disseminated to departments... [and] insufficient use is made to measure progress.

At best, assessment before or soon after entry is used to gain insights into strengths and weaknesses in the learning of individuals. This is evident, for example, where schools routinely screen pupils for special educational needs or specific learning difficulties.

All students take a screening test in spelling and reading on entry in Year 7. These assessments are carefully recorded and effectively used by the special educational needs co-ordinator to help teachers plan for the needs of individual students.

Pupils are screened for any learning difficulties and Common Entrance results are used to establish a baseline of pupils' capabilities.

Year 9 pupils sit a range of diagnostic tests, the results of which are used to guide housemasters and housemistresses, tutors and departments. They assist with setting and also serve to screen pupils who have learning difficulties.

Schools have made significant strides in using objective measures to monitor the progress made from the point of entry, and assessment often contributes to initial setting. It is less clear that the outcomes of entrance exams, or standardised assessments after entry, are used to pinpoint strengths or weaknesses in learning, except in the case of those with special needs. They may also provide little information about learning to date in subjects other than English and mathematics.

Continuity in the curriculum

Planning the curriculum

The curriculum in most schools is structured to provide breadth in Years 7 to 9, to give a strong basis for choice at GCSE and rich experience in subjects which may not be pursued later. The first year in particular is seen as providing opportunity for the extension of pupils' all-round education, and for induction into new ways of learning.

The year 9 curriculum has the commendable aim of exposing pupils to a wide range of subjects and the way these subjects are studied at [the school].

Most subjects that start as compulsory for all and later become optional have a coherent course for those who will drop it.

The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 provides a good basic education in those subjects that pupils do not take for public examination; it develops physical fitness and skills through physical education and games; and it pays attention to creative and aesthetic subjects such as design and technology, art, drama and music.

In Year 9, the college provides pupils with experience in a broad range of subjects so that they can make informed choices at GCSE.

The organisation of the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is often ambitious in its breadth, and time allocations may be squeezed as a result. Carousel arrangements for arts subjects or, occasionally, for sciences ensure exposure but can bring problems of continuity in learning. Occasionally, the omission of subjects can create discontinuity or imbalance in learning.

The unusual breadth of the curriculum in Years 7-9 is achieved at the cost of time allocations for some subjects that are not entirely appropriate.

There are some pressures within the provision for Year 9, with low time allocations for art, design, music, religious studies and PE. No drama is timetabled.

In Years 7 and 8, lack of time for practical and creative subjects affects continuity and progression. Years 7 and 8 do not do formal PE, only sport.

Clarity and coherence of purpose in planning the curriculum at this stage are vital, to temper the pressures of space and time and to test the inevitable compromises against the school's aims.

The school's curriculum committee regularly monitors the appropriateness of the curriculum and its continuity. It is aiming to establish a broad foundation course in the first two years to keep academic doors open...

Many schools provide opportunity in the first year for broadly-based courses, for example in PSHE, ICT, drama or thinking skills, to build skills for the future. Breadth and balance are actively pursued in the provision of practical and creative subjects, and in enrichment through extra-curricular activities. Advantage is taken of an interlude before requirements are dictated by external examinations.

Curriculum links between schools

Schools with a junior school are well placed to foster continuity across the transfer threshold, although this is not always achieved. Links are often informal and dependent on the enthusiasm of individual heads of departments. Their effectiveness can vary widely between subjects.

Liaison takes place with [the junior school] and helps to secure a logical progression from Year 8 to Year 9, and the school is extending this.

Continuity of the curriculum...is effectively achieved through formal and informal contact with junior subject co-ordinators.

Links with senior school departments are mostly informal, but effective in that the lower school curriculum enables pupils to transfer smoothly to the secondary stage of education.

Curricular links with the Lower School are not sufficiently developed in most subjects. Science, music and ICT are notable exceptions.

Curriculum links between schools tend to be commented on more frequently in junior than in senior school reports. The emphasis is generally on preparation for transfer, rather than the senior school's capacity to build on what has already been achieved.

Teachers in senior schools have a broad knowledge of the National Curriculum at Key Stages 2 and 3, and of Common Entrance requirements.¹ This shapes, to some extent, their understanding of the starting points after transfer. However, their detailed knowledge of what has gone before may be very sketchy. This can lead to pupils repeating work, sometimes at a less demanding level, after transfer. Many schools lack the mechanisms for preventing this from happening, or for identifying when it does.

Positive two-way links make a significant difference in maintaining momentum in learning across the transfer threshold.

Joint planning, in subjects such as modern foreign languages, ensures that pupils are well prepared for their senior school education and meet new topics and skills from Year 6 [the first senior year] so that their interest and motivation are sustained.

The subject co-ordinator [for ICT in the junior school] also teaches in the senior school. This... enables pupils to learn from one scheme of work without the artificial transition from Year 6 to Year 7.

Languages

Schools face a particular challenge in securing continuity in provision for modern foreign languages. Within independent junior and preparatory schools there is wide variation in the choice of languages studied, the age at which languages are introduced and the attainment expected by the age of transfer. Most pupils from maintained primary schools have had little experience of modern foreign languages, although this is beginning to change and new patterns of provision will need to be taken into account.

Even where a junior and senior school are linked, there is not always coherence in the planning of language choices or in arrangements to secure continuity.

The lack of provision for French in Year 7, and limited provision in Year 8, provides poor continuity for pupils who have already studied it at junior school.

¹ Common Entrance syllabuses are regularly reviewed by ISEB (Independent Schools Examination Board). It seeks the views of senior schools as the end users, but the response to this consultation is reported to be low.

In modern foreign languages, particularly in Year 7, there is often the potential for pupils being bored by repetition, or finding it hard to keep up, and this needs to be positively addressed.

In modern languages, year group co-ordinators build in extension activities for those with greater language experience in Year 7.

The sharing of planning and assessment across the transfer boundary serves to maximise progress.

Towards the end of Year 5, the foreign language assistants in the senior school give each pupil a five-minute oral test. All assessment data is available to language staff in the senior school when pupils transfer [in Year 6].

The teaching of a single modern foreign language to all pupils in the first year after transfer makes it easier to set pupils according to ability and prior experience. However, account has to be taken of trends in junior schools towards the broadening of language provision and the sampling of a range of languages, as well as the growing popularity of Spanish. Senior schools are increasingly expanding language choices and looking for ways of balancing choice, time and the pursuit of high standards, for example by accelerating progress to GCSE.

GCSE French is taken by all Year 10 pupils...German, Russian and Spanish are introduced in Year 11 and taught to GCSE in one year.

It is a challenging question to consider why able pupils in the independent sector should, in many schools, take so long to reach GCSE standard, despite having begun French so early.

The teaching of classical languages raises similar issues because of the variety of pupils' previous experience. Schools juggle to provide opportunity for all, providing a basis for subsequent choice. It is not always easy to build on the high achievement of a minority of pupils, particularly at 13, from preparatory schools where classics features strongly.

One foreign language is offered in Year 6 and two in Year 7, when classical civilisation is also introduced. In Years 8-9, pupils choose two languages from French, German and Latin.

Latin has a good two year course in Years 7 and 8, sufficient in itself, but forming a base for those who will take the subject further.

Strengths [in the curriculum] include the provision of two modern foreign languages, as well as Latin or classical civilisation, in Year 9, with the opportunity to start from scratch.

Cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities

The strong focus on subject provision means that there is not always enough attention to cross-curricular concerns, for example in ensuring continuity in the provision made for those receiving learning support.

Curricular support for those with special needs or English as an additional language is good in the specialist lessons but the follow through in mainstream lessons is inconsistent and often non-existent.

At best, the ICT programme supports the application of skills across the curriculum. Provision in the first years after transfer is seen as laying the foundations for this.

The scheme of work is thoughtfully planned to try to ensure that all pupils learn the skills needed to make effective use of ICT... in all the subjects they study.

All pupils take the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) on the basis of two ICT lessons a week in Year 7 and 8.

ICT lessons are timetabled in Year 9, after which a cross-curricular approach is adopted.

Careful attention is often paid to ensuring that new pupils gain maximum advantage from the activities on offer beyond the classroom. Activities specific to the year group can encourage initiative and community involvement from the start.

The structure and implementation of the programme of activities is of high quality and Year 9 pupils, in particular, benefit from a carefully organised programme.

Participation and success, however humble, are recorded and celebrated in terms of house points. This helps pupils, especially in Years 7,8 and 9, to feel that they count and make a contribution.

'7 Up', a Year 7 magazine, is an excellent example of a student led charity initiative.

For many pupils, transition to senior school opens up new and exciting extra-curricular opportunities. They also need help and direction in building on the particular interests and skills that they bring with them, and it is important for the senior school to take note of these.

Teaching and Learning

Inspection reports show little evidence of the dip in the quality of teaching at the start of secondary education that has been reported by Ofsted in the maintained sector. Indeed, the quality of teaching is frequently commended for its enthusiasm and effectiveness in years which are unconstrained by the rigid requirements of public examinations.

In Years 7 and 8...teaching styles were varied and imaginative, whilst in other years lessons were more teacher centred.

Teaching in Year 9 ignites the enthusiasm of pupils from preparatory schools where the Common Entrance Examination has dominated lessons.

The best practice was observed in the sixth form and Year 9 where pupils are effectively challenged and deliberately provoked, and debate, argument and originality are all encouraged.

High attaining pupils respond well to high expectations and, in many schools, hit the ground running.

General science is taught to all pupils in Years 7 and 8. Remarkably quick progress is made in the first year of the course. From the outset high standards are demanded and the pupils respond well.

Most Year 9 pupils arrive at the school with sound knowledge and understanding of basic mathematical skills, begin GCSE work immediately and are quickly introduced to many new mathematical concepts and techniques.

They are given responsibility for their own learning from Year 9, which promotes a high level of independence and commitment.

All Year 9 pupils are new to the school and arrive with a range of different technological experiences. They quickly adapt and face the design and problem solving approach to the subject with enthusiasm.

Weaknesses are evident when continuity is defined in terms of adherence to the prescribed curriculum, rather than extending pupils' capabilities in the light of what they have already done.

[In Year 7 science] the abilities of the pupils and their co-operative behaviour would allow teachers to move through the material more quickly ... to extend experience ... and to provide more stimulation.

The reading texts chosen for Year 7 are not sufficiently challenging.

Where there is a wide range of ability on intake, but also in highly selective schools, setting is recognised as helping to create the right level of challenge for pupils.

Grouping by subject ability, as in mathematics from Year 7, enables teachers to set a pace appropriate to the needs of the class.

In some cases, the enthusiasm and expertise of subject specialists injects excitement into learning in the year following transfer. Most pupils adapt quickly to new approaches. However, many teachers have little knowledge of the teaching methods used in the schools from which pupils come.

Reciprocal observation by teachers across the divide can generate useful discussion of teaching and learning, as well as curriculum content.

Good links [in science] have been established with the senior school, including some cross-phase lesson observations.

It is also valuable to explore pupils' own view of their learning after transfer. This may be particularly relevant in the case of pupils joining from maintained primary schools where experience of specialist subject teaching is likely to have been limited.

Record keeping and communication

There is a strong disposition in senior schools to make their own assessment of pupils, as seen in widening use of baseline tests. This is sensible and justifiable in the light of the diversity of schools from which pupils transfer. Teachers want to be able to make their own judgements in the classroom, and to let pupils make a fresh

start. However, the 'clean slate' approach can be an excuse for not taking stock adequately of pupils' prior experience and attainment.

The passing on of information, from schools which have an all-round view of a pupil acquired over many years, can be very useful if done well, and then put to good use.

Pupils in Year 8 are well prepared for the senior school and other schools. Transfer information is shared openly and effectively.

The process may look very different from the junior and senior sides of the equation, particularly between unlinked junior and senior schools. A senior school's desire to receive transfer information in a common format may not be welcomed by junior schools facing a multiplicity of such requirements. The transfer of records needs to be carefully organised, with a clear purpose in mind, if the information passed on is to be valuable in proportion to the effort involved in collecting and using it.

The Head's report on a transferring pupil is likely to highlight individual characteristics and achievements and contributes to the receiving school's academic and pastoral overview. It may be harder for the senior school to seek out specific information to help it in building a profile of the individual and of a new year group. There is a further challenge in ensuring that transfer information is communicated effectively, to staff concerned with the care of pupils, but also to teachers with responsibility for their progress in learning.

Parents have to become used to new styles of communication. Many schools recognise the importance of setting down good patterns of communication from the start.

Parents are informed about the academic attainment of their children through clear, detailed annual reports and newly introduced attainment profiles. The system of 'student planners' is an effective method for the communication of homework and parental comment. Parents' evening and informal introductory evenings provide parents with good opportunities to discuss their children's progress.

Concern to establish the parental partnership may be reflected, for example, in parent teacher meetings during the first year which are more frequent than in other years.

Induction and pastoral care

Transition arrangements

National studies show that the social and pastoral aspects of transition from primary to secondary schools are often more effective than those concerning academic progression. Transition arrangements, to ensure that pupils feel comfortable and familiar with what lies ahead, are often handled well on both the primary and the secondary side.

This is reflected in independent schools where smooth transition is usually secured between junior and senior school, so that pupils transfer confidently. Where schools are linked, there is likely to be familiarity with staff, facilities and other pupils, as well as some underwriting of continuity in the curriculum.

For pupils from other schools, the onus is on the receiving school to smooth the passage for pupils. Preliminary visits, for pupils and parents, are a regular occurrence. Less frequently, there is a systematic programme of visits to feeder schools. Where these occur they may be broadly focused on keeping the relationship warm between schools or, more specifically, on visiting pupils on their home territory before they transfer.

Many pupils joining the school in Year 7 are visited in their junior school.

Personal contacts between schools, though time-consuming, can play a major part in building understanding of what lies ahead.

Induction to the school community

Induction arrangements are generally good, and thought out with care.

The school organises an effective induction day for new entrants to Year 7, and excellent relationships between staff and students quickly form.

The induction of new pupils from abroad is good: they arrive several days before term starts to help with their familiarisation.

Excellent induction and integration procedures are in place, the activity days being particularly enjoyed.

Pupils themselves value the rite of passage which is embodied in transfer to secondary school. They look forward to the next stage and recognise the ability to adapt to its demands as a test of their maturity.

The move to senior school is often accompanied by a distancing of parents from their children's life at school as children assert their greater independence. In this respect, the transition to senior school may be harder for parents than for pupils. Many schools work hard at building links with, and between, parents at this stage, as an integral part of the induction process.

Some schools formalise their induction, investing admission to the school with a sense of occasion for pupils and their parents.

At the outset of a pupil's career in the school an admissions ceremony takes place. The governors interview each pupil, many with their parents in attendance, so that they are aware of pupils as individuals. Pupils then affirm that they will live by the rules of the school and the traditions of the foundation and are welcomed as members of the school community.

Induction often extends to teaching about independent learning and use of facilities such as the library.

On joining, pupils go through a thorough induction process which contributes to pupils using the library very well, both when directed and as independent learners.

All pupils in Years 6-7 are issued with a CD-ROM which includes both school-designed and commercial resources, as well as extensive links to relevant and tested websites, which can be easily accessed on the pupil intranet.

Pastoral support

Older pupils often play an active part in supporting new pupils.

The 'buddy' system whereby new boys are helped to settle in by older members of the house is notable and received much praise from pupils.

The support provided within the vertical grouping of houses is often complemented by special attention to the needs of new entrants as a year group. This is most effective when overseen by a senior member of staff.

Separating the Year 7 pupils and gradually involving them in house life provides a stable introduction to the school which they value.

The lower master provides a link across the houses for pupils in Year 9, monitoring progress, dealing with complaints and providing further contact for parents.

In many schools, the PSHE programme is strongly rooted in the first year and closely linked to the school's pastoral care for pupils.

A medically qualified school counsellor has established 'Novi workshops' for Year 9 pupils and also instituted a pilot scheme of peer mentoring to encourage and assist pupils to gain advice and support where necessary.

The pastoral support of pupils following transfer reflects the school's underlying values, and tests the school's ability to share these values effectively with pupils.

Conclusion

The move to senior school is an important transition, opening up the educational route through adolescence towards adulthood. Most pupils are well prepared for transfer and move on with confidence. Senior schools pay careful attention to induction and the social aspects of helping new pupils to settle in. However, curricular thinking in senior schools tends to be shaped more by awareness of what is to come than by understanding of what has gone before. This can lead to discontinuity, marking time or even regression in learning as pupils embark on the senior phase. While some schools sustain or accelerate momentum in learning when pupils transfer, mechanisms to ensure this are often lacking. There are many examples of schools working to secure continuity in learning, particularly with linked junior schools, but much may be left to chance, even on a shared site. Senior schools speak frequently of maximising opportunity and enabling pupils to fulfil their potential. To put flesh on the bones of these intentions, it is necessary to build carefully and imaginatively on what has already been achieved, as pupils make the transition to senior school.

Discussion points for school self-evaluation

The intake

How many different schools do pupils come from? What proportions are admitted at different ages, from the school's own junior school and other schools, or from maintained and independent schools. Is the pattern of intake changing?

Testing and assessment

What is the rationale for the school's entry procedures? What is the impact of these on the curriculum in feeder schools? What are the results used for and by whom? Are levels/scores in National Curriculum tests known, and how are they used? Is baseline assessment carried out; who uses the results and for what purpose? How do subject departments gauge attainment on entry?

Continuity in the curriculum

What principles govern the design of the curriculum in the first year after entry? What are the constraints? What is done to ensure curricular continuity from the junior to the senior school, and whose responsibility is this? What determines the pace of progress to GCSE and how is attainment on entry taken into account? How does provision for languages build on pupils' prior experience? How much liaison is there with feeder schools over languages?

Teaching and Learning

How familiar are teachers with Common Entrance syllabuses or National Curriculum requirements at Key Stage 2/3? How much is known about what pupils from different schools have covered in specific subjects? Would repetition or regression be identified? Are teachers aware of changes in the style of learning required? What is the pupils' view of their progress in the year after transfer?

Record keeping and communication

What information is passed to the senior school when a pupil transfers? Who decides this and who makes use of it? Is the emphasis on prior learning and attainment, interests and achievements or personal and pastoral needs? How are records (or information from pupils) used to ease transition and to maximise progress? How are two-way links fostered with the schools from which pupils transfer? What is done to establish good communication with parents from the start?

Induction and pastoral care

How well do arrangements for induction smooth the path for pupils socially, organisationally and academically? Is entry marked in any special way? How are pastoral arrangements tailored to the needs of pupils in their first year? How do they reflect the school's values?

Background reading

Galton, Gray and Ruddock (1999) (DfEE Research Report 131) The Impact of School Transitions and Transfers on Pupil Progress and Attainment

Galton et al (2003) (DfES Research Report 443) Transfer and transitions in the middle years of schooling (7-14): Continuities and discontinuities in learning

Key Stage 3 National Strategy (2004) (DfES) Curriculum Continuity: Effective transfer between primary and secondary schools

Key Stage 3 National Strategy (2004) (DfES) A condensed Key Stage 3: Designing a flexible curriculum

Excellence in Cities Evaluation Consortium (2004) Transfer from Primary to Secondary Schools

Ofsted (2002) Changing Schools: Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Transfer arrangements at age 11

ISI All round Education in ISC Schools: A Digest of Reports 2000-2001

Ofsted (2002,2003,2004,2005) Standards and Quality - Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools

National Literacy Trust www.literacytrust.org.uk : primary/secondary transfer - research summaries and case studies

Teachernet www.teachernet.gov.uk/casestudies : school case study of the Condensed Key Stage 3 pilot