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

Dawn Sanders, Gabrielle White, Bethan Burge,  
Caroline Sharp, Anna Eames, Rhona McEune  
and Hilary Grayson

National Foundation for Educational Research

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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education and Skills.



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# Executive summary

## 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.

## **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 in the ten year period between January 1993 and February 2004.

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





# 1 Introduction and context

This report aims to provide an 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. Before considering the aims of this project in more detail, it is important to consider the research background and to outline the contemporary policy context from which these concerns have arisen.

## 1.1 Structure of the report

This remainder of this report is divided into nine chapters. Chapter 2 presents the evidence from recent literature on the subject of transition. Chapter 3 presents the views of children interviewed during the case study visits and Chapter 4 considers the views of their parents. Chapters 5 and 6 present the views of school staff in the Foundation Stage and Year 1, whereas Chapter 7 considers transition from the perspective of school managers. Examples of schools' transition practices are presented in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 brings together the main themes, draws conclusions and offers recommendations for policy and practice.

## 1.2 The policy context

There has been a period of considerable change and development within early education in England. Early education has now become part of the government's Sure Start programme, bringing together education, childcare, health and family support. Responsibility for all services for children under eight years of age now lies with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Over the last decade, policy development has impacted greatly on the organisation and teaching of early education. A period of substantial development began in 1996 when the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education (SCAA, 1996) were introduced by the Conservative Government. These were intended to form a framework for early learning and to establish a set of common standards across all early years settings. The document set out learning objectives for children that should be met by the time they entered compulsory education. The objectives were organised into the following six areas of learning:

- Personal and Social Development
- Physical Development
- Creative Development

- Language and Literacy
- Mathematics
- Knowledge and Understanding of the World.

Although it was not statutory, this framework was the basis for drawing down funding for four-year-olds and was referred to during inspections carried out in both maintained and non-maintained settings. As such, the framework greatly influenced both planning and practice in early years settings. The nursery voucher scheme was introduced in 1996 with the intention of giving parents increased choice and flexibility in selecting early educational provision for their children. This scheme was abolished a year later and replaced with the Nursery Grant.

A period of growth and expansion in early years provision followed the change of government in 1997. New Labour made an election commitment to provide free, part-time early education for all four-year-olds. This was introduced by September 1998 and the commitment was extended to all three-year-olds in 2004. Several other initiatives were introduced during this period, including the Early Excellence Centres Programme which aimed to develop models of good practice, and to integrate services for young children and families. Early Years Development Partnerships (EYDPs) were established in each Local Education Authority (LEA) to provide a local integrated planning forum for early education. In 1998, EYDPs became Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) and their memberships expanded. The partnerships were formed to increase collaboration across sectors and to coordinate childcare services in an attempt to reflect the needs of children and their families in each area of the country.

Policy development in early education coincided with a drive to raise standards of academic achievement in education, with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy and an emphasis on traditional methods of teaching and assessment. The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) was introduced in the autumn term of 1998. The National Literacy Strategy Framework for Teaching (DfES, 1998) contained teaching objectives for teachers from Reception to Year 6. It offered a reference point for the day-to-day teaching of literacy and provided guidance on the daily Literacy Hour in which this teaching was to take place. The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) followed a year later. This placed an emphasis on daily mathematics lessons with a focus on mental calculation and whole-class teaching. The accompanying National Numeracy Strategy Framework (DfEE, 1999) set out a structured term-by-term teaching programme. These strategies placed emphasis on literacy and numeracy and resulted in increased attention being focused on these areas of the curriculum in primary classes.

The area of assessment was also to receive considerable attention. From the autumn term of 1998, all maintained primary schools were required to adopt a baseline assessment scheme accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). The aim was to assess all four- to five-year-olds in the basic skills of speaking and listening, reading, writing, mathematics and personal and social development. These assessments were scheduled to take place within seven weeks of starting school. The intended use of the information was for Reception teachers to plan their teaching to meet children's individual needs. This information was intended to be shared and discussed with each child's parents and passed on to the LEA.

In 1999, the Desirable Learning Outcomes were replaced with Early Learning Goals (QCA, 1999). In September of the following year the Foundation Stage was established, creating a distinct phase of education with the aim of unifying provision for children in the early years. The Early Learning Goals formed the basis of the Foundation Stage curriculum and was designed for children aged three until the end of the Reception year.

The philosophy underpinning the Foundation Stage curriculum is that learning should be carefully planned and structured, with an emphasis on activities that are fun, relevant and motivating for each child. The Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS) (QCA and DFEE, 2000) formed the core reference document for the implementation of the Foundation Stage. The guidance was intended to help practitioners plan to meet the diverse needs of all children and to enable most of them to achieve the Early Learning Goals by the end of the Foundation Stage. The guidance set out clear principles for early education, reflecting ideas about good and effective practice in Foundation Stage settings and placing emphasis on working in partnership with parents. Prior to the introduction of the Foundation Stage, Reception teachers needed to refer to both the Desirable Learning Outcomes/Early Learning Goals and the Key Stage 1 curriculum. The introduction of the Foundation Stage meant that Key Stage 1 curriculum did not start until children made the transition to Year 1.

The National Curriculum for Key Stage 1 was revised in August 2000, and one of the resulting changes was that the primary curriculum for English and mathematics was aligned with the NNS and the NLS frameworks for teaching. The Foundation Stage curriculum and the Key Stage 1 curriculum do contain some common elements and the Early Learning Goals are meant to be broadly equivalent to level 1 of the National Curriculum for Key Stage 1. The main differences between the two curricula are that the National Curriculum for Key Stage 1 is subject-based with prescribed programmes of study, whereas the Foundation Stage curriculum is integrated and more flexible. The National Curriculum Handbook (DfEE and QCA, 1999) for Key Stages 1 and 2 provides suggestions for Reception and Year 1 teachers on how the programmes of study at Key Stage 1 can build on the Early Learning Goals.

Specific guidance on the organisation of the NLS and the NNS in Reception classes was published in 2000 (DfEE, 2000a and b). These documents provide guidance for Reception teachers on the way in which the different elements of the strategies can be taught flexibly and appropriately to the age of the children. The CGFS (QCA and DFEE, 2000) states that Reception teachers can choose to cover elements of the literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson across the day rather than in a single unit of time. However, the CGFS states that all Reception teachers should have both the full literacy hour and the daily mathematics lesson in place by the end of the Reception year in order to ensure a smooth transition to Year 1. The structure of the literacy hour includes a period of about 40 minutes in which the teacher interacts with the whole class and a further 20 minutes for interacting with small groups. The daily mathematics lesson should last about 45 minutes in Key Stage 1, including whole-class teaching for ‘a significant proportion of the time’.

The Education Act 2002 extended the National Curriculum to include the Foundation Stage. A new form of assessment was introduced a year later that aimed to replace the various baseline assessment schemes that were in use. The Foundation Stage Profile (FSP) was dependent on practitioners’ assessments of individual children carried out through observation. The profiles could either be completed throughout the year, or at the end of the year using practitioners’ own assessment records (QCA, 2003). Schools and early years settings are required to send individual pupil level data from the profiles (based on the 13 scales for the six areas of learning) to their Local Education Authority (LEA) so that each LEA can produce aggregate data. Effective use of the FSP could help to ensure continuity in teaching and learning between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 as the profile gives Year 1 teachers important information and this can help them to plan effectively to meet the children’s needs. In the same year that the profile was introduced the Foundation Stage curriculum became statutory for the first time.

The change from having no officially defined, recognised or required curriculum within early education, to having detailed statutory curriculum guidance for practitioners and assessments of children’s achievements at the end of the Foundation Stage, has introduced new responsibilities and requirements for early years practitioners (Quick *et al.*, 2002). It has also meant that the end of the Reception year marks the end of the first stage of the National Curriculum. Children starting Year 1 experience a different, more subject-based curriculum. This has changed the significance of the move to Year 1 for children, teachers and families.

### **1.3 Aims of the study**

In *Excellence and Enjoyment: A Strategy for Primary Schools* (DfES, 2003) the government sets out its intention to focus on transition:

*We know that any transition from one stage of learning to another presents challenges for teachers. That is why we have worked from the beginning to try to ensure continuity between the areas of learning in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 programmes of study... But we want to understand better whether there are still difficulties about the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 and whether teachers need more support.*

DfES (2003) pp. 43–44

The main purpose of this study was to create a solid evidence base about the effectiveness of the transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 and to improve understanding about how best to support children's learning during this transition. The work involved identifying pedagogical approaches which support children in making this transition from the first stage of the national curriculum to later stages. The research had five main aims:

- To identify the key issues affecting children, parents and teachers involved in making the change from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1
- To determine how well concerns about the effectiveness of the transition are grounded in practice
- To establish more clearly the evidence base for different pedagogies for five- to seven-year-olds. In particular, to establish how these differing pedagogies contribute to managing the transition effectively
- To identify 'best practice' approaches for managing the transition successfully and with minimal disruption to the child's development
- To assess whether there are important differences across schools and sub-groups of children in managing successful transitions: e.g. do children from disadvantaged backgrounds find the underlying discontinuities of the transition inherently difficult?

## **1.4 Methodology**

The methodology for this study comprised three main parts: a review of the literature; a series of telephone interviews; and case study work in schools. Each piece of research was intended to inform the next.

### **1.4.1 Review of relevant literature**

The main purpose of the literature review was to inform subsequent stages of the research process. A systematic approach was adopted which involved conducting searches of key databases, websites, hand searching and contact with experts in this field. The review drew on a range of materials, published in the ten year period between January 1993 and February 2004.

Further details of the methodology used to identify material for the literature review can be found in Chapter 2. A full description of the search strategy used for the literature review is provided in the appendix.

### **1.4.2 Telephone interviews**

The telephone interviews were the first strand of the empirical data collection of the research into the transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.

They were designed to:

- identify schools for the case study phase of the research
- enable the research team to select a case study sample that reflects the key features of school size and organisation that may impact on children's experience of transition
- collect information to supplement and contextualise the case study work
- enable the research team to identify some examples of promising transition practice.

A sample of 60 schools was selected from the NFER Register of Schools. The sample was stratified to reflect geographical region, school type, size and achievement bands at Key Stage 1. The research team wrote to 120 schools inviting them to be participants in the telephone interviews and 81 schools responded. A sample of 60 schools was selected from the 81 schools.

The interviewees were all teachers directly involved in managing the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. The interviews were designed to explore some key issues related to the transition between Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. The main areas covered were:

- the context of the school
- school policies and practices for transition
- issues related to continuity in teaching and learning
- the skills teachers expected children to have for Year 1
- support and training teachers had received from the LEA or in their own school.

### **1.4.3 Case study visits**

The case study schools were selected from those which had contributed to the telephone interviews. The sample was selected to include schools from

geographically diverse areas of the country and with different profiles (i.e. in terms of school size, type and achievement profile).

The researchers made two visits to each of the case study schools. The first two-day visit took place during the summer term, 2004 and the second, one-day visit took place in the autumn term of the same year. The research focused on children making the transition from Reception to Key Stage 1.

The first visit focused on collecting the following information:

- School population characteristics, typical pre-school experiences and school admission policy
- Staffing, staff qualifications and training
- Organisation and management of Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1
- Pedagogical approaches adopted at each stage
- Difficulties encountered and solutions adopted
- Liaison between staff (including use of the Foundation Stage Profile) and between staff and parents
- Strategies adopted for easing transition
- Children's and parents' expectations of transition to Key Stage 1
- Children's and parents' experiences of transition from home to pre-school.

During this visit the researchers carried out semi-structured interviews with the following people:

- Reception class teacher
- Nursery class teacher (if applicable)
- Support staff (e.g. classroom assistant)
- Year 1 teacher
- Foundation Stage Coordinator
- Headteacher
- Governor responsible for the Foundation Stage.

In addition, to focus on the experience of particular children making the transition from Foundation Stage to Year 1, six children were selected from the Reception class list in each of the twelve case-study schools. The researchers observed these children in the classroom and outside (e.g. during outdoor play) and conducted interviews with them and their parents. (Further details about the methods adopted in the children's interviews can be found in Chapter 3.)

The second visit entailed the following:

- Interviews with the same children and their parents (where possible)
- Observation of children's activities
- Interviews with the Year 1 class teacher
- Interviews with Year 1 support staff (e.g. classroom assistants).

This visit enabled the research team to document the experience of children, parents and staff, and to find out which factors helped or hindered children in making a smooth transition to Key Stage 1.

## **1.5 Findings from the telephone interviews**

The main aim of the telephone interviews was to aid the selection of the case study schools. While the sample was wide-ranging, in terms of geographical location, school type and size, the primary purpose of the interviews was to act as a 'sampling frame' for selecting a broad range of case study schools. Given the specific purpose and the relatively small sample size, more research is needed to confirm the extent to which the views of interviewees are representative of those of the larger population. Findings from the case studies, presented in Chapters 3 to 8, enable a more detailed examination of the issues raised in the telephone interviews.

The interview schedule focused on the following themes:

- Teachers' views of transition issues, including differences in approach in Reception and Year 1
- Perceptions of the skills that staff felt were desirable for children entering Year 1
- School practices for transition to Year 1
- Staff support and training in relation to transition.

The interviews took place in March 2004. The sample of 60 schools mainly comprised of primary schools (with and without a nursery) but there were a small number of infant schools (also with and without a nursery). The interviewers spoke to 18 Foundation Stage Coordinators, ten teachers of Reception classes, 26 teachers of Year 1 and seven teachers of mixed Reception and Year 1 classes. In one school, two teachers asked to be interviewed because they worked together as teachers of a mixed Reception and Year 1 class. Full details of the sampling strategy are provided in the appendix.

### ***Teachers' views of transition issues***

The main points raised by teachers contributing to the telephone interviews are set out below.

- When asked whether they had 'any issues' with the transition process, 40 of the 61 interviewees said that the process posed some challenges for them.
- The 21 teachers who said they had no issues with the transition felt their school managed the process well. This included the seven teachers of mixed Reception/Year 1 classes who said there were no transition issues because the children remained in the same class.
- The greatest challenges related to curriculum expectations. Year 1 was commonly described by both Foundation Stage and Year 1 teachers as more 'structured' and 'formal' than Reception.
- Teachers said that Year 1 required more teacher-led activities with less freedom for children to move around and choose their own activities. There was a greater requirement for children to record their work (e.g. in writing) in Year 1.
- The literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson were considered to be particularly challenging for children in Year 1. The main difficulty lay in children getting used to the structure of the literacy and numeracy hours (especially the whole class activities).
- Year 1 classes tended to have more furniture and less space. In comparison with Reception, Year 1 classes had limited provision for role play, sand and water, educational toys and outdoor play.
- Most teachers identified certain groups of children who found the transition more difficult, including: the youngest in the year group, those who had spent less time in Reception, children described as 'less mature' and children with special educational needs.

### ***Skills desirable for Year 1***

- Both Foundation Stage staff and Year 1 teachers were asked which skills and abilities children needed to make a good start in Year 1. The skills considered desirable for children entering Year 1 included independence (especially being able to carry out tasks without adult help), appropriate behaviour (especially the ability to sit still and listen to the teacher) and social skills.
- The following academic skills were considered helpful for children entering Year 1: speaking and listening; knowledge of letter sounds; ability to draw letters; recognition and manipulation of numbers (preferably up to 20).

### ***Schools' transition practices***

- Both groups of teachers spoke about the ways in which they adapted their practice to help ease transition. This included Reception class teachers introducing elements of the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson and Year 1 teachers continuing with 'Reception-type' activities, such as role play.
- Most of the schools arranged for children to meet their new teachers during the summer term.
- Some teachers mentioned the importance of getting Reception children used to participating in whole-school activities, such as assemblies and playtime.
- Schools ensured that parents were fully involved when their children started attending the school (in either nursery or Reception). There was much less emphasis on parental involvement during the transition to Year 1.

### ***Support and training related to transition***

- Interviewees noted that most Reception classes had full-time support from teaching assistants, whereas Year 1 classes usually had part-time support. Year 1 teachers felt that this placed limitations on their ability to provide a wide range of activities for children.
- Both groups of teachers felt they would benefit from training on managing the transition to Year 1.
- A small number of interviewees commented that they would like school managers and governors to be more aware and supportive of early years practice.

## **1.6 Summary of key issues**

The main purpose of this study was to establish a solid evidence-base about the effectiveness of the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. Recent years have seen a period of considerable change in English early education. The transition to a more 'formal' curriculum now takes place a year after most children start school. This study used a combination of methods to investigate the key issues regarding the transition in question. Telephone interviews with staff in 60 schools raised some issues about curriculum and pedagogical continuity and suggested that staff would find training helpful. The following chapter identifies issues in the research literature which are then explored in the remaining chapters which consider the views of children, parents and staff in the 12 case-study schools.

## 2 Review of relevant literature

This chapter sets out the findings from recent literature on transition, with particular reference to the transition to Key Stage 1.

### 2.1 Purpose of the review

The purpose of the literature review was to identify the main issues relating to the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 (as recorded in the evidence base) and to identify the gaps in knowledge. By doing so, it was hoped to inform our understanding of the area and to identify key issues that could be illuminated in the case study part of the research.

The research questions that the review aimed to address were:

- What are the issues regarding curriculum/pedagogical continuity between Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1?
- What are the key issues for children and their parents in making the transition between Reception (Foundation Stage) and Year 1 (Key Stage 1)?
- What are the key issues for teachers, support staff (e.g. teaching assistants) and headteachers in managing the transition between Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1?
- What are the issues raised in making educational transitions at other stages/ages in a young child's life (i.e. home to early years setting, early education setting to school, transition in the middle years of schooling both within and between settings e.g. Key Stage 1 to 2, Key Stage 2 to 3)?
- Which strategies have been identified as exemplifying good practice in easing transition and to what extent are these applicable to the transition in question (i.e. Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1)?
- Are there any factors relating to the characteristics and experiences of children and their families (for example, deprivation, ethnicity and language, pre-school experience, gender, age of starting school, parents' experience of education) that appear to influence young children's experience of transition?

The review involved an analysis of published research conducted in the ten year period between January 1993 and February 2004. An additional report focusing on the transition from Reception to Year 1 was published by Ofsted in May 2004 (soon after the review of the literature was completed). NFER was asked by the research steering group to include the findings from this study in the review of the literature because of the relevance of its findings.

Full details of the search strategy and summary framework are provided in the appendix.

In developing an overview of the available evidence, the researchers used the best available evidence to answer the research questions. This approach means that evidence is prioritised in terms of the appropriateness of its design and the quality of its execution in relation to the questions of interest to the review.

A framework was developed by the research team (see appendix) in order to aid the analysis and writing of each summary. This also helped to ensure that there was commonality in the review process as each of the reviewers used an identical framework. The framework encouraged the reviewer to focus on specific aspects of the research material. These included: the research design, sample, research methods, analysis and findings. The reviewers recorded their comments on the quality of the research, which allowed them to focus on the contribution of each study to the issues of particular relevance to the review.

## **2.2 Content of the review**

It is important to note that there is a limited amount of research from England that focuses on the children's transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. This is not surprising, given the relatively recent introduction of the Foundation Stage (in 2000) and the subsequent introduction of the Foundation Stage Profile (in 2003).

The study of educational transition (e.g. from pre-school to school) is also not very well represented in the recent UK research literature. For this reason, a large proportion of the literature reviewed originates from other countries, particularly the USA and Australia. We should also point out that some of the evidence is drawn from studies of other educational transitions (such as starting school and the transition from primary school to secondary school). In writing this review we have attempted to distinguish clearly between material concerning the particular transition of interest to this study and that relating to other educational transitions; and between studies conducted in this country and elsewhere.

The review found evidence on the following issues:

- Theoretical perspectives on transition.
- Curriculum and pedagogical continuity in the early years.
- Children's experiences of transition.
- Parents' experiences of their children's educational transitions.
- Teachers' experiences and views of transition.

- Schools' transition practices.

## 2.3 Theoretical perspectives on transition

Fthenakis (1998) points out that children today experience multiple transitions and have to cope with many discontinuities in their lives, such as parental separation, remarriage, or moving location. Although discontinuity can be very challenging to children, it can also encourage children to develop new patterns of behaviour which can be personally profitable and offer opportunities for development. Fthenakis suggests that teachers can play an important role in strengthening children's ability to cope with the discontinuities they will inevitably face.

Children make educational transitions as they start school, as they progress through school, and as they move between schools. These transitions require children to acclimatise to new surroundings, to adapt to new ways of working, to make sense of new rules and routines, and to interact with unfamiliar adults and peers. A child's ability to respond to these challenges may influence the ways in which he or she progresses and develops. It has been suggested that children's experiences of transition in the early years may be particularly influential:

*Each of these experiences is likely to affect children and their capacity to adjust and to learn. Such is the significance of early transitions for young children that it is essential that parents, educators, policy makers and politicians play close attention to young children's experiences in order to provide well for them.*

(Fabian and Dunlop, 2002).

As well as conducting empirical studies on transition, researchers have attempted to develop conceptual models aimed at facilitating common understandings and more effective practices. One such model was developed by Pianta *et al.* (1999b). This attempts to define transition to school in ecological terms. In doing so, the model borrows from the work of Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), which described and mapped various contexts that influence children's development. In Pianta *et al.*'s (1999b) model, children's transition to school is understood in terms of the influence of different contexts experienced by the child, including the family, classroom, community. It also takes account of the connections between these contexts over time. This model conceives of transition as a process that involves interrelations between children, parents and schools across time. It suggests that it is important to consider the concerns raised by each of these groups, in order to build up a comprehensive picture of the effect of the transition process.

## 2.4 Curriculum and pedagogical continuity in the early years

This section presents the research evidence on issues of curriculum and pedagogical continuity between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. In order to contextualise issues of continuity, the section begins by considering evidence on effective pedagogy in early education and the implementation of the Foundation Stage in English Reception classes.

In this section the term ‘early years’ is used to refer to the stage of education for children aged three to five years. The term ‘practitioner’ is used to refer to all those adults working with children in the Foundation Stage. The term ‘pedagogy’ is used to refer to the principles, methods and approaches to teaching, whereas ‘curriculum’ relates to the content of the activities and associated guidance.

There have been concerns expressed about the curriculum and pedagogical continuity between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 (Quick *et al.*, 2002). Although these two curricula possess common themes, it is questioned whether their commonalities are sufficient to enable them to interweave coherently (Ellis, 2002; Quick *et al.*, 2002).

### 2.4.1 UK research on effective pedagogy in the early years

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) recently commissioned two parallel studies into effective pedagogy in the early years. The Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning (SPEEL), (Moyles *et al.*, 2002), and the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years project (REPEY), (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) aimed to identify both perceptions of effective pedagogy and the factors involved in effective early years practice.

The SPEEL project (Moyles *et al.*, 2002) led to the production of a framework that provides a set of key statements representing core competences in the effective practitioner/pedagogue role. The authors suggest that the framework is a valid and reliable tool that can be used with practitioners as a set of quality assurance criteria. The authors found that:

- Effective pedagogical practices were dependent upon a strong overall management and organisational ethos, in which practitioners felt valued and had status.
- It was important for practitioners to have opportunities to reflect upon and articulate their practice.
- Practice varied considerably amongst practitioners who had been identified as effective.

- There was evidence that adult involvement and engagement in children's play was not always understood or utilised as a vehicle for learning.

Moyles *et al.* (2002) identify two key factors in encouraging practitioners to reflect on their practice: time and training. Having time and being able to reflect on practice was important but practitioners' ability to reflect on their practice appeared to be related to their level of training. As a result, the authors suggest that practitioners may require further support and training in several areas in order for them to improve the quality of their work.

The REPEY project (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) focused on the interaction between adults and children in a sample of 12 early years settings in England. These settings had been identified as being 'effective' on the basis of child social/behavioural and cognitive outcomes from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study as 'good' practice settings.

The EPPE project is a large-scale longitudinal study into The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) (Sylva *et al.*, 2004). The EPPE study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the 'value added' to aspects of children's developmental progress, by their early childhood provision. One of the EPPE project's aims was to identify the most effective pedagogical strategies that are applied in the Foundation Stage to support the development of children's skills, knowledge and attitudes.

The REPEY project included in their sample two English Reception classes and a group of 46 'effective' childminders identified according to the professional judgement of local authority experts. The research evidence arises from intensive case studies conducted in each of the 14 settings and telephone interviews with each of the childminders.

The findings of the REPEY project indicated that:

- Good outcomes for children were linked to adult-child interactions that involved 'sustained and shared thinking'.
- Interaction that involved open-ended questioning was valuable in terms of children's learning.
- Trained teachers were the most effective in their interactions with children, resulting in the most sustained shared thinking; and less well qualified members of staff were more effective when they were supervised by a qualified teacher.
- In the most effective settings, the balance between adult-initiated and child-initiated activities was equal, including both adult-initiated group work and freely chosen instructive play. In excellent settings, staff helped children to extend about half of the activities that children had initiated themselves.

- Formative assessment was important in meeting children's individual needs, particularly through providing feedback during activities.
- In the most effective settings, staff encouraged children to be assertive and helped them to rationalise and talk through their conflicts.
- Cognitive outcomes were directly linked to quantity and quality of planned group work.

The REPEY project (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) went on to consider the experiences offered to children in different kinds of provision, finding that children in Reception classes experienced a much greater emphasis upon adult-initiated episodes. There is no evidence to suggest that these differences are widespread, as only two Reception classes were included in the REPEY sample. However, the study raises questions about differences in practice that may exist between the first year of the Foundation Stage (when most children attend nursery provision) and the second (when most children attend a Reception class at school).

The research also sought practitioners' views on transition. In relation to the transition to Key Stage 1, Reception class teachers identified differences in structure and teaching approaches and expressed concerns about the emphasis that was placed on children acquiring 'formal' skills in Year 1. In addition, these teachers expressed the view that chronological age could not necessarily be taken as an indication of a child's level of development and that some children may find it difficult to adjust to a more formal environment. Reception teachers felt that children need to be reassured about, and prepared for, the experiences that they would encounter in Year 1.

#### **2.4.2 Research on implementing the Foundation Stage in England**

A report published by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, 2001) provides some evidence on how schools responded to the introduction of the Foundation Stage. The report focuses on the teaching of literacy and numeracy in English Reception classes. The evidence used to comprise the report was produced by inspections carried out in 129 schools between autumn 2000 and summer 2001, soon after the Foundation Stage had been introduced.

Inspectors found that the introduction of the Foundation Stage had brought new challenges for many schools. Although just over half of the schools in the sample had written action plans to help them implement the Foundation Stage, only a quarter of the plans had sufficient detail. Furthermore, these plans rarely included any reference to preparing children for Year 1.

The inspectors found that Reception teachers were aware of the importance of preparing children for the Key Stage 1 curriculum. Most Reception teachers

had implemented a full literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson by the middle of the summer term. However, a small minority of Reception teachers in the sample had not implemented both of these elements by the summer term. The inspectors expressed concern about this, because it meant that some children would not experience the full literacy hour and daily mathematics lessons before moving to Year 1.

A subsequent survey (Quick *et al.*, 2002), aimed to identify practices and opinions regarding the Foundation Stage. Structured telephone interviews were conducted with 799 headteachers and 752 Reception class teachers in English schools. In 702 cases, the headteacher and Reception class teacher were from the same school. The response to the Foundation Stage was positive: the majority of both headteachers and the Reception teachers (91 per cent and 95 per cent respectively) reported that they considered the Foundation Stage to be a good thing. Respondents identified flexibility and informality as the main benefits of the Foundation Stage. However, a small number of respondents (ten per cent of heads and 15 per cent of Reception teachers) identified difficulties arising from unclear guidance and mixed messages about the balance between structured and unstructured work. A few respondents (eight per cent of each sample) felt that the introduction of the Foundation Stage had caused disruption because it was so different from Key Stage 1.

Interestingly, analysis revealed that respondents' access to training on early years/the Foundation Stage appeared to be linked to positive experiences of implementing the Foundation Stage in Reception classes.

The report presents information about transition, but it should be noted that the report focuses on headteachers' perceptions and does not report the views of Reception teachers in this regard. Quick *et al.* (2002) found that the majority of headteachers felt that the introduction of the Foundation Stage had not led to problems in the transition to Key Stage 1. However, just over a quarter of heads reported that there had been problems (19 per cent of the heads reported 'small' problems and a further seven per cent felt that transition had been 'a big problem' in their school). Further analysis revealed that larger, urban schools were more likely to consider this transition to be problematic.

The main problems identified in this survey related to the different pedagogies adopted in the Foundation Stage and Year 1. Heads said that without adaptation at the end of the Reception year or at the start of Year 1, children were finding it difficult to adjust to the more formalised methods and academic demands of Key Stage 1. There were some concerns expressed for children who had not achieved the Early Learning Goals during the Foundation Stage.

Three years after the implementation of the Foundation Stage, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) surveyed 550 of its members working in the Foundation Stage in England (Ellis, 2002). The survey aimed to investigate the impact of the Foundation Stage and to examine the support that practitioners had received. Three quarters of respondents stated that their setting had made changes to accommodate the Foundation Stage. The most frequent changes identified were: the development of policies to reflect the Foundation Stage and changes to outdoor provision. Over two thirds of respondents reported that they had changed the way they planned the curriculum and over half said that they now worked more as a team.

Thirty per cent of respondents reported that, since the introduction of the Foundation Stage, some children become unable to settle at activities and had needed more adult support. A quarter of these respondents worked in Key Stage 1 or in mixed-age classes.

Just under half of all respondents (44 per cent) reported that they had experienced problems when trying to make links between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. They commented that the areas of learning from the Foundation Stage curriculum were not systematically mapped onto the National Curriculum subjects in Year 1.

The ATL commissioned a further study in 2004 to explore if, and in what ways, the Foundation Stage was changing practice in Reception classes (Adams *et al.*, 2004). The ATL was concerned that the introduction of the Foundation Stage may have brought with it a clash of priorities for teachers. The research team surveyed a sample of 180 Reception class teachers, teaching assistants, headteachers, governors, LEA staff and personnel working in EYDCP in ten English LEAs. The survey was followed up with semi-structured interviews and observations in Reception classes in a convenience sample of eight LEAs (seven of the ten plus one additional LEA). Interestingly, the researchers found there were some discrepancies between the questionnaire data, the interview data and the observation data.

The questionnaire data from the Adams *et al.* (2004) study suggested that curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage had been welcomed by practitioners, and respondents reported that they had experienced few difficulties and challenges in implementation. However, the findings from the interview data were less positive and revealed some evidence of confusion among practitioners. In addition, the observational data indicated that everyday practice in classrooms did not adequately reflect the principles set out in the CGFS (QCA and DfEE, 2000).

Adams *et al.* (2004) argue that there was evidence to suggest that Reception class teachers experienced pressure from Key Stage 1 to prioritise particular skills among children (particularly literacy, numeracy and adaptation to school

routines). The authors suggest that their findings provide evidence of a need for further training and the production of a document offering a clearly argued rationale for the Foundation Stage, which would help Reception class teachers to resist inappropriate pressures from their colleagues in Key Stage 1.

### **2.4.3 Research on curriculum continuity between the Foundation Stage and Year 1**

This section considers the evidence from three studies which gathered the perceptions on curriculum continuity of those working in Year 1.

Research conducted by Bennett (2000) focused on progression and continuity between nursery, Reception and Year 1 classes in five English schools. He observed a shift from a learner-centred approach in nursery and Reception to a more teacher-directed, curriculum-centred approach in Year 1. Bennett suggests that progression and continuity were hindered in two ways during this transition. Firstly, there was insufficient liaison between teachers in Reception and Year 1 and secondly, children had to adapt to important changes in teaching styles and curriculum demands. He found that some children demonstrated regression in previous knowledge and understanding. Bennett suggests that children's knowledge was being undermined in Year 1 by the prescriptive nature of the literacy and numeracy strategies.

A second report offering evidence of children's experiences in Year 1 arises from an international study carried out by Ofsted (2003). The study aimed to compare and contrast the educational experiences of six year olds in England, Denmark and Finland. The findings were based on classroom observation and interviews with relevant staff in twelve schools in England, seven schools in Denmark and eight schools in Finland.

The researchers found that Year 1 teachers in England were less secure than their colleagues in Denmark and Finland about the nature and purpose of the curriculum in Year 1.

Teachers said that they found it quite difficult to deal with the two curricula in England because they were so different. In particular, those teaching in mixed age classes found it difficult to integrate the Foundation Stage curriculum and the National Curriculum for Year 1 within a coherent programme for the whole class. A few Year 1 teachers said that they preferred the integrated approach of the Foundation Stage curriculum rather than the segregated subject-based Key Stage 1 curriculum. A few of the Year 1 teachers said they felt that the emphasis on learning through play would also benefit the six-year-olds in their classes.

There was some evidence of pressure on Year 1 teachers to move to a more 'academic' programme. Year 2 teachers were reported to be anxious that children should make good progress in Year 1, particularly in the areas assessed by national tests. Similarly, English headteachers were interested in trying to include more play-based learning, but they were concerned that this might jeopardise the gain in standards in core subjects.

Ofsted followed their international study with an evaluation focusing specifically on the transition from Reception to Year 1 (Ofsted, 2004). Data was collected from visits to 46 English schools (over three terms in 2003) where teaching was observed and discussions were held with headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants.

The 2004 study found that there was a growing awareness of the need to improve transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 and that this had led some schools to make changes to the management and organisational structure in their schools. However, there was some evidence to suggest that the work in Year 1 did not meet the needs of all children, particularly for those children who had not yet attained the Early Learning Goals.

The authors propose that policy makers should give further consideration to the links between the areas of learning in the Foundation Stage and the subjects of the National Curriculum for Key Stage 1. Furthermore, they suggest that schools should do more to ensure that learning experiences in Year 1, build upon the practical approaches and structured play that takes place in Reception and involve subject coordinators more in planning for curricular continuity.

One of the intentions of the Foundation Stage Profile is to give Year 1 teachers information about the children who are moving up into their class from Reception. The Foundation Stage Profile was introduced during the summer term of 2003 and its use by Year 1 teachers and subsequent significance has yet to be fully evaluated. The authors of the Ofsted report found that over three quarters of the schools were using the profile in addition to their existing records and assessments, which meant that the overall workload was very high. The authors suggest that policymakers need to clarify the purpose of the Foundation Stage Profile and explain more clearly how information should be recorded.

#### **2.4.4 Summary of the main findings on curriculum and pedagogical continuity in the early years**

Research relating to the issues regarding effective early years pedagogy and continuity between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 demonstrates that:

- Effective early years practice includes opportunities for children to initiate their own learning activities for about half of the time. Adults in effective settings use open-ended questioning and dialogue to extend children's learning. (Moyles *et al.*, 2002; Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002)
- Practitioners with appropriate training are more effective in extending children's learning in the early years (Moyles *et al.*, 2002; Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002)
- In general, practitioners appear to have welcomed the introduction of the Foundation Stage and the accompanying guidance for practitioners (Quick *et al.*, 2002; Adams *et al.*, 2004)
- Two studies suggest that practice in Reception classrooms (the second year of the Foundation Stage) may not adequately reflect the pedagogical model as set out in the curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage (Adams *et al.*, 2004; Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002).
- There is evidence to suggest that some teachers have experienced difficulties in making links between the Foundation Stage curriculum and the National Curriculum for children in Year 1 (Ellis, 2002; Ofsted, 2003)
- Studies have suggested that Year 1 teachers may feel under pressure to adopt more formal approaches in order to prepare children for National Curriculum Assessments (Adams *et al.*, 2004; Ofsted, 2003)
- The evidence from the different studies is not entirely consistent concerning the extent to which children are considered to face difficulties during transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. There is evidence to suggest that most headteachers feel the transition is managed well within their school. However, some headteachers have expressed concerns and do regard this as problematic (Quick *et al.*, 2002). The main difficulties relate to the greater 'formality' of pedagogy and the greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy in Year 1 (Bennett, 2000; Quick *et al.*, 2002; Ellis, 2002; Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002)
- It has been suggested that children who have not attained the Early Learning Goals by the end of the Foundation Stage may find transition to Year 1 more problematic (Quick *et al.*, 2002; Ofsted, 2004)
- It has been recommended that practitioners should receive further guidance, training and support in relation to implementing aspects of the Foundation Stage and in relation to preparing children for the transition to Key Stage 1. (Adams *et al.*, 2004; Ofsted, 2001, 2004)

## 2.5 Children's experiences of transition

This section discusses the research evidence relating to children's experiences of transition. Unfortunately, however, very little of this evidence is concerned with the specific transition from the Foundation Stage to Year 1, due to a lack of studies in this area.

### **2.5.1 Research into children's experiences of transition from Reception to Key Stage 1**

The searches identified two studies that had collected children's views about the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.

In their study of the transition between Reception and Year 1, (Ofsted, 2004) the researchers spoke to children in 46 schools. Researchers spoke to children on three separate occasions, in the spring and summer terms of Reception and also in the autumn term of Year 1 (unfortunately the report does not outline the number of children who took part in the study). The findings indicate that the children were aware of the significance of the moving into Year 1. They were looking forward to the transition and felt confident about themselves and their work.

The children were able to discuss with the researchers the idea that they were moving from a more play-centred environment into an environment in which work would be harder. The children mentioned different types of difficulties when they were interviewed in their Reception class compared to their comments about their difficulties in Year 1. The report suggests that children in Reception tended to talk about basic skills that they found it difficult to master, whereas when they were in Year 1 they talked about the work that they found difficult.

The findings from an earlier piece of research conducted by Fabian (1998), based on interviews with 24 children, indicates that children may have mixed emotions about the transition to Year 1. This research found that children felt nervous and excited when approaching this transition. The author suggests that even if children have visited their new classroom and met their new teacher briefly, they have not yet developed a working relationship and are unsure of the workload that lies ahead.

### **2.5.2 Research evidence from the UK on children's experiences of other educational transitions**

We were interested to explore the findings from research into other educational transitions. By doing so, we hoped to illuminate the extent to which children's anxieties are similar across different kinds of transition and to identify the issues that may be particularly important for children in the move from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. This section of the report considers the evidence from studies into other educational transitions carried out in the UK.

Research conducted by Hendy and Whitebread (2000) focused on the importance of independence for children during transition between the ages of

three and seven. The researchers interviewed 24 teachers, 48 children (12 nursery children, 12 Reception children, 12 Year 1 children and 12 Year 2 children) and 46 parents in England about independent learning in the early years. Parents were asked to describe the ways that their child showed independence, and teachers were asked about the ways in which children became more independent. The responses to these questions were then categorised under several headings: physical, self help, organisational, personal, social and cognitive. Children's perceptions were explored using structured interviews. They were asked to describe their favourite activities at school, what they could do well, what they found more difficult and anything they could do on their own now that they couldn't do before.

The study found that the teachers' definition of independence was quite narrowly focused on organisational aspects. The researchers suggest that teachers' expectations and organisational practices encouraged children to depend on the teacher to a greater extent as they progressed through education. For example, when asked how they would deal with a difficulty, the nursery-aged children were more likely to try to resolve the problems themselves, whereas older children, particularly those in Reception classes, were more likely to involve an adult.

Two studies conducted in Scotland highlighted the importance of friendships to children as they move into a new setting, suggesting that friendship is central to the way in which children cope with the process. For example Graham and Hill (2003) conducted a questionnaire survey of children in Glasgow, supplemented with focus group discussions. Three secondary schools, together with three of their feeder schools were involved in the research, and the researchers drew a sample of 268, ten- and 11-year-old children who were making the transition from primary to secondary school. When asked what advice they would give other children to help manage the move from primary school to secondary school, one of the main suggestions was the need to make friends. Similarly, Stephen and Cope (2001) conducted case studies of 27 Scottish children who were moving into the first year of primary school. Their teachers suggested that children who were sociable and made friends more easily were more likely to settle into the class.

There are suggestions in the literature that children with certain characteristics may find transition a more difficult experience. For example, in their review of the literature on transition in the middle years of schooling, Galton *et al.* (1999) concluded that certain groups of children, such as those that receive free school meals, have special educational needs, or have English as an additional language, may be more vulnerable to 'lose ground' academically during transitions and transfers. The empirical study conducted by Graham and Hill (2003) also found differences among children from different ethnic backgrounds. A higher proportion of children from white backgrounds (22%) said they had made 'a large number of new friends' when compared with

children from Pakistani and other minority ethnic backgrounds (14%). The children from Pakistani backgrounds were more likely to report that they had trouble fitting into secondary school. Their teachers did not appear to be aware of these problems, although some acknowledged that there were particular difficulties for pupils with English as an additional language.

### **2.5.3 Research from other countries on children's experiences of making educational transitions**

The evidence from studies conducted into educational transitions from other countries tends to focus on particular aspects of transition, several of which are also evident in the UK research literature. For this reason, we have organised the studies into the following themes: independence and work; rules; friendship and social skills; and the impact of transition on children with different characteristics.

#### ***Independence and work***

In common with the findings from UK research (Hendy and Whitebread, 2000) one Australian study (Potter and Briggs, 2003) has suggested that children lose opportunities for independence and choice as they move through school. The researchers conducted a questionnaire study of 100 five- and six-year-olds starting school. Eighty per cent of these children said that one of the aspects they did not like about school was the 'work'. The children conceived of work as an activity that was inflicted on them, and an area in which they lacked choice. In addition, about a third of the children said they appreciated being given a choice of activities by their teacher.

The review identified two other non-UK studies that reported children's views about work. The first of these was a study of 21 children in Italy (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000) moving from pre-school to elementary school, unfortunately the authors do not state the age of the children who took part in the study. The study found that children were worried about the amount of work they would have to do in school, and also the amount of work they would have to do at home. The researchers indicate that the children's views of homework had been influenced by what they had been told by their siblings. In the event, the children found they were able to manage the increased workload, but they still wanted to have more playtime.

Clarke and Sharpe (2003) studied 56 six- and seven-year-old children starting school in Singapore. These children anticipated that the move to school would involve lots of work and no play. The children were not only worried about the amount of work they would have in school, but also the homework that they would be expected to complete after school.

### **Knowing the rules**

Four studies highlighted children's interest in and concern about school rules. As part of the *Starting School Research Project*, Dockett and Perry (2003) interviewed 300 five- to six-year-old children in New South Wales in order to discover their perceptions and expectations of starting school. The children frequently spoke about the rules they needed to know when they started school: they were able to recite a list of school rules and also knew the consequences of breaking the rules.

Einarsdottir (2003b) conducted a study in Iceland she interviewed 48 five- to six-year-old children towards the end of their pre-school year to investigate their perceptions of school. The findings suggest that these children were not only worried about the rules, but also other organisational features of school life such as break-time and how the school bell would divide up the school day.

These findings were echoed in two other studies of children starting school in Italy and Germany (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Griebel and Niesel, 2000).

### **Friendship and social skills**

Several pieces of research into children's experiences of transition have identified the importance of children's peer group, especially their relationships with friends, siblings and the importance of social skills in helping children to adjust to their new setting.

For example, Margetts (2003) surveyed the teachers and parents of 212 children (aged from four to six) who were starting school in Australia. The findings suggested that children with high levels of social skill were more likely to adjust well to school.

A study of children making the transition to secondary school (Johnstone, 2002) indicated that 'familiar faces' within the school could help aid transition. Johnstone studied a sample of 290 children in New South Wales. Children who had siblings in the high school they were moving to felt better informed and this eased their concerns about the transition to secondary school.

Although the majority of research reviewed has suggested that friendship is important in easing children through transition, a small scale study conducted in New Zealand (Ledger *et al.*, 2000) failed to support this view. This study involved participant observation of a group of 16 children in New Zealand. The children were observed by one researcher throughout the transition process from pre-school to school. The findings indicated that although friendships are important to children, they were not always maintained following the transition. The study also found that the children without friends

or familiar peers appeared to settle into school as well as those who started school knowing other children.

### ***Individual characteristics***

In addition to the focus on children from different ethnic backgrounds, a study by Margetts (2000) suggests that transition can pose particular challenges for children who have special educational needs. She studied 213 children in their first year of school in Australia and found that children who displayed problem behaviour, such as aggression, internalising behaviour or hyperactivity (identified using a standardised rating scale) were more likely to experience difficulty adjusting to their first year of school.

## **2.5.4 Summary of the main findings from research into children's experiences of transition**

The research on children's expectations and experience of the transition process shows:

- On the whole, children view transition in a positive light. The two studies focused on the transition from Reception to Year 1 found that children had positive views of the transition, but also some concerns, especially about workload (Ofsted, 2004; Fabian, 1998)
- Work and workload are of concern to children making educational transitions. There is evidence from a small number of studies to suggest that, as children move from pre-school settings to primary school they become more dependent on adults and their opportunities to exercise choice in learning is limited (Hendy and Whitebread, 2000; Potter and Briggs, 2003; Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Clarke and Sharpe, 2003)
- Friendships, siblings and social skills may help children to settle into a new setting more easily (Graham and Hill, 2003; Stephen and Cope, 2001; Margetts, 2003; Johnstone, 2002)
- Children are concerned about the rules and conventions of school (Dockett and Perry, 2003; Einarsdottir, 2003b; Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Griebel and Niesel, 2000)
- Evidence from a small number of studies suggests that certain children may find transition more difficult. This includes children from minority ethnic groups, those with English as an additional language, and children with special educational needs (Galton *et al.*, 1999; Margetts, 2000; Graham and Hill, 2003).

## 2.6 Parents' experiences of their children's educational transitions

This section considers the evidence relating to parents' views about transition. However, we should point out that the literature searches identified only a small number of studies focusing on transition to Year 1. For this reason we have included evidence relating to parents' experiences of their children making the transition *to school*. The term 'parents' is used to refer to the adults who are the child's parents or main carer(s).

Parents are children's first educators. For this reason, encouraging parents to be involved in their child's education is widely accepted to be good practice, especially in the early years (QCA and DfEE, 2000).

### 2.6.1 Parents' views of the transition to Year 1

Most of the research evidence relating to the transition from Reception to Year 1 focuses on the views of teachers. The evidence available on parents' views arises from three studies (Fabian, 1998; Ofsted, 2003, 2004).

Fabian (1998) studied the impact of transition on children as they moved up through Key Stage 1 for her PhD thesis. As part of this study, the author interviewed a sample of 12 parents to consider their perspective in comparison to the views of the teachers and children. It is worth noting that this study was carried out *before* the introduction of the Foundation Stage. At the time, the completion of Reception did not mark the end of a distinct phase of education. Therefore, although the children in the study were moving up to a new class, they were not beginning a new stage of education or experiencing any substantial change in curriculum or pedagogy.

The study found that parents did not feel the need to be involved in the transition process as their children moved up to Year 1. However they did talk to their children about the transition and expressed an interest in receiving information from the school because they wanted to support their child's learning. The researcher noted that parents whose children had started school in the summer term expressed concern that their child would find the transition more difficult. Fabian suggests that schools should develop a process of communication with parents. She argues that it is important for parents to feel they can approach their child's teacher to discuss any concerns or worries they may have about their children's transition.

A more recent international study conducted by Ofsted (2003) took place after the Foundation Stage had been introduced in England. The study compared the educational experiences of six-year-old children in England, Denmark and Finland. The research team held discussions with a sample of parents in each of the settings (the report does not include information on the number of

parents that were involved). The researchers reported that some of the English parents expressed concerns about the curriculum in Year 1 as they felt it was too abrupt a change after the Foundation Stage curriculum. Several parents also held the view that there was too much of what they termed ‘formal’ teaching in Year 1.

In their subsequent study of English schools, Ofsted (2004) gathered the views of parents in relation to the transition from Reception to Year 1. The findings were based on discussions that were held with parents in 46 schools. The authors reported that most parents were satisfied with the arrangements for their child’s move up to Year 1. Nevertheless, parents whose children had started school in the spring or summer term felt that their children would have benefited from more time in Reception.

Parents expected to see a change in the balance between play-based activities and more formal teaching and learning. Some parents expressed concerns about this and suggested that the changes were being implemented too early.

### **2.6.2 Non-UK studies of parents’ views on their children’s transition to school**

Although the searches identified only three studies of parents’ views in relation to the transition between Reception and Year 1 in England, it identified a body of research in other countries that concerned parents’ views on the transition to school. It is likely that some of the issues raised are generic to parents’ concerns during transition more generally. The evidence on parents’ views on transition to school may therefore serve to illuminate some of the concerns that arise for parents when their children make the transition to Key Stage 1.

The review identified two studies that explored parents’ concerns about their child’s impending transition to school in the USA (Rosenkoetter and Rosenkoetter, 1993; Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 1999).

Rosenkoetter and Rosenkoetter (1993) conducted a survey of 592 US parents. Most of the parents said they were positive about their children starting school and that their children were eager to start. A minority of parents had concerns about their children’s safety and a few were concerned about their child’s ability to do what they identified as ‘work’. All of the parents in the sample expressed a desire to be informed about the curriculum, the staff and the services on offer.

Thirty-seven per cent of the parents in the survey sample had children with disabilities. Parents of these children were significantly ‘less eager’ about their

child starting school. These parents had concerns about the appropriateness of curriculum and of staff expectations for their child's attainment.

A separate longitudinal study (Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 1999) aimed to identify patterns of family-school contact in pre-schools and kindergarten classes. The researchers asked teachers to complete involvement logs recording family-school contact for the children in their class over an eight-month period. Teachers completed involvement logs for 290 children during the first year of the project and for 71 of these children in the second year. The findings showed that teacher-family contact occurred more frequently in pre-schools than in school kindergarten classes. In pre-school, there were more opportunities for informal, brief contacts between teacher and parents, often when parents collected their children from school. This research is interesting because it highlights differences in the levels and types of parental contact between staff and parents in pre-school, compared with school.

Four recent studies conducted by Dockett, Perry and their colleagues have examined the beliefs and expectations of parents as their children start school in Australia (Dockett *et al.*, 1999; Dockett and Perry, 2002; Perry and Dockett, 2003a and b). Taking the four studies together, the authors found that parents were concerned about:

- health issues
- their child settling into the group
- their child adjusting to the new environment
- their child having the necessary knowledge
- the teacher recognising that their child was important
- their child receiving support from friends and siblings.

Parents from non-English speaking backgrounds were particularly concerned about their child's ability to communicate with the teacher.

The authors concluded that parents, teachers and children all had different concerns about the transition process (for discussion of teachers' concerns see Section 2.7.3). They recommend that parents, children and teachers should engage in discussion about starting school prior to transition so that each group's concerns can be recognised and addressed.

### **2.6.3 Summary of the main findings from research on parents' experiences of transition**

Research into parents' experiences of transition suggests the following:

- The evidence on parents' views of transition to Year 1 is limited to three studies. Parents were generally satisfied with the transition process, but would like schools to keep them informed so that they can support their children (Fabian, 1998; Ofsted, 2003, 2004)
- The results from two studies conducted since the Foundation Stage was introduced suggest that parents are aware of a change in the approach to teaching in Year 1 and that some have concerns about the abruptness of the change and the formality of the teaching approach in Year 1 (Ofsted, 2003, 2004)
- Findings from two studies suggest that parents of children who started school in the spring or summer term may be more concerned about their child being 'ready' for the transition to Year 1 (Fabian, 1998; Ofsted, 2004).
- Research from other countries has focused on the transition to school. In general, parents anticipated that their children would manage the transition well, but there is some evidence to suggest that parents' concerns about transition to school may be different to the concerns of teachers (Dockett *et al.*, 1999; Dockett and Perry, 2002; Perry and Dockett, 2003a and b)
- Research evidence from several countries suggests that parents are concerned about their children adjusting to new situations. They want to be informed so they can prepare their children for the new experiences (Fabian, 1998; Dockett *et al.*, 1999; Dockett and Perry, 2002; Perry and Dockett, 2003a and b)
- Studies conducted in Australia and the USA indicate that parents whose children have disabilities and parents who come from non-English speaking backgrounds have particular concerns about transition (Dockett *et al.*, 1999; Dockett and Perry, 2002; Perry and Dockett, 2003a and b; Rosenkoetter and Rosenkoetter; 1993).

## **2.7 Teachers' experiences and views of transition**

This section presents the research evidence relating to teachers' views about transition. It focuses on issues other than those concerning the curriculum and pedagogy, as these have already been reported in a previous section. The research evidence on teachers' perceptions of the transition from Reception to Year 1 was limited. However, there are issues in the research evidence that may help to develop an understanding of teachers' perceptions of transition issues more generally.

### **2.7.1 Teachers' transition practices in relation to Key Stage 1**

The UK research evidence stresses the importance of good communication between practitioners during transition (see Galton *et al.*, 1999). In relation to this, the recent study by Ofsted (2004) indicated that the teachers in the 46 schools visited held regular meetings between staff in Reception and Year 1.

However the report draws attention to some of the barriers to effective communication, including the employment of part-time teachers and assistants, high staff turnover, and the infrequency of meetings.

A specific issue addressed in the Ofsted report (2004) was the transfer and use of assessment data. The study found that teachers demonstrated a growing awareness of the importance of assessment data in the transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. The report's authors identified this exchange of information as the most positive aspect of the transition. Most of the 46 schools involved in the study transferred the following assessment records from Reception to Year 1: Foundation Stage Profile; samples of children's work; records of reading and mathematics; copies of the reports sent home to parents; and additional notes on some or all pupils. The research suggests that the exchange of information was important in supporting curricular continuity and progression in children's learning.

### **2.7.2 Research evidence from other countries' perspectives on transition**

Several researchers have pointed out that a lack of communication between teachers may hamper the school's ability recognise and address children's individual learning needs (see Brostrom, 2000; Firlik, 2003; Timperley *et al.*, 2003; Riley, 1995).

However, research studies indicate that effective communication does not always take place. For example, Griebel and Niesel (2003) sent questionnaires to 133 kindergarten teachers in Germany. Although teachers felt that communication between staff was crucial in order to ease transition, some of the class teachers were critical of the skills that children had acquired in kindergarten. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted in New Zealand (Timperley *et al.*, 2003). This study involved interviews with teachers in 20 schools and 27 early childhood centres. The majority of teachers in both settings felt that the transition process should involve collaboration between teachers, but few were satisfied with each other's roles in the transition process.

### **2.7.3 Teachers' views of the skills children need at school**

As mentioned in Section 2.6.2 a group of researchers in Australia have produced a number of publications focusing on children starting school (Dockett *et al.*, 1999; Perry and Dockett, 2003b). Their research has found that teachers would like children to have certain skills on entry to school. These skills include the ability to operate as part of a group, be able to follow directions and demonstrate independence in relation to personal care (dressing

themselves and eating lunch without adult help). Similar findings were reported in studies conducted in other countries (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Makin, 2000).

### **2.7.4 Summary of the main findings from research into teachers' experiences and views of transition**

The research on teachers' experiences of the transition process shows:

- The need to communicate with other practitioners involved in transition is well recognised, but is not always easy to achieve in practice (Brostrom, 2000; Firlik, 2003; Griebel and Niesel, 2003; Riley, 1995; Timperley *et al.*, 2003). However, evidence from one study of transition to Year 1 in England suggests that Reception teachers were passing on information to their colleagues in Year 1 (Ofsted, 2004).
- Research on children starting school in other countries has suggested that teachers identify common skills as desirable on entry to school. These include an ability to function as part of a group, follow directions and independence in dressing and eating (Dockett *et al.*, 1999; Perry and Dockett, 2003b; Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Makin, 2000)

## **2.8 Schools' transition practices**

This section presents information about the practices adopted by schools to support children during transition. Again, the searches found very little research on transition practices that had been conducted in the UK. The majority of the reviewed research comes from the USA and Australia. The evidence-base provides information on the types of approaches used to ease young children's transition, but there is very little information about the effectiveness of different strategies.

### **2.8.1 Evidence on practices used to ease transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1**

The research conducted by Ofsted (2004) focused on transition from Reception to Key Stage 1. It found that schools adopted a variety of transition arrangements. In addition to the common practice of teachers passing on children's records, the report highlights the practice adopted in some schools whereby both sets of teachers are involved in assigning children to groups within Year 1 classes, taking into account children's learning, personal and social development.

Other transition strategies adopted in these schools included:

- Joint ‘social’ activities for children in Reception and Year 1 (assemblies, school performances and activity days)
- Reception children gaining experience of the Year 1 curriculum (e.g. by joining Year 1 for activities on phonics or numeracy)
- Reception teachers introducing elements of the Year 1 curriculum in the summer term (especially the literacy hour)
- Year 1 teachers adapting the curriculum to include some Reception activities at the beginning of the year
- Year 1 staff ensuring that the classroom environment contains ‘Reception’ features
- Teachers ‘moving up’ with their classes, so that children have the same teacher in Reception and Year 1.

The report states that parents who appreciated the strategies adopted by schools to communicate with them about transition. These strategies included:

- Special events (e.g. workshops on literacy and numeracy)
- parents’ meetings where routines and expectations of Year 1 could be discussed
- information on the topics that would be covered in Year 1 and guidance on how to help their children
- reading diaries, which encouraged parents and school staff to comment on children’s progress.

Another second piece of research investigated the transition practices used by teachers to smooth the transition from Reception to Year 1 (IFF Research Ltd, 2004). The study comprised telephone interviews with 531 teaching professionals (response rate 60%). The sample included headteachers, Key Stage 1 teachers, heads of early years settings and early years practitioners. They were asked about their views on the effectiveness of transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. Fifty-one per cent of the respondents felt that transition was very effective. Suggestions about the most effective transition practices included children visiting their new classroom (21 per cent) and practitioners sharing information (17 per cent).

When asked to identify ‘least effective’ practices, 35 per cent said that there were no least effective practices, and 11 per cent identified giving information to parents as the least effective practice. (This may be an interesting finding, but it is difficult to interpret its meaning because it is not clear whether respondents felt this practice to be ineffective and whether they had actually attempted to provide information to parents). It is also important to recognise one of the limitations of the findings of this study: over 20 per cent of the respondents worked in early years settings and therefore would not have been

directly involved in the transition of children from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.

### **2.8.2 Evidence from the UK on practices used to ease other educational transitions**

This section considers evidence from one study on transition practices that schools use to help children make the transition from primary to secondary school in England. Although the findings are not directly relevant to the transition from Reception to Year 1, they do add to the body of evidence about the use of specific practices to help to ease the transition for those involved.

Galton *et al.* (2003) in their survey of nine Local Education Authorities found that schools adopted a variety of practices to help children make the transition from primary to secondary school. These included: bridging units, summer programmes and extended induction programmes. Bridging units were designed to support curriculum continuity. They started in the last few weeks of the primary school and continued for several weeks in the secondary school. The authors explored the relationship between the transition practices and children's attitude gains. They found that children who attended schools using these strategies made considerably higher positive attitude gains after the transition than children who had not been involved in transition practices.

### **2.8.3 Research from other countries on schools' transition practices**

The research evidence from other countries focuses on the transition to primary school. It includes surveys of common transition practices, suggestions for best practice models, and an evaluation of transition practices in one school.

In her survey of 106 pre-school and 62 first grade teachers in Iceland, Einarsdottir (2003a) found that the transition practices in most common use were a visit by the pre-school children to the primary school and an invitation from the primary school for the pre-school children to participate in specific events.

Two studies identified changes in teachers' practice designed to help young children make the transition to school. Corsaro and Molinari's (2000) study of Italian children found that teachers tended to be more lenient about enforcement of the rules in the first few weeks of the school year. For example, they allowed children to talk and move around the room. As time went on, teachers gradually introduced more rules and began to enforce them more strictly. Similarly, Chun (2003) found that teachers in Hong Kong reduced the workload placed on children during the first few weeks of term

Research on transition practice in the USA has been influenced by the Ready Schools Movement (see Figure 1).

### ***The Ready School Movement in the USA***

In 1995, the National Education Goals Panel set a goal that by the Year 2000 all children would 'start school ready to learn'. According to Early *et al.* (2001), the ready school movement was established in order to move the responsibility for 'school readiness' from children and their parents to consider the school's responsibility for offering a suitable experience for the incoming children. The main feature of a ready school is that it adopts strategies designed to help children and their parents make a smooth transition to kindergarten.

Pianta *et al.* (1999a) conducted a large scale questionnaire survey of US kindergarten teachers' transition practices. A total of 3,595 teachers returned the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 38 per cent. The study revealed that most teachers carried out transition practices, such as holding an 'open house', talking with parents and sending information home. However, the report's authors point out that these practices rarely had 'ready school' characteristics, and tended to reflect a low-intensity, non-individualised and impersonal approach. They suggest that this form of activity is likely to convey little more information than what the child should bring with them on the first day of school.

The argument for a more in-depth approach to transition practices is put forward by Early *et al.* (2001) who suggest that practitioners should begin transition activities early, so that all parties are involved in a process rather than viewing transition as a one-off event.

The US literature contains several pieces of advice offered to those designing kindergarten transition programmes, drawing on case study examples (Gelfer and McCarthy, 1994; Jang, 1995; Margetts, 2002). Their recommendations for early years practitioners are similar:

- Develop written transition plans
- Take account of the challenges facing children's families
- Involve staff involved in both the sending and receiving settings
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the practices.

We found very little evidence of evaluation of transition practices in the recent literature. One exception is the study by Howard *et al.* (1999) which offers an account of an evaluation of a transition programme in one school in Australia. The findings indicated that while there were elements of the transition

programme that were successful, there were also elements that might need to be changed, including improving accessibility for working parents.

#### **2.8.4 Summary of findings on schools' transition practices**

The following points can be extracted from the recent literature on schools' transition practices:

- Two studies of the transition to Key Stage 1 have suggested that schools adopt a variety of practices to help children make the transition and to inform their parents. These include communication between teachers, joint activities for children in Reception and Year 1, information for parents and some adaptation of the curriculum (IFF Research Ltd, 2004; Ofsted, 2004).
- Several US writers have suggested that elementary schools need to plan a programme of transition activities for children starting school, which includes collaboration with all the communities involved (Early *et al.*, 2001; Gelfer and McCarthy, 1994; Jang, 1995; Margetts, 2002; Pianta *et al.*, 1999a)
- It has been suggested that the transition practices adopted most commonly by US kindergarten teachers may not be the most effective (Pianta *et al.*, 1999a).
- There is little evidence to indicate which transition practices are more or less effective.

### **2.9 Main findings from the literature review**

This section draws together the findings of the review and highlights the issues that merit further investigation.

One of the messages from this research is that certain characteristics of the Foundation Stage are well supported by the evidence, particularly the emphasis on child-initiated activities and shared dialogue between children and adults (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002; Moyles *et al.*, 2002).

Research and theory relating to transition draw attention to the fact that children face a number of discontinuities in their lives and that they need to learn to cope with change. Schools can help children to adapt to transition, but they need to view this as a process, rather than a one-off event and involve all parties (educational practitioners, parents and the children themselves) (Fthenakis, 1998; Pianta *et al.*, 1999b).

In other countries, children make the transition from pre-school to school at around the age of six. The transition to school therefore entails the move to a new institution as well as the start of more formal learning. The introduction of the Foundation Stage means that English children make the transition to

school at the age of four and make the transition to a 'more formal' (academic) curriculum a year later.

Although the Foundation Stage has been welcomed, there is some evidence to suggest that teachers have experienced difficulties in making links between the Foundation Stage curriculum and the National Curriculum for children in Year 1. There are also some indications of tensions between the wish to continue Foundation Stage practice and the need to prepare children for National Curriculum Assessments at the end of Key Stage 1 (Quick *et al.*, 2002; Ofsted, 2003; Adams *et al.*, 2004).

There was very little research evidence that illuminated children's concerns about the transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1, but there was a body of research on children's transition from home or pre-school to school. This research is helpful, because it highlights some common issues, but care should be taken when applying the messages of such research, since the transition between Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 usually takes place within a school and therefore does not involve children in adapting to a completely new environment.

The transition research suggests that although the majority of young children feel positive about the process, some have specific concerns about moving into a new setting, including making friends, understanding rules/school routines and the balance between work and play (Dockett and Perry, 2003; Einarsdottir 2003b).

There is very little evidence available about parents' views of the transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. The evidence suggests that parents are aware of a change in the approach to teaching in Year 1 and that some parents have concerns that these 'more formal' approaches may not be appropriate for their children (Ofsted, 2003, 2004).

The evidence from research on children starting school suggests that parents want to be informed about the transition process so that they can support their children and help them adjust to the change (Dockett *et al.*, 1999; Dockett and Perry, 2002; Perry and Dockett, 2003a and b).

There are several indications in the research literature that children with particular characteristics may face greater difficulties during educational transitions. This includes children with special educational needs and those speaking English as an additional language. In relation to the transition to Year 1, there are some specific concerns for children who have not attained the Early Learning Goals and those who have spent less time in the Reception class (Quick *et al.*, 2002; Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002; Graham and Hill, 2003).

The research findings suggest that the majority of teachers are aware of the need to use transition practices in order smooth periods of educational transition for children. However, there is some debate as to whether or not teachers use the most effective transition practices. In particular, it is questioned whether teachers in the ‘receiving’ provision communicate adequately with those in the ‘sending’ provision and whether parents have sufficient information and support to help prepare their child (Fabian, 1998).

This literature review has considered recent research evidence on the ways in which children, parents and teachers are concerned about transition, in addition to the importance of continuity in curriculum, pedagogy and effective transition practices. The quality of the research varied: one or two studies had serious weaknesses, and several lacked clear information about samples, data collection and analysis. Much of the reviewed research was conducted on a small scale utilising qualitative methodologies. Although these methodologies allow for rich data to be collected, they preclude the possibility of making generalisations to a wider population.

The review has identified a need for more information on specific areas of transition research. Perhaps the most striking gap in the evidence base was the lack of studies undertaken in the UK investigating transition in general and, more specifically, the transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.

### **2.9.1 Priorities for further research**

Given that the Foundation Stage Curriculum has recently become a statutory requirement, there would appear to be a need for research into the transition process from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.

The priorities for further research identified by this review are highlighted below:

- Studies seeking teachers’ views on the continuity between the curriculum in the Foundation Stage and that adopted in Year 1.
- Studies aimed at identifying the transition practices adopted by teachers in Reception and Year 1, including changes to curriculum and pedagogy.
- Studies which assess the effectiveness of specific transition practices that have been used by educators in an attempt to smooth the transition to Key Stage 1.
- Research aimed at identifying the effect that transition has on different groups of children (for example, children for whom English is an additional language, children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and children who have not yet achieved the Early Learning Goals).
- Research considering children’s expectations and experiences of the transition to Key Stage 1.

- Research considering parents' expectations and experiences of the transition to Key Stage 1.

Although it is not possible for a single study comprehensively to address all of these points, the above list informed the issues addressed in the case study work, which is described in the following chapter.



## 3 Children's views of transition to Key Stage 1

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings from the interviews with children in 12 case-study schools concerning the transition from Reception to Year 1.

#### 3.1.1 The sample of children

In recognition of the lack of research focusing on children's experiences of transition, this study sought to highlight children's perspectives of moving to Year 1. We asked the Reception class teachers in the 12 case-study schools to choose six children for interview. We requested a range of children to represent different achievement levels, 'seasons' of birth (autumn, spring and summer) and both genders. The resulting samples were influenced by the composition of the class. For example, in schools where the cohort was predominantly female, the sample contained a higher proportion of girls. In a few cases, the staff selected a child with identified special needs or whose needs were being monitored. The sample included children from a range of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, reflecting the schools' local context and intake.

The visits took place during the summer term of the Reception year and again nearly half way through the autumn term of Year 1.

**Table 1** shows the distribution of boys and girls across the 12 sample schools and between the two visits. Seventy children were interviewed during the first visits. The majority (66) of these children were interviewed again during the second visits to the case study schools.

**Table 1 Sample of children interviewed about transition to Key Stage 1**

School	Visit 1 (summer 2004)		Visit 2 (autumn 2004)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
A	4	2	4	2
B	3	3	2	3
C	3	3	2	3
D	1	5	1	4
E	3	3	3	3
F	3	3	3	3
G	3	2	4*	2
H	3	3	3	3
I	3	2	3	2
J	2	4	2	4
K	4	2	2	2
L	1	5	1	5
Total	33	37	30	36
Total per visit	70		66	

*\* In School G, one boy was interviewed during the second visit only, hence the increase in the number of boys interviewed during the second visit*

### 3.1.2 Interviewing children for the study

The research team used two main methods for gathering the children's views: semi-structured interviews and children's drawings. Interview schedules were devised using simple questions to elicit children's views and experiences of school. The content of the schedule was influenced by the literature review. For example, we asked children what they enjoyed doing at school, whether there was anything they did not enjoy and what were their expectations and experiences of moving from Reception to Year 1. The research team were briefed on the issues raised in the literature review and received training on appropriate techniques for interviewing young children.

We decided to use drawing as a research tool in addition to the interviews, because we knew that this was a technique that helps young children to relax, offers a starting point for the interviews and provides a richer data set (see

Schneekloth, 1989; Strommen; 1995; Alerby, 2003; Sharp and Davis, 1997a and b).

Interviews took place in a 'private' area (for example, a separate room or quiet area of the classroom). The children were interviewed in pairs (based on friendship groups) to help counteract any reticence they may have felt in speaking to a stranger. This also had the benefit of encouraging dialogue between peers. Children were asked to draw a picture of themselves in their current class. The researcher asked the children: 'I'd like to find out what it's like at this school. Could you draw me a picture of you at school?' The researcher provided paper and coloured pens. When the children had completed their drawing, the researcher asked them to explain what the drawing represented and the researcher made a note of their descriptions. The researcher requested the children's permission to take a copy of the picture. The procedure was repeated during the researchers' second visits to the schools.

This chapter will present the views of the children both before and after the transition to Year 1. In order to demonstrate the distribution of children's comments across the sample populations, the 12 schools are identified by letter, as School A, B C and so forth.

### 3.2 Children's notions of work and play

The major characteristic of children's descriptions of their experiences in Reception, what they imagined life to be like as a Year 1 pupil and how they actually experienced the first term in Year 1 was their use of two words: 'work' and 'play'. When describing their experiences in Reception, children in the sample rarely used the term 'work', but consistently used the word 'play'. However, when they talked about their anticipation of life as a Year 1 pupil, the phrases '*work*' and '*hard work*' began to appear in their comments. By the time these children were interviewed in Year 1, the terms '*hard work*', '*more work*' or '*loads of work*' featured as their primary descriptors of classroom life. The following sections describe these experiences and highlight the context for children's use of the terms work and play.

### 3.3 Children's experiences of Reception

When questioned about their experiences in Reception, children in our sample responded with detailed descriptions of their activities. 'Play' and 'playing' were the most commonly-used phrases. Other activities, such as writing or reading were mentioned, but were not labelled as either 'play' or 'work'. This is illustrated in the following extract from an interview with a girl in Reception class (School A):

**Researcher:** what sort of thing do you do at school?

**Girl:** Read books, colouring, play on the computer, cut and stick, play with dominoes, play in the airport [role play area], play snap, drawing pictures.

In answer to the same question, a boy and girl at school G said:

**Boy:** 'Play on the computer, write stuff, quad bikes [outside], playing battleships'

**Girl:** 'I play in the sand, play with play dough, we get to go outside at playtime, I play in water'.



Boy in Reception Class at School I 'Playing Spiderman at school.'

Similarly, when the researchers asked children what they liked doing *best* in Reception, play was the predominant word, as these comments from two boys in Reception class (School A) show:

**Researcher:** What do you like doing best?

**Boy 1:** 'Playing in the sand and playing with Duplo [construction toy].'

**Boy 2:** 'Playing in the sand and writing'.

Several pupils, particularly boys, highlighted construction activities as one of the things they liked doing best in Reception. For example, a boy in School F said he enjoyed playing with the building blocks, making models and building castles. The comment of another boy in School E provided an insight into the influence of construction on his emotional state: 'I like playing with the Lego. Because when I am really sad I make stuff and it makes me feel happy.'

However, play activities were not the only theme evident in children's descriptions of Reception class life, as this account provided by a girl in School H demonstrates:

**Researcher:** What sort of thing do you do at school?

**Girl:** 'I go outside and play in the nursery. I draw pictures... I take them home and give them to my mum. I like to make cards in the office [role play area]. I love reading... I go to my house and say "mum can I read my reading book?"'

Interestingly, when asked whether there was anything she did not like about school, the same girl said: 'I hate it when we do work. Every time we do work all we have to do is write and my hand gets tired'.

Clearly, for this girl, the term 'work' equated with the writing element of her curriculum experiences in Reception. Writing was mentioned by several other children in answer to the question 'Is there anything that you don't like about school?', as illustrated by these comments from a boy and girl in Reception class at School C:

**Researcher:** Is there anything you don't like about school?

**Boy:** 'oh yeah, doing work like writing and numbers because it takes too long.'

**Girl:** 'I don't like writing

**Researcher:** 'Why don't you like writing?'

**Girl:** 'Because it is bored'.

Notably it was writing, not reading, that was the activity most focused upon in response to this question, suggesting that not all aspects of literacy were disliked by the children we interviewed. Number work was also unpopular with several of our interviewees, as demonstrated by this extract from a girl and boy at School K:

**Girl:** 'I don't like number work, because you have to write things'

**Boy:** 'Because it is too hard. My friend knows the times tables up to 150'.

Moving on to the contexts in which play-focused activities were experienced, several responses suggested that children in the Reception class enjoyed engaging with activities which involved cooperating with other children, as illustrated by the following interview extract from School C:

**Researcher:** 'What do you like doing best?'

**Girl 1:** 'Building monsters, *build with other people* 'cos we get to use loads of bricks'

**Girl 2:** 'Playing with [the] tea set *because you can share with other people*. All my friends smell my teddy bear because he smells like roses.'

Similarly, a girl in School E responded to the same question by saying: 'I paint with other people'. These comments suggest that doing activities with their classmates was a particularly enjoyable feature of these children's classroom life. Interestingly, there were no such comments in the second round of interviews, conducted when the same children were in Year 1. (Further study

with larger samples would be needed to explore the implications of this in more detail.)

In addition to identifying work as an activity they disliked, several children said they did not enjoy ‘sitting on the carpet’ in Reception class. For example a girl in School A said: ‘I don’t like sitting for a long time because it’s boring’.

The next section will consider children’s expectations of Year 1.

### 3.4. Imagining life in Year 1

During the first visit, when they were still in Reception class, we asked the children: ‘What do you think it will be like in Year 1? (The researchers checked that the children understood the term ‘Year 1’, for example, by naming the teacher that they would have in the next year.) Children’s responses to this question were often characterised by phrases such as ‘*work*’ and ‘*hard work*’. Work seemed to be a particular issue for children when contemplating the transition to Year 1. They were not only concerned about work in the classroom, but also homework, as demonstrated by this response from a boy in School K: ‘I am worried about homework because I don’t know what you have to do in Year 1.’

Children raised some concerns about the availability of familiar toys and activities in the Year 1 classroom, as indicated in the following dialogue from an interview with a boy and girl in Reception class at School C:

**Researcher:** What do you think it will be like in Year 1?

**Boy:** ‘No toys.’

**Girl:** ‘No toys.’

**Boy:** ‘No building.’ [construction activities]

**Girl:** ‘It is just going to be work, work, work.’

**Boy:** ‘Carpet, carpet, carpet.’

**Girl:** ‘You have to do work all the time – writing.’

This boy was not alone in expressing concern about the potential loss of construction activities in Year 1, nor about raising concerns about the amount of time that would be spent sitting on the carpet. For example, a boy in Reception class at School D envisaged that Year 1 would be dominated by: ‘carpet work, carpet work, carpet work’. In contrast to these feelings of apprehension, children in another school were looking forward to Year 1 because they would then be able to participate in a period of choice involving a selection of creative activities such as drama. Indeed, when children from this school were interviewed on the second visit, there was a notable absence of the phrase ‘*hard work*’ (see also Chapter 8).

Children from another school which had continued the pedagogical approach from the Foundation Stage into Year 1, also anticipated that there would be 'new things to do' in their new class, such as model-making, 'seeing the butterflies through the little house and drawing', and 'doing new jobs'. Interestingly, when these children spoke of homework or sums they didn't preface their comments with the word 'hard'. Further discussion of these play-based approaches can be found in Chapter 6 of this report.

This section and the previous one have looked at children's use of the words 'play' and 'work' in regard to their experiences in Reception and anticipation of classroom life in Year 1. The following section will consider their experiences in Year 1.

### 3.5 Being in Year 1

When we revisited the schools in the autumn of 2004, we asked children what sorts of things they did at school and what was different from Reception class. The responses mirrored the themes identified in relation to their expectations of Year 1. In particular, their descriptions of life in Year 1 were dominated by phrases such as '*hard work*', '*more work*' or '*loads of work*'.

Here is a typical extract from an interview with a girl and boy in School J:

**Researcher:** 'What sort of things do you do in Year 1?'

**Girl:** 'We do hard work. We have to count lots and we are trying to do some numbers and we have calendars'

**Boy:** 'We do work...'

**Girl:** 'Hard work'

**Researcher:** 'Why is it **hard** work?'

**Girl:** 'Because we count numbers and we are doing lots of hard work this week, we are'.



Girl in Year 1, School L 'Sitting at my desk doing my work'

Some children noted particular features of the classroom environment that were different in Reception and Year 1, as illustrated in the following dialogue between a girl and boy from School C:

**Researcher:** What's different about this year compared to last year?

**Girl:** 'We haven't got a pretend shop'

**Boy:** 'or a house.'

**Girl:** 'We have activities.'

**Boy:** 'We have got Lego.'

**Girl:** 'It has been work, work, work'.

Similarly, a girl from School I reminisced about dressing up in Reception class: 'It [Year 1] is different; it has different things to the other classroom. In Reception we used to dress up and we could play on the carpet with the dressing-up stuff. We can play in Year 1, but not lots of times any more, some times'.

Children in one school focused on their access to construction activities, as shown in the following example.

There were occasions on which children's preferences clashed with the priorities of their teachers. In School H, children had been used to having free choice of activity in Reception and the boys we spoke to said they particularly enjoyed construction activities. In Year 1, the teachers were concerned that boys tended to dominate construction activities, so they stipulated that boys and girls should take turns at the construction activities, with each group having construction every other week. Two of the boys we interviewed referred to this:

**Researcher:** 'What do you like doing best in Year 1?'

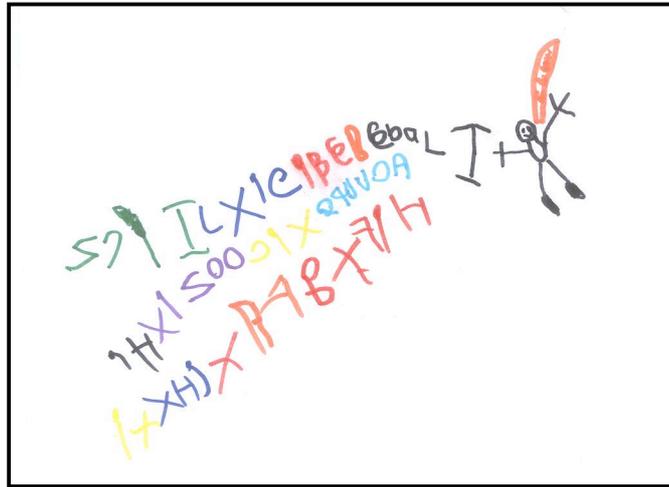
**Boy 1:** 'If the teachers say you can take a box out, and if it is boys' week then you can do construction. But you have to do your work first'.

**Boy 2:** 'I like doing construction when the teacher lets you.'

Interestingly, their Year 1 teacher commented that younger boys in particular had found the transition from Reception 'really difficult' and that they were 'constantly wanting to play'.

However, Year 1 also brought new challenges and experiences which children clearly enjoyed. Some children relished the challenge posed by 'hard work' and expressed an enjoyment of it, as this boy from School A said: 'I like doing hard work, I like doing lots of hard work'. He went on to say, 'I like numeracy and I like adding up and taking away. I can count up to 102'. A boy and girl in School F both stated that their favourite activity was word searches. Notably, the girl added that she liked word searches because she was 'good at them'.

The evidence from the boy at School A and the girl at School F indicates that command of a task was an important feature of children's enjoyment of 'work' in Year 1. In addition, getting a reward for your work was mentioned by a girl in School J: 'I like writing best because I like sounding out the letters and getting smiley faces if you are good at it'.



Boy in Year 1, School E 'Doing letters at school.'

For two of the children interviewed at School F, their curriculum experiences created a new set of classroom conversations as well as 'more work':

**Researcher:** 'I'm sure the children who are in Reception class now would like to know what it is like in Year 1. What would you tell them?'

**Boy:** 'You get to play with the Victorians and we talk about islands and cats.'

**Girl:** 'We talk about Victorians and cats... it is nearly the same as red class [Reception], but its got more work to do.'

**Boy:** 'And more exciting things'.

These excerpts draw attention to an apparent paradox inherent in divergent notions of work and play exhibited by children across the sample of 12 schools. Two points are evident here. First, that children labelled similar activities in different ways (for example, although most children referred to reading, writing and number activities as 'work', some did not describe these activities as 'work'). Second, children had different allegiances to the activities they identified as work and play. Although most identified 'hard work' as something they disliked doing in Year 1, others identified reading, writing and number work as a challenge they enjoyed. This may be a fruitful area for further research to document how the transition from Reception to Year 1 impacts on children's perceptions and enjoyment of activities they identify as work and play.

In addition to speaking about work and play, many of our interviewees talked about the geographies of their classrooms. The next sections will examine children's perceptions of the change in classroom environments between Reception and Year 1, focusing on the carpet and role-play areas, as these were topics which children spoke of a great deal in our interviews. Further discussion on teachers' perspectives of the Year 1 learning environment can be found in Chapter 6 of this report.

### 3.6 Children's views of 'carpet time'

When asked whether there was anything they did not like about school, a common issue in children's responses was a concern with sitting on the carpet. This was an activity in which they were required to sit still and listen to their teacher (especially during the whole class activities within the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson). Here is an extract from an interview with two children at School E:

**Researcher:** 'is there anything you don't like about being in Year 1?'

**First Boy:** 'Being on the carpet for a long time.'

**Second Boy:** 'Neither do I because it's very boring.'

**First Boy:** 'And it wastes our time playing.'

**Second boy:** 'It wastes your life.'

A similar dialogue about carpet time took place between a boy and girl in Year 1 at School H.

**Boy:** 'I don't like sitting on the carpet all the time.'

**Girl:** 'Yeah we just sit, sit, sit.'

**Boy:** 'Yes and it's boring.'

**Girl:** 'Yeah and we could be playing outside and getting some exercise.'

Another boy and girl at the same school (H) commented that they didn't like 'sitting on the carpet' in Year 1. Although they had experienced carpet work in Reception they noted that 'now we *always* have to sit on the carpet and in [Reception] it was comfortable'. In one school the use of the carpet had diminished, although sitting was still required, as a girl in Year 1 explained: 'We sit at the tables now and not on the carpet very much'.

A recent study (Hancock and Mansfield, 2002) on children's views of the literacy hour also gathered evidence of the use of the carpet by primary teachers. From their study, Hancock and Mansfield came to the conclusion that:

*It seems that the classroom carpet may have undergone a significant change of function. Hitherto it was a place where children could relax and 'choose' maybe after they had finished their work. Now with the*

*arrival of the Literacy Hour, as a 7-year-old-girl said, "we do hard learning on the carpet".*

(Hancock and Mansfield, 2002, p. 194).

Interestingly, however, children's most negative comments regarding sitting on the carpet did not always emerge from schools whose teachers were using more formal pedagogies in Year 1. This is possibly because all Year 1 classes were implementing the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson, which involved seated, whole-class work.

### **3.6.1 The roles of 'Carpet Buddies'**

Two schools reported that it was common practice to use 'carpet-buddies' as a tool for grouping children on the carpet in Year 1. Some teachers instructed children not to sit next to their friends, as one child, from School K commented, 'so you don't talk to your friends too much you shouldn't sit next to your friends [on the carpet]'. Additionally, one school used cuddly toys with children who found sitting still challenging and another school gave 'active' (restless) children 'handling objects' to focus on while doing carpet work. All these strategies were used to keep children still and focused on listening to the teacher.

## **3.7 Role play in Year 1**

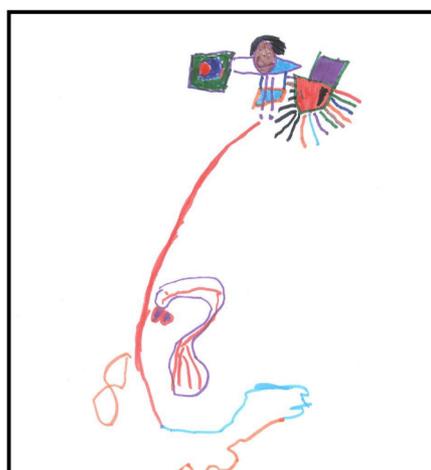
A feature of Reception classrooms which was commonly highlighted by the children was the role play area. Children often identified these areas as favourite places to be, and said they enjoyed 'dressing-up'. Parents also had noted their children's love of dressing up and role-play, as this comment from a parent of a girl in Reception class at School L illustrates: 'I'm hoping it's not going to be a shock because she absolutely loves dressing up and role-play and I'm not sure how much they do of that in the next stage'. Indeed, her daughter stated that 'playing in the Doctor's surgery' was one of the things she liked best in Year 1. Several of the schools we visited had role-play areas in Year 1 so that this element of the Foundation Stage curriculum could be continued. The Year 1 teacher at this school highlighted LEA provided training on role-play as an important element of developing Reception/Year 1 transition practices at her school. Three out of the six children interviewed at School L chose 'Playing in the doctor's surgery', as one of the things they liked best in Year 1. Puppets were used in the Year 1 classroom in School D as part of their transition practice, and for one boy in School I it was the thing he liked doing best in Year 1: 'Playing with the puppets because you can make up stories out of them and then show the stories and make a show'.



Girl in Year 1, School E 'Playing princesses and me stood by a computer – we do that once a week.'

### 3.8 Child-initiated activities in the Year 1 classroom

Few of the children we spoke to as Year 1 pupils spoke of having opportunities to choose their activities. The exception to this was children in Year 1 at School K where, as one boy observed, 'we do choosing like we did in Reception'.



Boy in Year 1, School K 'Sitting on the chair playing with the cubes when we are able, choosing inside'.

In seven schools, child-initiated or free-choice time was very limited. For several of these schools there was a period called 'golden time' when children could choose their activities, usually on a Friday afternoon. Several of the children we spoke to as Year 1 pupils identified opportunities for free choice as a favourite part of their school life, as this excerpt from an interview with a boy and girl in School G demonstrates:

**Researcher:** 'What do you like doing best in Year 1?'

**Both:** 'golden-time.'

**Boy:** 'Because I like dressing up.'

**Girl:** 'I like doing the art things.'

Two other pupils in School G highlighted the limited period devoted to golden time:

**Researcher:** 'What do you like doing best in Year 1?'

**Girl:** 'Some people would say they like golden time best.'

**Researcher:** 'Is that what *you* like best?'

**Boy:** 'Not always, 'cos we don't have it for very long. Sometimes you get it extra when we miss assemblies.'

Golden time was also described as being 'really good' by two other children interviewed at School G.

It is important to note here, that when asked about rules in Year 1, several children were worried about losing golden time as a punishment, as one girl from School B said: 'You get your name on the board if you break the rules. You also lose your golden time and if you lose all your golden time you don't have any left.' Similarly, for two Year 1 boys at School G, breaking the rules meant 'you get a minute of golden time off and that's so dead'.

Some children in our study said they enjoyed choosing activities because they provided opportunities to access open-air environments. This leads us on to children's views of the outdoor environment at their schools.

### 3.9 Outdoor activities

Access to outdoor space was rarely mentioned by children (none of the Year 1 classes had free access to the outside environment). However, there were a few exceptions, like the girl from school L who, when asked what she liked doing best in Reception, commented: 'I like playing in the house outside. I like getting muddy hands'. A girl at the same school, when in Reception, stated that she liked: 'sitting on benches, laying down on them and looking up at the sky [at ]the sunshine'. One boy in response to the question 'What do you like doing best in Year 1?' replied 'Playing outside and inside'. A girl in School H also mentioned being able to play outside. Children's comments on access to the outdoor environment, as Year 1 pupils, tended to focus on the following themes:

- Play time outdoors
- Free choice time allowing access outdoors
- Not being allowed outside.

For a few children in our sample, restricted access to the outdoor environment was a notable difference between being in Reception and Year 1. In some schools, such as School L, Year 1 teachers were aware of the positive impacts of using the outdoor environment. This was a rural school with excellent facilities including a garden, recreational equipment and access to a substantial amount of open space. Teachers integrated the outdoor environment into their teaching in various ways during the school day.

### **3.10 Other Issues**

For many children involved in this research study the positive element of moving to Year 1 was about ‘getting bigger’ or ‘growing up’. However for the majority of them this was counterbalanced with the idea of ‘doing hard work’. Although friendship networks were highlighted in the literature review, and in the parent interviews, as a key element for children in transition *to* school, the majority of children interviewed for this study did not highlight it as a major concern in moving from Reception to Year 1, probably because most of them knew that they would be moving with their friends. School/class rules also featured prominently in the literature review, (see for example Dockett and Perry, 2003), as a primary concern for children starting school. But, as in the case of friendship networks, these were not perceived as a key issue by children making this transition, except where additional rules were added in relation to particular features of Year 1 life, as in the punishment of losing ‘golden time’.

### **3.11 Summary**

This chapter has sought to present the transition from Reception to Year 1 from the child’s perspective. The following key messages have emerged from the children’s views.

- Children’s comments focused on notions of work and play in both Reception and Year 1.
- Children who experienced Year 1 classes where staff were providing play-based, practical learning opportunities in Year 1, tended not to use the phrase ‘hard work’ to describe their experiences.
- In the majority of schools in our sample the children noticed the loss of particular activities in Year 1, especially role-play and construction.
- Children had a negative view of the ways in which the carpet area was used in Year 1.
- Some children in our study were sad at the loss of choice in their Year 1 curriculum.

## 4 Parents' issues

This chapter presents the views of parents about their children's transition to Year 1.

### 4.1 Introduction

The literature review conducted for this study revealed a lack of research focusing on parental views of the transition between the Foundation Stage and Year 1. However, one recent study (Ofsted, 2004) indicated that parents have some concerns about their child's move into Year 1. It suggested that, although parents felt that there should be some change in the balance between play-based and formal teaching, some were concerned that these changes were being implemented too early and abruptly. The current study sought to add to the evidence base by focusing on parents' perspectives of the transition to Year 1.

#### 4.1.2 The sample of parents

The research team, with the help of the schools, sent a letter to the parents of the six target children selected in each of the 12 case-study schools inviting them to take part in the research. The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face during the school visits. However, if parents were unable to be interviewed at school, telephone interviews were organised. As with the child interviews, parents were interviewed on two separate occasions (in a few cases, a different parent was interviewed on each occasion). Table 2 contains further details on the number of parents interviewed on each occasion in each school. As the table shows, interviews were conducted with the majority of the parents of the 70 children.

The parent interviews were conducted before and after their child moved from Reception to Year 1. The questions in the first interviews were concerned with parents' experiences of their child's previous educational transitions and their expectations of how their child would cope with the transition to Year 1. The second interviews focused on how parents felt their child was settling into Year 1, and which factors were either helping or hindering their child's adjustment. Both interviews sought to collect information about the relationship between parents and the school, and whether parents felt informed about school practices generally, and transition to Year 1 in particular.

**Table 2: Sample of parents interviewed about transition to Key Stage 1**

School	No. parents interviewed during visit 1	No. parents interviewed during visit 2
School A	2 (1 father)	2 (1 father)
School B	4	3
School C	3	3
School D	3	4
School E	4 (1 father)	3
School F	6	3
School G	5	5
School H	6	6
School I	4	4
School J	6 (1 father)	3
School K	5	5
School L	5 (1 father)	5
Total no. of parents interviewed per visit	53	46

## 4.2 Parent's views prior to the transition to Year 1

The findings from the first set of interviews with parents can be grouped into three main themes:

- Parents' relationship with the school.
- Experiences of previous educational transition.
- Expectations about their child's transition to Year 1.

### 4.2.1 Parents' relationship with the school

The main issue raised by parents in this study was communication with teachers at their child's school. The majority of parents felt that the staff at their child's school were approachable (very few parents in the sample reported that staff were unapproachable).

Most of the parents said they frequently spoke to school staff, particularly during morning dropping-off times or when they picked their children up from school. Parents observed that the opportunity for more formal contact with teachers was focused on parents' evenings during the year.

A minority of parents said that they did not have frequent or effective communication with school staff. These parents expressed concerns that communication was not a two-way process within the school, and that the

school did not provide parents with enough information about what their child was doing at school.

A few parents pointed out that communication with their child's school, especially informal communication, was much more difficult for working parents. This is illustrated in the following example.

A mother described the fact that although she felt she had a good relationship with staff at the school any communication was very much initiated by her. She suggested that if she did not initiate communication with the school then there would be no communication. She felt that this lack of two-way communication could be a result of the fact that she was 'a working mum'.

*It might just be because of my circumstances but because I am working full time, I am lucky that my work is flexible and that I am able to go into school every morning, but it is a very different environment from picking them up in the afternoon, after school. After school it is more relaxed and there is more opportunity for dialogue and there is more opportunity to talk to other mothers because they are all outside waiting for their children and there is information that can flow that way as well.*

This mother also suggested that although she viewed the relationship with the school as a partnership she was not always sure of her role within the partnership.

#### **4.2.2 Parents' experience of their child's previous educational transitions**

We asked parents about their experiences of previous educational transitions (for example, when their child started school). Some parents also referred to their experiences of an older child's transition to Year 1.

Those parents that had been through the transition with another child reported that their previous experience of transition had been positive. Only a small minority of parents reported having had a negative transition experience.

### **Settling into Reception**

The majority of parents felt that their child had settled in well to the Reception class, although a minority of parents mentioned that their child had experienced a few difficulties. One area of concern was their child's ability to socialise with the other children in the Reception class. This issue arose particularly for children who started school in a later intake, who had had to assimilate into an established social group. It also affected children who did not have existing relationships with others in the class (for example, those who were not part of a group of children moving from the same nursery into the Reception class). A few parents reported other difficulties experienced by children entering Reception, including adjusting to new routines and coping with the work.

Parents were asked how long it had taken their child to settle into Reception. Most of the parents said that their child had settled into Reception either straight away or within the first few weeks of term. However, a minority of the parents indicated that it took their child the whole of the first term, if not longer, to adjust to being in Reception. These differences are illustrated by the observations made by a mother of twin boys. Her comments suggest that even children from the same family may settle in differently, due to their own specific needs:

*My son settled in a lot quicker than his brother, he just thought it was a trial run – you know, he was going there for a few days and that was it. But he does have a speech problem so he found it harder to mix with other children. He found it very tiring. They went from September to April, just half days. So, I must admit after Christmas they'd both got into the way of life.*

Parents were asked to describe any factors that they felt had helped their child to settle into the Reception class. The following factors were suggested by a majority of the parents:

- Friendship.
- Good relationships with the teacher.
- Involvement in transition activities.

The next sections will consider each of these factors in more detail.

### **Friendship**

Friendship groups were considered to be very important in helping children to settle into Reception. This supports the evidence cited in the literature review which highlighted the importance of friendship during educational transitions (Graham and Hill, 2003; Stephen and Cope, 2001; Margetts, 2003; Johnstone, 2002).

Parents suggested that having friends in the new class offered a support group to the child, and that it was comforting for their child to have familiar faces in an unfamiliar environment. As one of these parents remarked: 'She had her friends there, so there was a little support network.'

### ***Relationship with the teacher***

Parents considered the relationship with the teacher to be an important factor in their child's adjustment to Year 1. Having a 'nice' teacher gave their child confidence and the ability to tell someone if they had a problem. The ability of a teacher to know and understand their child was considered to be very important, as one parent noted:

*One of the parent-teacher things I went to... she [the Reception class teacher] was doing it, and I said to her 'how much can you comment on [my daughter]?' and she was able to give really good examples that she genuinely knows my daughter and what she's like, what she feels her personality is like. She checks how she is and how she operates in class... it reassures me.*

The following section considers parents' views of transition practices experienced by their children *prior* to moving into Reception class.

### ***Transition practices***

A minority of parents mentioned that their children's involvement in specific transition practices prior to the move into Reception had helped them settle. This group of parents reported a number of different transition practices, including home visits, visits to the Reception class, and meeting Reception teachers before the move.

A few of these parents described transition practices that involved the parents as well as children. For example, one parent indicated that the school's transition practices had not only helped her child settle in but also reassured her, as a parent, about the transition.

### ***Other factors***

There was a range of other factors that a few parents identified as helping their child to settle in to Reception, including: familiarity with the school environment; continuity of learning and a gradual introduction to the school routine.

Moving on from the factors which parents felt helped ease their children into Reception, we will now consider parents' expectations of their children's transition to Year 1.

### **4.2.3 Parents' expectations of the transition to Year 1**

Parents were asked about their expectations of their child's move to Year 1. The interviews provided an opportunity for parents to raise any concerns about the transition and to state whether they felt well informed.

The majority of the parents interviewed reported that they felt happy about their child's transition to Year 1. A few parents were looking forward to their child joining Year 1 because it would provide access to new learning opportunities (such as extra-curricular clubs).

However, some parents had concerns about their child's transition to Year 1. The biggest concern for this group of parents was related to the work required in Year 1 and the loss of activities that their child enjoyed. This included the worry that their child might not be able to play any more, or have the opportunity to choose activities, but would have to sit at a desk and do work. As one parent said: 'I am worried that she won't have the same opportunities to work at her own pace and in a play-based way'. Another parent was concerned at the emotional impact these changes in learning environment might have on her daughter:

*I have this vision of Reception being this very quiet, calm and nurturing environment, and when you go into Year 1 it is much more [organised] around the curriculum and it feels a bit more regimented and a bit more structured. Sometimes that is a difficult transition to make and it is more around the emotional side of that and feeling like she is a bit out of her depth.*

Some parents whose children had started Reception later than others because of their date of birth raised concerns. As one parent said: 'I think that the September [entry] children have a head start because... they have had a whole extra term in school and that means a lot when they are still young.'

For a small minority of parents in the sample whose schools had mixed-aged classes (comprised of Years 1 and 2), there were concerns about how their children would work with the older children in the class.

#### ***Parents' perceptions of their child's feelings about the transition to Year 1***

The majority of parents felt that their child was feeling positive about the move to Year 1 because they were looking forward to being more 'grown-up'. In addition, a few parents suggested that their child was looking forward to taking advantage of extra curricular activities that were available to children in Year 1. As one parent commented: 'She can do the clubs after school, Reception children are excluded from those because they are younger. [She has] no concerns – wants to go to dance.'

However, a minority of parents reported that their children were concerned about moving up to Year 1. Their children's worries included: not being able to play as much in Year 1, not being able to do the work and concerns about their new teacher. One parent said: 'I think she's worried. A couple of times she has woken up in the night and said "What's going to happen when I go up to Year 1? I won't be able to cope".' Another said: 'I think he is slightly apprehensive because he doesn't know what to expect. He is only just starting to realise and I have been saying "You are going into a different class".'

The next section considers parents' suggestions about preparing children for transition to Year 1.

### ***Being prepared for the transition***

The majority of parents felt that their child was prepared and ready for the move to Year 1. On the other hand, a minority felt that their child was not prepared for the transition or indeed that the teachers were not prepared for their child. This group of parents suggested actions that could be taken to help to prepare their child for Year 1, including: spending more time with the Year 1 teacher; talking about the transition in school and establishing continuity with Reception class activities.

A few parents observed that their children had been much better prepared for the transition to school. One parent described her daughter's transition to Reception as follows:

*She did settling in visits before Christmas and the parents get to go in and sit down and have lunch with them. They go through how they are going to focus on topics and how they will structure the teaching. I found that really good... I think there is just as dramatic a change from Reception to Year 1 as there is from outside the school to starting school, yet they didn't do that there.*

#### **4.2.4 Information about the transition to Year 1**

In addition to their views of their child's preparation for transition, parents were asked if they felt informed about their child's impending move to Year 1. For example, had they received written information, spoken to a teacher about transition or met their child's new teacher? The next section discusses parents' responses to these questions.

The majority of parents indicated that they had not received any written information about the transition. However, some of the parents in this group thought that they might receive some information before the end of term. Parents said that they wanted to know who would be their child's teacher and they wanted information about the work that their child would be doing in

Year 1. For example, one parent said she wanted: ‘information about what level they are expected to be at and how fast they are expected to go’. Another wanted to know: ‘How we can prepare them for Year 1’.

A few parents had received written information from the school about the transition to Year 1. This included newsletters explaining when the child would be having a ‘move up day’, changes to their routine, and information about who the teachers were going to be next year. One parent said she felt well informed as a result: ‘We got plenty of written information before the end of term, even down to the milk money changing and when she turns five it will go up. They give you everything to prepare you for September.’

Most parents said that they had not yet spoken to their child’s Reception teacher about the transition. However, as with written information, a number of these parents suggested that they would be speaking to the teacher before the end of the summer term. The minority of parents who had spoken to their child’s Reception teacher had discussed a variety of issues, including how their child had progressed in Reception and whether the child was now ready for Year 1.

Very few of the parents had met their child’s prospective Year 1 teacher. However, some said the teacher was familiar because they had taught another of their children. As one of these parents explained: ‘I already know her because she taught [my daughter] when she was in Year 1.’

A group of parents were concerned because not only had they not met their child’s Year 1 teacher, but they did not yet know who would be teaching their child next term.

### ***Did parents feel informed?***

Parents were asked how well informed they felt about their child moving into Year 1. Their answers revealed a desire for information so that they could prepare their child for Year 1.

Parents said they wanted to know more about the work that would be expected of their child, for example, what would be expected of their child in Year 1, what the learning expectations of teachers would be and what kind of work their child would be doing. Parents also wanted to know about any new routines that would be introduced in Year 1.

A minority of parents considered that they were already well-informed about the transition, some of whom were relying on previous contact with the school. A few knew about Year 1 because of an older child or because they worked in the school. One of these parents commented that, if she had not worked at the school, she would not have felt as well informed.

### 4.3 Parents' views after the transition to Year 1

The key findings from the second set of interviews with parents can be grouped into three main themes:

- Parents' views on how the child had settled into Year 1.
- Communication between the parent and school about the transition.
- The parent's role in transition.

The findings are based on data from 46 parents. Nine parents who took part in the first interviews did not take part in the second interviews. Two parents took part in the second interviews only.

#### 4.3.1 Settling into Year 1

The majority of parents reported that their child was keen to go back to school after the holidays and had settled in well.

A minority of the parents indicated that their child had not been keen to go back to school after the summer holidays. This group of parents gave a variety of reasons for their child's hesitancy, including:

- Not knowing what to expect.
- Enjoying Reception and not wanting to be in another year group.
- Worries about not being able to do the work.

One of the parents in this group described her daughters' anxiety, which focused on hard work: 'She was actually quite worried about it. She thought that it would be really hard and she thought that they did really hard work in year 1' This mirrors comments made by the children in many of our sample schools, when they were asked what they thought life in Year 1 might be like (see Chapter 5).

Parents were asked how their child had settled into the new Year 1 class. Most parents reported that their child had settled in well. As one parent explained: '[I am] pleased – she seems to have gotten into the swing of things. Every night we go through what she's done. She's quite proud of herself.'

Another parent commented:

*[She is] fine. I remember when they had the talk at the beginning of term they said that your child will notice that they have less playtime and more sit down schooling and I have heard some parents say that their child is not sure about it, but [my daughter] has been fine.*

A few parents indicated that although their children had initially been keen to go back to school, they were not happy once they had started in Year 1. One of these parents commented:

*She was actually quite excited about it. I think that the summer holidays are sufficiently long enough for her to have missed everyone and want to go back. I have actually found it more difficult since half term because she has been quite clingy and she misses me and this half term has been a lot more difficult than the start of term.*

A few other parents said that their child had experienced some challenges settling in to the Year 1 class. These challenges were attributed to difficulties with work, missing their Reception teacher and discontinuity caused by staffing issues. Difficulties with work were most common and centred on the workload and/or the level of difficulty. One of these parents described her daughter's reactions as follows:

*She found the feedback that she was getting at the start difficult and she was finding things quite hard... She has found the work very different and she has said to me that the work is as hard as Year 4 - which is her way of telling me how hard it is.*

Another talked about her daughter's experience of Year 1 in the following terms:

*They don't feel as if they are having a good time as much – they worry more about knowing things, spelling etc. It is great when she brings it home but she does worry about getting things wrong. There is much more order now too. It used to be playing while learning and now it is 'this is learning time' – some excel but [my daughter] panics.*

Parents were asked to describe the school topics that their children had talked about since they had started in Year 1. Some said that their child did not talk much about school: for those who did, the most common topics were work and friends. One described her daughter's concerns about losing a friend:

*She is a bit upset that the friend she has had for a while ... is not playing with her because he has found a male friend now, so she is quite upset about that, because she prefers to play with boys.*

Other school-related topics of discussion included: playtime, their new teacher and preferring Reception.

Parents were asked if they had noticed any changes in their child since the transition to Year 1. A majority said that they had noticed changes, most commonly that their child was more tired after school. This is exemplified in the following comment:

*She has been more tired so I have been sending her to bed even earlier, but it doesn't make a difference. I think it is the concentration at school. In the nursery it is just playing games and painting and in Reception they do work but it isn't hard, it is just working them into how school is. Now [in Year 1] it is serious.*

### **Factors that helped children settle into Year 1**

Parents were asked to identify any factors that they felt had helped their child to settle into the Year 1 class. They identified a number of factors, including friendship, preparation with parents, relationships with teachers and specific school strategies. Most parents identified more than one factor.

Parents felt that moving into a class with a group of friends had really helped their child. This reflects findings from the first set of interviews with parents. Another factor (identified by a large minority of parents) was the time they themselves had spent preparing their child for the transition. This preparation took many forms including parents talking about the move and continuing with school activities over the summer holidays (for example, helping their child with reading and writing). One parent who helped prepare her child by continuing school activities, indicated that for her this was best done in an opportunist way. She said, 'There's only certain times with my son when you can do homework like playing spellings in the bath'.

Several parents identified their child's relationship with the Year 1 teacher as an important factor in helping them settle into the new class. Most parents thought that their children were responding well to the new teacher. On the other hand, a poor relationship with the teacher was a cause for concern. When asked how her daughter had settled into Year 1, one mother said: 'Not very well, not very well at all actually, not as well as I expected her to. She doesn't like her teacher.'

A few parents identified specific transition practices undertaken by the school that had helped their child to settle in. These activities included meeting the teacher and an opportunity to visit the new classroom. In one case, a parent said that several strategies had helped her child, including that she had had the same teacher in Reception and Year 1:

*[She has settled in well] as a result of having the same teacher. A lot of the routines are familiar to her and I think having the opportunity to have some time playing [has helped]. I think she has definitely benefited from the fact that they have had a more play-based approach this year.*

Eleven of the 12 case study schools held a 'move-up day'. This was a specific transition activity in which the children spent time in the Year 1 classroom

with their new teacher. Researchers asked parents whether their child had spoken about this activity and how their child felt about it.

The majority of the parents indicated that for their child the 'move-up' day had been a positive experience. One of these parents reported:

*She was really looking forward to it [the move to Year 1]. She said it was much bigger than her other class and how there were different things there and that she could learn new things. They had a new teacher so they were looking forward to it - she was fine.*

In three schools the parents themselves had been invited to attend move-up day with their child. These parents felt that this was a good idea.

A small minority of parents made suggestions about how the move-up day could be improved. One parent explained: 'It is [held] slightly too early and then followed by a long summer holiday. Perhaps they should go into school for one day in the holiday to their new class. Either they forget or it doesn't go well and they spend six weeks worrying.' Another highlighted the need for the transition visits to be as realistic a representation of life in Year 1 as possible. During her daughter's visit, the current Year 1 class remained in the Year 1 classroom. The child was given the impression that the 'old' Year 1 class would still be present when the move took place, leaving her wondering how all the children would fit into the classroom.

### **Comparing Reception and Year 1**

Parents were asked how they felt their child's experience of Year 1 compared with Reception. The difference identified by the majority of parents was the amount of work that their child was doing in Year 1. Some parents commented that there had been a change in the teaching and learning that their child was experiencing, and others referred to the different subject areas. One parent explained:

*Well I have noticed that they do actual lessons now, whereas in Reception it was more like playing, 'learning playing'. But in Y1 it is more like 'sit down everybody'. So she is enjoying the fact that she is learning, she knows that she is learning, that she has got homework.*

Three schools were continuing elements of the Foundation Stage curriculum into Year 1. Parents were divided on the merits of this approach. Some thought it provided good continuity with the children's previous experiences, whereas others were worried that their children may not be making sufficient academic progress. The following comments represent these views. One parent said:

*At the moment it is quite informal in the morning. There are a lot of similarities with Reception: they come in and sign their name for lunch. I haven't really noticed any differences [between Reception and Year 1]. I think it is a really good way to do it, to have it like Reception and then build up.*

Another parent (who was also a teaching assistant) expressed her concerns about this approach:

*I have got my reservations about the whole thing now for some odd reason... I am in Year 1 every day after play so I see them, they are still constantly playing; they don't see much of a difference between Year 1 and Reception... I am in Year 2 as well and I see that work that they are doing and I am concerned. They will probably be fine [but] how are they going to make the massive jump?*

The next section examines parents' comments regarding the communication they had with teachers as well as the information they received both before and after their child's transition to Year 1.

### **4.3.2 Communication and information**

The research team was interested to discover whether parents had talked to teachers about the transition after their child had moved into Year 1. It was also important to find out if parents had received any information after the first interview, either at the end of the summer term or at the beginning of the new school year.

As in the first set of interviews, parents' comments suggest that there was limited communication between teachers and parents. The research team interviewed parents just before the autumn half term. At this stage the majority of parents in the sample reported that they had not spoken to the teacher about their child's move to Year 1. For many of these parents this meant that their child's school had not held a formal parents evening to discuss how their child had settled in. For parents who had met with the Year 1 teacher, discussion focused on their child's progress and any areas of concern that the teacher might have.

The majority of parents said that they considered the Year 1 teachers to be approachable. However, a small minority of parents indicated that they had found it difficult to talk to their child's new teacher and did not feel able to discuss their concerns. The following example describes the feelings of one of these parents:

One mother said her daughter had been having problems since she moved into the Year 1 class. Her daughter was finding it difficult to concentrate and follow the instructions she was given by the teacher. However, because this mother had not had an opportunity to build up a relationship with her child's teacher, she did not feel happy to discuss her concerns.

*I haven't talked to the staff about it, to be honest I don't find [the Year 1 teacher] that approachable and haven't really met her or had a chance to get to know her. It is not like in Reception when we had a chance to get to know the teachers and we had the visits and everything so I felt like I had started to build a relationship with the teachers. It has been really different this time, because I don't even know her.*

This mother said that she would have liked to be more informed about Year 1 and how it would affect her daughter. She reiterated the point that neither she nor her daughter had really had a chance to develop a relationship with the teacher.

*But I would have liked to have met the new teacher and to have had some information about the homework and things like that. I would just want the reassurance that the new teacher knows my child and knows them as an individual, knows what they can do and everything.*

A minority of parents explicitly said they would like to have had more communication with a teacher about their child's move to Year 1. In one case, the school had recently decided to introduce a more play-based approach into Year 1. One mother expressed the view that her child's school could have done more to inform parents about the changes that had been made:

*I think there could have been a bit more communication. I think maybe a note out to parents saying 'This is what we are planning to do this year, this is how it will affect your child, this is what our expectations will be, and this is why we think it is a good idea'. That might have been in order perhaps.*

### **Did parents feel informed?**

Despite the lack of face-to-face communication with teachers, the majority of parents said that they felt reasonably well informed about the transition. However, several expressed the view that additional information would have helped them and their child during the transition, particularly in relation to the curriculum. As one of these parents commented: '[I felt] Well informed about the teachers but not about Year 1. The information about the curriculum was lacking. It didn't need to be specific, but some information would have been useful.'

### 4.3.3 Parents' role in transition

We asked our interviewees how they felt parents could best help their child during the transition process. Parents said that they could help by supporting their child through the transition process, listening to their child's concerns and talking to their child about the differences between Reception and Year 1.

Parents were asked what advice they would give to other parents who were about to experience the same transition. Several of the parents explained that they did not feel qualified to give other parents advice about transition. Those who felt able to do so suggested a number of strategies, these included:

- Spending time talking to staff at the school.
- Being positive about the transition.
- Not expecting everything to run smoothly.

## 4.4 Summary of findings

This chapter has described parents' expectations and experiences of their child's transition to Year 1.

### ***Previous experience of educational transitions***

- Most parents felt that their child had settled in well to Reception class.
- Parents felt that it had taken their children different lengths of time to settle into Reception. Some children settled in straight away whereas others took more than a term to adjust.
- Parents thought that several factors helped their children settle into school, including having friends in the Reception class, a good relationship with the teacher and the transition practices adopted by the school.

### ***Expectations of the transition to Year 1***

- Most parents said they were not particularly concerned about their child's transition to Year 1. However, some parents were worried about how their child would adapt to the greater workload and fewer opportunities to learn through play.
- The majority of the parents felt that their child was unconcerned about the transition to Year 1 and that their child was well prepared.

### ***Communication between parents and schools***

- Very few parents had received information about the transition from their school. They wanted to receive information about the work that their child would be doing so they could help prepare their child for Year 1.
- Parents wanted to meet their child's new teacher before the end of the summer term. They felt that this would give them an opportunity to pass

on information about their child and would help them to establish a relationship with the new teacher.

- Few parents had met their child's new teacher before the transition or had an opportunity to speak to the Year 1 teacher during the first half of the autumn term.

### ***Settling into Year 1***

- The majority of parents reported that their child was keen to go back to school after the summer break. Most children settled in well, although many parents noticed that their children appeared tired.
- Parents identified a range of factors that they felt had helped their child to settle into Year 1. These included friendships, preparation with parents and good relationships with the Year 1 teacher.
- Those parents who felt their child had not settled in well said their children were finding the work difficult and were struggling with the reduced opportunities to play.

### ***Transition visits***

- Most of the case-study schools had provided an opportunity for Reception children to visit the Year 1 class. Parents felt that this had helped reassure their child.
- Very few of the schools involved parents in the transition visits with the child. Parents who had been involved in these visits found them to be beneficial.

### ***Parents' role in transition***

- Parents suggested that they could help their child during the transition by talking to them about the move to Year 1, providing learning activities and by building a positive relationship with their child's teacher.

## **5 Issues for Foundation Stage staff**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter is based on interviews with 28 staff in the Foundation Stage, namely nursery teachers, Reception teachers and support staff in the 12 case-study schools. All interviews were conducted in the summer term of 2004. The research team conducted interviews with 14 Reception teachers, five nursery teachers and nine support staff working in Reception classes. Five of the case study schools had their own nurseries. Four schools had mixed Year 1 and 2 classes and one of the schools (at the time of the first visit only) had a mixed Reception and Year 1 class. The schools had one of three school entry patterns: seven schools operated one intake per year (in September), four operated two intakes per year (in September and January) and one had three intakes per year (at the beginning of each school term).

The interviews focused on the following themes:

- Children's transition to school (including children's adjustment and the factors that help children to settle).
- The implementation of the Foundation Stage, especially curriculum and pedagogy.
- Children's transition to Year 1 (including the skills that Reception teachers and support staff felt children needed for Year 1).
- Transition practices (including preparation of children, liaison with Year 1 staff and communication with parents).
- Staff support and training for transition.

### **5.2 Transition to school**

We asked nursery and Reception teachers to comment on how they felt children coped with the transition to nursery or Reception, how long it took children to adjust and what helped them adjust to the new setting. The purpose behind these questions was to gather information about earlier transitions in order to provide a context for the consideration of issues relating to the transition to Year 1.

#### **5.2.1 The views of Foundation Stage staff on children's experience of transition to school**

The Foundation Stage staff we interviewed said that the majority of children coped well with the transition to school, although it was common for one or two children to be tearful in the first few days. In their experience, the typical

period of adjustment ranged from a few days to a week, though exceptionally children could take up to a term to adjust to school. This was the same for both the transition into nursery and the transition to Reception.

Around half of the Foundation Stage teachers interviewed felt that certain groups of children found settling particularly difficult. This included children born in the summer and those with SEN. It was also felt that children without nursery experience and those who had attended nursery provision elsewhere found it more difficult to adjust. The main reason given for such difficulties was because these children did not have an established friendship group at the school. On the other hand, children moving between the nursery and Reception class in the same school faced few difficulties. As a teacher in a school with its own nursery commented: 'It was just like moving buildings for them'.

A Reception teacher made the following comments about children's adjustment to school:

*I suppose it is a gradual thing over the first half term. I mean some of them just took to it like a duck to water straight away. A lot of them came in knowing lots of the other children already from their nurseries, but ... I think the biggest problem were the ones who didn't know anybody or were a bit shy and took a little while to make friends. A lot of the ones who had been to nursery were used to similar routines. By the end of the first half term they were all perfectly aware of the routines and expectations.*

### **5.2.2 Factors that helped children to make a smooth transition to school**

The Foundation Stage staff described a variety of factors that helped children adjust to or cope with the transition to school. These factors included:

- An introduction to the Reception teachers and classroom environment.
- Continuity of environment (classroom layout and equipment).
- Continuity of friendship groups.
- Curriculum continuity.

All the nursery and Reception teachers and support staff talked about the importance to children of visits to the new classroom during 'taster days'. This gave children an opportunity meet teachers and support staff and to see the classroom environment. A Reception teacher gave the following example of a practice that was common across the case study schools:

*First of all we go into playgroup and meet the staff and children who are coming up so they know our faces, [then] they come and look round the school. They come up for a couple of sessions, with their playgroup leader and they get some activities out which they play with.*

The Reception teachers and support staff in other case study schools described similar activities, although the time spent on visits and the type of activities differed.

Where schools had their own nursery, ensuring a sense of continuity between nursery and Reception was considered an important factor in easing the transition to school. This was accomplished by adopting similar nursery and Reception classroom layouts and/or creating a sense of continuity in learning. A Reception teacher described how her practice in the first weeks of school included familiar topics, such as:

*... telling stories that are familiar to them already. Our first topic is always "ourselves" [which involves] referring to the previous nursery, what kind of things they used to do there and their families, to show you are interested in where they have come from; they haven't just arrived! .*

Preserving existing friendship groups was also considered to help children to adjust to a new setting. Reception teachers and support staff felt that children who came to Reception class with existing friendship groups found it easier to settle as did those who had older siblings in school.

Other factors that the Reception teachers and support staff felt helped children to adjust included creating a friendly atmosphere; focusing on having fun, friendly and understanding teachers and creating a sense of class identity (e.g. being part of 'red class'). The Reception teachers also thought that it was important for them to establish a good link between the nursery and Reception class because this would ensure they were informed about what was being taught and how. This would make it easier to ensure continuity in learning; and to keep parents informed about transition. Some Reception teachers and support staff referred to their school's admission practices. They felt that certain practices helped children settle into school, including adopting staggered intakes and building up the time children spent in school gradually (i.e. starting with half day attendance until children were ready to spend the whole day at school).

Reception staff (both teachers and support staff) felt that children who were more independent found transition easier. In this context, 'independence' meant children being able to care for themselves without relying on adult help (examples included being able to dress themselves for PE or use a knife and fork at lunch). Having already been to nursery was regarded as positive factor because Reception teachers felt this was associated with a level of

independence and social skill. In contrast, children who had not attended nursery were described by one Reception teacher as ‘... more clingy, don’t integrate as well and have fewer social skills’.

### **5.3 Planning in Reception classes**

Planning for teaching and learning in Reception, for the most part, was approached collaboratively by Reception teachers, teaching assistants and, in some cases, nursery teachers and headteachers. Where teaching assistants were not included, this was because they were not paid for planning time and/or were not felt to be experienced enough to participate.

Teachers varied in the ways they timetabled the six areas of learning that form the Foundation Stage Curriculum. Some integrated these throughout the week, whilst others focused on specific areas within each day.

The following comments have been selected from schools using different approaches.

One Reception teacher said: ‘I integrate the areas as much as possible. We have a different focus each week but I don’t timetable areas separately until the last term.’ Another described designating different activities within set periods each day:

*Every morning they do a PE, literacy and numeracy activity. In the afternoon they have all the different activities to choose from, which all have something to do with the six areas of learning.*

A third planned separate activities each day:

*We have a day for each, so Monday is language and literacy, Tuesday is mathematical, Wednesday is knowledge and understanding, Thursday is Creative and Friday is creative and physical – Personal and Social is all the time really.*

Most commonly, Reception teachers planned to have a literacy and numeracy activity available each day. Literacy and numeracy activities were usually adult-led, in line with the curriculum guidance for literacy and numeracy teaching. Teachers planned for a combination of specific activities in other areas of the curriculum, together with a range of activities for guided/free choice.

## 5.4 Preparing children for Year 1

When asked how they prepared the children for the transition to Year 1, Reception teachers in all 12 schools talked about the need for academic, social and emotional preparation.

Most of the teachers said they made changes to the way they timetabled areas of learning in the summer term to help prepare the children for Year 1. This involved introducing greater structure and lengthening the amount of time spent on particular activities, particularly literacy and numeracy sessions.

The reference to ‘greater structure’ was shorthand for placing a greater emphasis on adult-led, whole-class sessions, especially in literacy and numeracy, encouraging the children to remain still for longer periods of time (e.g. getting used to them sitting on the carpet for longer periods) and reducing the amount of time devoted to free choice and play-based activity.

On the other hand, teachers in two of the schools explained that they did not plan to make any changes to the timetabling of areas of learning during the year because they felt it would disrupt the pattern of Reception class activity and would not be in the children’s best interests.

In fact, about a third of the Reception class teachers we spoke to questioned whether it was in the best interests of young children to introduce ‘Year 1’ activities into the Reception year. Although they made adjustments to their curriculum and pedagogy in order to help children make a smooth transition to Year 1, they felt that this was a coping strategy that was not congruent with the philosophy of the Foundation Stage curriculum. As one Reception teacher commented: ‘I think, having been in Reception for three years, we are changing and we shouldn’t be. Year 1 needs to come and meet us – they are the ones who are too structured.’

A Reception teacher who had not adjusted her practice said: ‘Perhaps we don’t do enough preparation [for transition], but we’d miss out on Reception. The difficulty is that so much is expected of them at the start of Year 1’. Another Reception teacher described feeling subject to conflicting demands:

*I go on these Foundation Stage courses and then come back into school and I feel torn between what the Foundation Stage advisors are telling me to do ... that it shouldn’t be structured at all... But [the children] have to be able to do a certain amount by the time they get into Year 1.*

A few Reception teachers talked about transition as taking place in both Reception and Year 1. These individuals were from schools where the headteachers emphasised the Early Years and this transition in their schools’

policies. Ensuring continuity between what and how the children were learning in Reception and the topics provided at the start of Year 1 was advocated, as one Reception teacher said: ‘When the children enter Year 1 it is planned in a similar way to the Foundation Stage. Gradually the children are introduced to literacy and numeracy hour and focused group activities’. However, providing this continuity was felt to be much harder in the four schools that had mixed age classes containing children in Years 1 and 2, because these classes had to address the needs of older children.

## **5.5 Skills Foundation Stage staff thought children needed for Year 1**

We asked the 24 Reception teachers and support staff which skills they felt it was necessary for children to develop in Reception that would help them in Year 1. The responses of support staff mirrored those of the teachers. Therefore, the term ‘Reception staff’ is used throughout this section to refer to both support staff and teachers.

Reception staff identified the following academic, social and personal skills that they felt helped children to make a successful transition:

- Basic literacy and numeracy skills (17 staff).
- Independence (16 staff.)
- Social skills, especially cooperation and sharing (16 staff).
- Ability to sit still and willingness abide by the school rules (11 staff).
- Concentration (6 staff).

Academic skills were also thought to be crucial for successful transition to Year 1. Reception teachers and support staff focused largely on literacy and numeracy, but children’s ability to articulate ideas and feelings was also felt to be important.

Reception teachers and support staff talked about the importance of children being independent, meaning able to carry out routine aspects of personal care without adult help. This included skills such as the ability to dress and undress (for PE) and being able to go to the toilet without assistance. One teacher spoke about children’s ability to complete a given task without adult assistance, saying that children needed to be able to: ‘Complete a set amount of work in a set time and not have the teachers sat next to them the whole time’. Some interviewees also mentioned other aspects of independence, in the sense of independent learning. These skills included self-awareness, inquisitiveness and confidence. One Reception teacher felt that children needed to be: ‘Aware of their own learning, that they go and find out about things, that they want to practice skills themselves’.

Social skills, particularly being able to make friends, sharing and cooperation, group and team working, were thought to be important for Year 1. Reception teachers and support staff said that children needed to know how to behave appropriately in different situations and to understanding other people's feelings.

The ability to sit still was mentioned frequently, or as one teacher put it 'sitting nicely'. Teachers and support staff also stressed the importance of children knowing and abiding by the rules. Examples included not running in the corridor, respecting resources, tidying up after an activity, and politeness. Staff also acknowledged that Year 1 would require children to be able to concentrate on a specific activity for a sustained period of time.

## **5.6 Communication with staff in Year 1**

Reception teachers were asked how they communicated with Year 1 teachers prior to the transition. They reported a variety of formal and informal methods of sharing information, including the use of the Foundation Stage profile (FSP).

All the Reception teachers said they shared information with their colleagues in Year 1. They used the FSP complemented by reports, alternative assessments, examples of work and reading records. They also engaged in informal discussions with their colleagues. However, teachers in four schools expressed concern that Year 1 teachers would not use the FSP, because these documents were not felt to be sufficiently useful in terms of their content and format.

As well as handing over information, Reception teachers helped those in Year 1 to group children by ability and, in a few cases, even began to use these ability groups in the Reception class. Teachers in ten of the schools explained that it was common for teachers to participate in handover sessions where they would talk about each individual child with the Year 1 teacher with the above information to hand.

## **5.7 Communication with parents**

Foundation stage staff felt it was important to inform parents about the transition to Year 1. Teachers felt that if parents had a greater understanding of the transition to Year 1 they would be able to support their children better throughout the summer holidays. Some of the Reception and nursery teachers explained that their schools had organised parents' evenings. In five cases, these were held at the end of the summer term before the move to Year 1, but in a further five schools they took place after the transition (two schools reported that they did not have 'formal' parents' evenings). These meetings provided an opportunity for Reception teachers to pass on general information

about transition and to allow parents to visit the Year 1 classroom. In other schools, parents' meetings were less formal events where parents could come and talk about any issues of concern, not necessarily transition issues.

The existence of an '*open door policy*' was mentioned often in the respondents' answers. In schools where there was no formal opportunity for parents to visit the school before the end of the summer term this represented parents' only opportunity to discuss transition issues, but teachers said that many parents did not take advantage of the opportunity. Several Reception teachers reported the difficulties they had experienced in involving parents. These problems included: getting parents to take an interest, contacting parents who had separated from their partners and communication barriers for parents who did not speak English. In addition, one teacher expressed 'security' concerns over inviting parents into the school.

## **5.8 Support and training for Reception staff about transition to Year 1**

Only one of the 15 Reception teachers we interviewed had received training specifically about transition. This was a one-day course attended by both the Reception and Year 1 teachers in the school. Another teacher reported that although she had not received any training on the issue, she was involved in a regional working party on transition.

Most Reception teachers said they were not aware of any provision for training or advice on transition issues in their locality. A few teachers commented that they felt training and support for transition might be better targeted at their colleagues in Year 1. As one Reception teacher said:

*I actually think that Year 1 teachers are the people who need particular training because those of us in Reception are used to the transition into school and have worked on that transition which makes it easier for us to work transition to Year 1. I think that a lot of the training should go to Year 1 teachers to educate them more about the Foundation Stage as well as transition issues. I don't think that should fall to the people in the schools to do but having said that I do feel that Year 1 teachers are stuck because it is hard to resist the downward pressure.*

## **5.9 Summary of the issues for Foundation Stage staff**

- Foundation Stage staff felt that children coped with the transition to school well and the majority of children adjusted to the new environment within a few weeks.

- Factors that helped children to make a smooth transition to school included familiarity with the staff, continuity of environment, friendship groups and curriculum.
- In most schools, planning for the Foundation Stage was approached collaboratively between Reception teachers and teaching assistants.
- Most Reception teachers included a literacy and numeracy activity every day but the timetabling of other areas of learning varied between schools.
- Reception teachers felt there was a need to prepare children academically, socially and emotionally for the transition to Year 1.
- Foundation stage staff thought that a combination of academic, social and personal skills helped make this transition successful for children.
- Foundation Stage staff reported using a variety of formal and informal methods of sharing information with staff in Year 1, including the use of the Foundation Stage Profile.
- Foundation Stage staff felt it was important to inform parents about the transition to Year 1. Parents' meetings held in the summer term or first term of Year 1 were common ways of conveying information to parents.
- Most Reception teachers had not received training specifically on transition and were not aware of any such training in their locality.



## **6 Issues for Year 1 staff**

This chapter reports on the material from two sets of interviews with Year 1 teachers and support staff in the 12 case-study schools. Interviews were conducted during the second half of the summer term (before the transition) and again during the first half of the autumn term (after the transition). The first section of this chapter focuses on Year 1 teachers' preparation, including any liaison that took place between staff in the Foundation Stage and those in Year 1. The second section explores the views of Year 1 teachers and support staff about how the children were coping with the transition and any practices that had helped the children settle into Year 1.

### **6.1 Preparation for the transition**

During the researchers' first visits, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Year 1 teachers in 11 of the 12 case-study schools (unfortunately one teacher was unavailable for interview on the day of the visit). The interviews were conducted towards the end of the summer term before the children made the transition from Reception to Year 1. The purpose of the interview was to identify the different ways in which the Year 1 teachers were preparing for the children's transition to Year 1.

#### **6.1.1. Liaison between teachers**

All of the Year 1 teachers reported that they did liaise with practitioners in the Foundation Stage. The majority of teachers reported that the liaison consisted mainly of one-to-one discussion between staff about the progress that children had made whilst in Reception. Individual children's needs were also usually discussed and any relevant information about the children was passed on to the Year 1 teachers. For example, one teacher explained: 'I have had oral liaison [with the Reception teacher] when we have got together and had an informal chat about the children'.

Year 1 teachers in three schools reported that they had shared assemblies and carried out joint activities with the Foundation Stage, which they saw as a form of liaison. These sorts of shared activities often gave Year 1 teachers an opportunity to get to know the children in the Reception class. In one school they had linked resources relating to role play. In the summer term the Year 1 class had a travel agent and the Reception class had an airport and the children were able to play in both role-play areas, which meant the children were more familiar with the Year 1 classroom when they moved up to Year 1.

Year 1 teachers in three schools also reported having a more formal staff meeting to discuss the children's individual needs in more detail:

*We have a big staff meeting about the next year, after graduation morning [where all children go to visit their new class]... All the teachers meet and we talk about children who have special educational needs, those who might need extra support, and those who might be more able.*

### **6.1.2 Assessment and record keeping**

All of the Year 1 teachers reported that the Reception teachers would pass on the completed Foundation Stage Profiles at the end of the summer term. In the majority of schools, Reception teachers also passed on other records and assessment data for each child.

*We have a list of things we must pass on... such as ability groupings, pupil Profiles, tracking, scores. IEPs [individual education plans for children with special needs] are written in July for the next teacher, link books are passed on and reading records.*

All of the Year 1 teachers reported that they planned to use these records to help them group the children by ability. Comments from teachers included: 'I use it for grouping, definitely, that's vital' and 'I use it to group the children initially as it gives me a general idea of who might need extra help and things like that'.

Eight Year 1 teachers also reported that they would use the information about the children's skills and abilities to inform their curriculum planning. For example, one teacher explained: 'we need to know where they have come from and we'll match our expectations to what they can do and then take them forward from there'. Two teachers mentioned that the records would be used to help with target setting once the children had moved up to Year 1. One of these teachers expressed concerns about the target setting and commented that she found this extremely difficult to do:

*We have to set targets for each child at the start of Year 1... that is what I find most difficult because the children have just come up from the Foundation Stage which is so different from Key Stage 1 so I find it really difficult to set targets and to say what children will be able to achieve so early on in the year, before I have got to know them and before we have really got started with the National Curriculum work.*

### **6.1.3 Communication with parents before the transition**

Only one Year 1 teacher reported having any contact with parents before children made the transition to Year 1. This teacher was working in a school

that had arranged a coffee morning for parents to come into Year 1 with their child to see the new classroom. However, this was an exception. In all other 11 schools, parents had no opportunity to meet their child's teacher, see their child's new classroom or discuss any concerns before their child made the transition to Year 1.

The majority of Year 1 teachers said that they would usually meet parents informally after the transition when parents dropped off and collected their children. In some cases teachers also planned to have a more formal meeting for parents once the new term had started.

Year 1 teachers were asked if they felt there were any specific barriers to involving parents in the transition. Nine of the 11 Year 1 teachers felt that barriers did exist. They identified a variety of barriers, including:

- **School policies** – three teachers reported that schools did not have an 'open-door' policy. In these cases, parents were expected to make an appointment if they wanted to discuss anything with their child's teacher. A teacher in one school said that the school had a security system in place that made it difficult for parents to gain access to the classroom without having made a formal arrangement beforehand.
- **Lack of time/organisation problems** – two teachers reported that it was difficult to arrange formal meetings or open-evenings for parents, as the summer term was so busy and any meetings at this time were usually dedicated to discussing reports with parents of children currently in Year 1.
- **Perceived lack of interest from parents** – two teachers felt that many of the parents did not want to be involved and were primarily concerned about their child's behaviour rather than their child's learning.
- **Younger siblings** – one teacher commented that many parents had younger children which made it difficult for them to attend open-sessions.
- **Working parents** – one teacher explained that many of the parents worked which meant that children were often brought to and from school by childminders. For this reason contact between school staff and parents was minimal.
- **Language barriers** - one teacher reported that a third of the parents at the school spoke English as an additional language which made communication more difficult.

## 6.2 After the transition to Year 1

During the second visits, interviews were conducted with 15 Year 1 teachers from all 12 case-study schools. Nine of these teachers had been interviewed during the summer term. In four schools there had been staff changes so a different teacher was interviewed in the autumn term. In addition to this, in

two schools the target children had been split across two classes so interviews were conducted with both teachers, and in one school the Year 1 post was shared by two teachers (both teachers were interviewed on the day of the visit).

Interviews were also conducted with 15 members of support staff who worked in Year 1 across the 12 case-study schools. In three cases two members of support staff were interviewed (either because there were two Year 1 classes or because the role was shared).

The interviews were conducted towards the middle of the autumn term, after the children had been in Year 1 for between four and six weeks. Teachers and support staff were both asked how the children had settled into Year 1 and about any specific activities and/or practices that may have aided the children's adjustment.

It is worth noting that the second visits to the 12 case-study schools revealed that there were differences in the ways that the schools were operating Year 1. Teachers and support staff reported employing different pedagogical practices to aid children's adjustment. These differences in approach meant that there were considerable variations in the children's experiences across the 12 schools. The impact that these differences had on the transition process will be explored in this section from the perspective of staff working in Year 1.

### **6.2.1 Curriculum and organisation in Year 1**

There are differences between the way in which the Foundation Stage and Year 1 curricula are structured and taught. The Foundation Stage curriculum is more flexible and children learn through a play-based pedagogy, where they have opportunities for outdoor and self-initiated learning. The curriculum for children in Year 1 is subject-based, with prescribed programmes of study and Year 1 teachers often adopt a more 'formal' teaching style.

Visits to the 12 case-study schools revealed differences in the approaches to teaching adopted by the Year 1 teachers. Teachers in a number of schools had changed their approach specifically to aid the transition. Teachers in three of the schools were continuing to provide play-based, integrated, practical learning opportunities for children in Year 1. The teachers in these schools planned gradually to introduce a more structured approach to teaching and learning during the year. Teachers in two of the other schools had made some changes to ease children's transition but opportunities for child-initiated, practical learning were limited. The remaining seven schools had introduced the subject-based curriculum and more 'formal' teaching methods from the outset.

The Year 1 teachers were asked to identify the main differences between the learning environment in Year 1, compared with Reception. Year 1 was commonly described as ‘more structured’, meaning that the timetable was organised into specific sessions, each focusing on a particular area of the curriculum. In the majority of cases, opportunities for child-initiated activities were limited because teachers felt that the timetable was ‘just too pressured’.

The majority of Year 1 teachers reported that there were considerable differences between the learning environments in Reception and Year 1. The main differences reported by Year 1 teachers were that there was:

- **Less space** – in most cases the Year 1 classrooms were smaller and contained more tables and chairs than the Reception classrooms. This meant there was less space for play equipment and for the children to move around.
- **Less play equipment/resources** – Year 1 classrooms often were not equipped with bikes or scooters, sand or water activities. Many also had minimal equipment for role-play.
- **Less opportunities for outside play** – only two schools reported having access to outdoor provision. But even in these cases, children needed to be supervised which meant that generally children could not access outdoor provision freely. However, most Year 1 teachers did report taking the children outside occasionally for specific activities such as PE or science.
- **Less adult support** – although most Year 1 classes had teaching assistants assigned to them, this was usually on a part-time basis whereas most Reception classes had full-time support from teaching assistants/nursery nurses.
- **Fewer child-initiated activities** – in most schools activities tended to be more adult-directed and there was less opportunity for children to initiate their own learning.

Year 1 teachers found the lack of space restrictive and regretted the lack of provision for role play. For example, one teacher commented: ‘It [the Year 1 classroom] is really different, this space is not really ideal, it would be nice to have a bit more space so that we could have more role play’.

The differences in staffing levels made it particularly difficult for Year 1 teachers to provide the children with free access to outdoor play because they were unable to provide adequate supervision for such activities. Comments from teachers in two schools illustrate the difficulties involved:

*We might go out for PE in the summer, we might use the outside area, but it has to fit in with when I have my help and that is mostly in the mornings so it is not so easy to actually fit it in.*

*We do have access to the playground from here but is getting too cold now to have the door open and we don't have enough supervision to use that space.*

In the majority of schools there were few opportunities for child-initiated activities. The three schools that were continuing the Foundation Stage approach into Year 1 were the only schools that provided opportunities for this kind of activity on a daily basis. For example, one teacher explained: 'about a quarter of the activities are child initiated and free choice'. However, this teacher went on to say that children's opportunities for free choice would decrease gradually as the year progressed.

In two schools, teachers had 'relaxed' the timetable in the afternoons, giving children opportunities to initiate activities and play with some of the toys and equipment. One of these teachers commented:

*We are trying to make sure that [opportunities for child-initiated activities] happen because we are aware now that is what the children have enjoyed, that is what they've liked in Foundation class ... They are still learning, they are still working even though they are not seeing it themselves.*

In the remaining seven schools opportunities for free-choice activities were limited to 'golden time' once a week (usually on a Friday). These opportunities were considered to be a reward for good behaviour and/or completion of work. For example, one teacher explained that the only time the children in her class had free choice to initiate play was in 'golden time on a Friday'; otherwise it was 'just wet playtimes' when the children had choice. Another teacher commented that this was one of the main things that the children found difficult in Year 1 because they were used to having more free-choice in Reception.

*There is no place on the timetable [for child initiated activities]. They have lots of choice in Reception which is why they find it difficult. It depends, sometimes they can choose when they have finished their work but not everyone gets to choose and we often have more work to do.*

### **Grouping children in Year 1**

Year 1 teachers were asked whether and how they grouped the children in their class. The majority of teachers (11 of the 15) grouped children by ability for literacy and numeracy, as this made it easier for teachers to differentiate activities. In fact, the majority of teachers reported that the children worked in ability groups for most activities. In schools with more than one Year 1 class, the groups were often formed across classes, with different teachers taking each group. This meant that children would mix with children in other classes

and may be taught by someone other than their class teacher. Teachers commented that additional adult support was concentrated on helping the lower ability groups.

In three schools the Year 1 teachers reported that they grouped the children differently for some activities, which meant they were not working with the same children all of the time:

*For main tasks the children are grouped by ability but we try to have a mixture, for other activities they are randomly grouped. For carpet work they have a carpet buddy<sup>1</sup> which links up more and less able together; this helps them to keep more focused and less chatty.*

### **Curriculum planning**

Year 1 teachers were asked who was involved in planning the curriculum for the children in Year 1. Teachers in five schools reported planning collaboratively as a Year 1 team, either with other Year 1 teachers (if the school had more than one Year 1 class) and/or with support staff who were based in Year 1. In four schools, teachers reported that they planned together as an infant department: ‘we get together as a department for the ideas of what we are going to do’. This particularly related to planning literacy, numeracy and topic work.

However, not all Year 1 teachers involved others in planning the curriculum. In three schools, teachers reported that they did their planning on their own and did not involve support staff or teachers from other year groups.

A Year 1 teacher in one school reported that they had recently changed the format of their planning. In the past the Year 1 teachers had used the same planning format as the rest of the school but teachers in Reception had used a different format. The Year 1 staff decided to devise their own planning format so that it was similar to the Reception class. The Year 1 teacher at the school reported that this new system was working well.

## **6.2.2 Specific transition activities**

The majority of the case-study schools had organised specific activities to try to aid children’s transition to Year 1 and most schools also had practices in place to help children adjust to the changes. However, some schools had clearly given more consideration to this than others. These schools had involved the children in a series of specific activities aimed at smoothing the children’s transition to Year 1.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information on ‘carpet buddies’ is given in Chapter 3.

The majority of Year 1 teachers (13 of the 15 interviewed) reported that they had spent at least one morning with their new class in the lead-up to the transition. Year 1 teachers in two of these schools had taken this process of familiarisation further, by organising a series of visits for the Reception children during the second half of the summer term. In one of these schools, children visited the Year 1 class in small groups for one afternoon each week and spent a session with the teacher joining in with Year 1 activities. The teacher felt that this had given the children an opportunity to get to 'know where things were' in the classroom and to familiarise themselves with the equipment and resources in the classroom. The children at this school had also visited Year 1 as a whole class for a specific 'move-up' morning. The teacher explained that organising a series of visits was something they had introduced this year and she felt it had worked well: 'I think it was better than what we have done in the past'.

In the other school, the children had also visited the Year 1 classroom on several occasions. During one such visit, the teacher had given the children an opportunity to discuss their expectations and to raise any concerns about moving to Year 1.

However, two Year 1 teachers had been unable to spend any time with their new class before they started in Year 1. In one case, the teacher had only begun working at the school in September and so had not been able to meet the class beforehand. In the other, the teacher said the summer term had been too busy to enable her to spend time with the Reception class: 'There just wasn't the time to start having half a day here and swapping round'.

The teachers who had spent time with their new class were asked how these visits had prepared the children for the transition. The majority of teachers reported that the visits had provided the children with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the Year 1 classroom and also to get to know their new teacher. For example, one teacher explained: 'I think it got them used to the classroom because they got to see the classroom... and they got to know me a little bit better'.

A parent explained how the visit to the new classroom had helped to prepare her child for the transition. When she had first discussed 'moving up', her son had been quite confused about what was happening. But visiting the classroom had helped him to make sense of the situation.

*He said he had been to see the classroom and that he liked the classroom. It was helpful and it focused his mind on it. He had been getting a bit confused because I had said to him that he would be moving up to [Year 1] class after the holiday but he would say 'I don't know anyone in [Year 1] class'. He hadn't realised that everyone would move up, so going to the classroom helped him realise what was happening.*

Six of the teachers taught mixed-age classes with children from Years 1 and Year 2. Two of these teachers mentioned that the visits had given children an opportunity to meet their classmates. For example, one teacher said the visit had given the children an opportunity to get to know the ‘older group of children’ who would be with them in their new class.

In three schools, Year 1 teachers had organised shared activities such as an ‘organised story time’ or a sports day to give the children further opportunities to mix and to begin building a relationship with their new teacher. One teacher commented:

*They had an activity week where they [the Reception children] went into Year 1 and Year 2 and that was done as a joint activity and we also had our sports day which was a joint day as well and they were all in teams together.*

Two of the schools had also organised a further visit for the children where they could be accompanied by their parents. These visits gave parents an opportunity to see the new classroom and meet their child’s new teacher. For example, one of the teachers explained: ‘We also had an open evening when parents could come and bring the children to the new class; we set up the classroom to show how it is going to be during the year.’

Year 1 teachers were asked whether they felt there was anything else that could be done to improve current practice in relation to transition. Three teachers made suggestions. One teacher suggested that, although Reception children had visited the Year 1 class on one occasion, they would have benefited from a series of visits to enable them to get used to the different pedagogic approaches employed in Year 1:

*I think maybe rather than just one morning at the end of the term it would be good if they came to me for one session for the last few weeks of term. It [Year 1] is very different and we had a few children in September saying I have had enough now... I want to go and play.*

Another teacher explained that she had planned to swap classes with the Reception teacher which would have enabled her to spend some time in Reception with her new class. Unfortunately, this had not taken place due to time constraints, but it was something that they hoped to implement in the future:

*We were going to change and [the Reception class teacher] would come and teach my class and I would go and teach Reception, but it was so hectic at the end of term we didn’t fit it in. But that is something that we thought we might do in the future.*

The third teacher explained that she would have liked to have held a formal meeting for parents so that the teachers could explain why they had decided to continue the play-based approach into Year 1 and the benefits of this kind of approach:

*I think I could have improved practice if I could have had a proper meeting with parents to explain the new situation this year. I think that some parents come in and still see them playing, and think that to learn they should spend more time sitting. I would like a transition meeting and get all the parents together and explain the philosophy.*

### **6.2.3 Skills considered desirable for children moving to Year 1**

The 30 Year 1 teachers and support staff were asked what skills they felt were important for children to develop in Reception in order to help them cope well in Year 1. The skills reported by interviewees as important were:

- independence (16 interviewees)
- listening skills (16 interviewees)
- social skills (13 interviewees)
- basic literacy and numeracy skills (ten interviewees)
- confidence (two interviewees)
- concentration (two interviewees)

‘Independence’ was mentioned by over half of interviewees as being important for children entering Year 1. The most common interpretation of this concept was that children should be able to get on with tasks independently of adult help. This included children’s ability to take responsibility for their own personal care, such as being able to undress and dress themselves for PE. Some teachers stressed the importance of children being able to follow instructions without seeking further reassurance or help. A minority of teachers referred to independent learning, saying that it was important for children to be motivated and confident enough to initiate their own learning opportunities (interestingly, these were the teachers that were continuing the play-based approach into Year 1). For example one teacher commented that it was important for children to be: ‘independent...to take responsibility for where they want to go... to be motivated to want to learn...to ask questions and challenge safe boundaries’.

Being able to listen, take turns and work as a group were also considered to be important skills needed for Year 1. Several interviewees referred to ‘carpet time’ during which children were expected to listen to the teacher. Children needed to be able to judge when it was appropriate to speak, as one teacher

said, ‘to learn to respond and not just butt in’. Comments from teachers included:

*Listening skills... I think to start with those skills are more important than the academic skills, because you have to get them listening to move on. I mean literacy skills are really important, but unless you have their attention and you know they are listening then they are not going to learn are they.*

*They need to be able to work in groups, listen, share and it is important that they have friendships and can get along with each other.*

*Being able to work in a group and knowing that it is not always ‘me, me, me’... knowing that they have to work in a group and take turns and share equipment.*

Basic literacy and numeracy skills were considered to be important for children to have on entry Year 1, as children needed ‘something to build on’. These skills were often considered to be necessary for children to be able to access the Year 1 curriculum. For example, one teaching assistant commented: ‘I think that learning the basics helps them with the Year 1 work, with their spelling, reading and everything’.

#### **6.2.4 Children’s adjustment to Year 1**

Most of the teachers and support staff felt that the children in their class were ‘coping well’ with the transition to Year 1. However, there were three teachers who said that children were coping ‘OK’ and one teacher said ‘initially it [the transition] was tricky for some’. These teachers reported that some children were coping better than others and that a number of children had found the transition difficult.

The Year 1 teachers and support staff working in schools that had introduced the more formal teaching methods from the outset were among those that reported that children were finding it more difficult to settle. The Year 1 teachers and support staff working in schools that had continued an integrated play-based approach reported that this had made it easier for children to adjust after the transition. For example one teaching assistant commented: ‘I think they are doing especially well this year...we are trying to make Year 1 a little bit more like the Foundation Stage and I think it has worked really well’.

However, Year 1 staff also said that children had responded differently to the changes and the majority of teachers reported that there were individual children in their classes who had found it more difficult to adjust. Teachers reported that younger children, those who were ‘less able’ (children in the lower ability group), children with EAL, and children with Special

Educational Needs (SEN) had found it more difficult to cope with the transition. For example, one explained that children who found it difficult to listen to and follow instructions were experiencing problems: 'There are a lot of instructions for them in Year 1... there is a lot to take in and they feel overwhelmed sometimes'.

A Year 1 teacher explained that one of the children in her class had found it particularly difficult to adjust to the changes in Year 1, as she sometimes found it difficult to concentrate and listen to instructions. The child's mother was aware that her daughter was finding the transition difficult and reported a change in her daughter's behaviour and attitude towards school. When the child was asked how she was getting on in Year 1 the child recalled a negative experience of being told off for doing something wrong and not paying attention.

**Researcher:** *How are you getting on in Year 1?*

**Child:** *I have been told off sometimes because I done some things wrong and I wasn't looking.*

**Her Year 1 teacher said:**

*For [the child] it is difficult... she is very quiet and her concentration is not that good and she wasn't listening. That meant that she wasn't always sure of what she had to do. But that has improved now because I have got her to try and look at me and to try and listen and that is coming on but we still have a way to go. There are a lot of instructions for them in Year 1 and she has found that difficult. I try to space them [the instructions] out or ask them [the children] to repeat back to me what they have to do to check that they [the children] know [what they should be doing].*

**Her mother said:**

*She hasn't found it easy [in Year 1]... she has to listen and follow instructions and she finds that quite difficult... In Reception they used to tell the parents [what was going on] so that we could help them but in Year 1 they expect the children to remember what they are supposed to be doing and [my daughter] doesn't always remember.*

*She has definitely been more tired and there has been a change in her behaviour; well her behaviour at home anyway... Her attitude to school has changed, there have been tears in the mornings and she hasn't wanted to go to school.*

Two Year 1 teachers reported that the boys were finding the transition more difficult than the girls 'especially the younger boys'. One of these teachers commented: 'the boys do [find it more difficult to adjust] they are not as mature as girls... they find the listening difficult'.

Year 1 teachers pointed out that children were expected to be a lot more independent of adults in Year 1. Most Year 1 classes did not have a full-time assistant assigned to them which meant that children did not always have access to help and needed to be responsible for their own things. For example, one teacher reported that the children sometimes found it difficult to find their book bags or their PE kit by themselves.

Interestingly, a small number of the parents also commented that their children were expected to be 'more independent' in Year 1. For example, one parent commented: 'she [her daughter] has to be a lot more independent and she has a lot more responsibility in Year 1'. Another parent mentioned that her child 'has to change his own book and be more independent' in Year 1. This particular child also commented about this issue when interviewed. He said that what was different about being in Year 1 was that you had to change your own book.

Five Year 1 teachers felt that those children that were older, those that were 'more able' and those that were more confident and 'outgoing' had found it easier to adjust to the differences. For example, one teacher commented: 'I suppose the more able, older children are able to manage the change best and are picking up the new routines quickly'.

Teachers' estimates of the amount of time it took children to adjust to Year 1 ranged from a few weeks to a full term. One teacher commented: 'I would say that it took them a good few weeks before they were totally settled with routines and things'. Two teachers suggested that it would take the children a full term to adjust. As one of them said: 'They [the children] are still adjusting and I think it will take them right up until Christmas to get used to it'.

Teachers who felt that children were having difficulty adjusting to Year 1 were asked to identify the source of the difficulty. The most common response, given by over a third of the teachers, concerned the reduction in play-based learning and the increased workload in Year 1. Two teachers highlighted 'recording' (i.e. writing activities) as a specific area of work that children appeared to find difficult. This was because they were used to more practical activities. Five teachers mentioned that some children found it difficult to follow instructions. A further two said that the children were finding it difficult to manage independently and often still needed adult help and support.

Teachers were asked what action they had taken to deal with these difficulties and the majority said that they responded to children's individual needs. In most cases children were given additional adult support or differentiated work that was considered to be more appropriate for their level of attainment.

Year 1 teachers were asked how this group of children compared with previous years in terms of adjustment and just under half felt they had coped better. Teachers gave a number of reasons for this, most of which were associated with the composition of the class. This group of children were considered to have coped better with the transition because:

- There were fewer children with behaviour problems than in previous years which had made a difference (two teachers).
- The children were generally more able than previous groups (three teachers).
- The class was smaller which meant the children got more individual attention (one teacher).

The Year 1 teachers and support staff in the schools that had continued the play-based, integrated approach into Year 1 mentioned that this had impacted on the children's adjustment. These people reported that children were adjusting better than they had in previous years and they felt that this was partly due to their change in practice. Comments included: 'there has been a big improvement because of all the similarities we have tried to introduce' and 'this year has been different...there has been a more gradual transition... and I think this has helped them with the transition'.

Year 1 teachers were asked to describe what signs might indicate to them that whether or not a child had settled well into Year 1. Teachers identified the following signs in children who were settling well:

- happy and enjoying school (nine teachers)
- 'on task' and not just wandering around the classroom (eight teachers)
- confident to approach the teachers and support staff (seven teachers)
- familiar with the routine and able to get on and work independently (five teachers)
- confident to join in with activities (two teachers)
- interacting well with the other children and forming friendships (two teachers).

Teachers said that children who were not settling well might be:

- unhappy and tearful (twelve teachers)
- reluctant to come to school (eight teachers)
- finding it difficult to concentrate (eight teachers)
- unsettled and seeking attention (six teachers)
- reclusive or withdrawn (four teachers).

Other indicators of difficulties mentioned by just one or two teachers included: children struggling with their work or following others because they were not sure what they should be doing.

The Year 1 support staff were asked to describe the role they played in children's transition. They saw themselves as providing support to the children, targeting help to those that needed it. They also felt it was important that they were viewed as approachable by the children and that they could provide reassurance when needed

### 6.2.5 Practices and pedagogies aimed at smoothing the transition

Year 1 teachers and support staff were asked to identify practices that were helping children to adjust to Year 1. The main practices/organisational changes reported by interviewees were:

- **The extension of Foundation Stage practice into Year 1** – 14 teachers/teaching assistants mentioned that providing for play-based learning had helped children to adjust. One school had invested in additional resources to mirror the equipment that children were used to in Reception class.
- **Friendships** – 12 interviewees mentioned friendships as being an important factor in helping children to adjust to the changes.
- **Familiar adults** – nine teachers said that having adults in Year 1 who were familiar to the children had helped the children to settle.
- **Having a similar routine** – six interviewees reported that having a similar routine in Year 1 and Reception had helped children adjust.
- **Having the same rules** – two teachers said that having the same rules and similar expectations in terms of behaviour had made it easier for children.
- **Having linked resources/activities** – two teachers explained that they had used specific resources to create continuity between Reception and Year 1 and this had helped children to manage the changes.

As mentioned earlier, there were differences in the approaches to teaching adopted by the Year 1 teachers across the sample of case-study schools. Year 1 teachers in three schools had changed their practice considerably and had continued the pedagogical approach from the Foundation Stage into Year 1. Year 1 teachers in seven schools had made minimal changes and had introduced the subject-based curriculum and more formal teaching methods from the beginning. Two schools had introduced some practices to ease the children's transition but generally their approach to learning was not integrated or play-based.

In schools that were continuing the play-based approach into Year 1 and gradually increasing the structure, teachers reported that the continuity in learning had helped to smooth the transition. For example, one teacher working in a school that had changed their approach this year explained how it had aided the transition: ‘The set-up has helped them to adjust more easily. In previous years when they were sitting down [for more formal teaching] it was more difficult for them to cope with. The idea is to gradually introduce them to that structure a term at a time’.

However, a teaching assistant working at one of these schools expressed concern that the changes in approach might hold some children back: ‘I do worry about whether it [the play-based approach] holds back the high flyers and the more able children... But...if you pitch things higher then some children who aren’t attaining may suffer’. One of the teachers adopting a similar approach commented on this issue too, asserting that the changes should not hold back the more able children. However, she explained that she would have to do more to ‘ensure that those children were stretched and working appropriately during free-sessions’.

Year 1 teachers in schools that had introduced a more subject-based, structured approach reported that they had tried to give children opportunities for play and child-initiated learning in the afternoons to help the children to adjust to the changes. For example, one teacher commented:

*I give them quite a lot of free time in the afternoon, basically because they are not able to concentrate. I am gradually trying to introduce work in the afternoon and then they can have free play. I also try to do active things in every afternoon in the hall... we don’t have a lot of space but they can go in the book corner and make up stories with the puppets and then show them to the class, they make models, sometimes I ask them to do something specific or they can do their own thing.*

However, teachers pointed out that this would change as time went on as they felt they needed to introduce more structured approach in order to cover the curriculum requirements for Year 1. For example, one teacher explained:

*I think towards the end of the year they will get slightly less [free play]. Other things take their place, more structured technology and the activities become more directed and have to fit in more with the curriculum.*

In some cases Year 1 teachers had made small changes to their approach at the beginning of Year 1. For example, teachers reported that they taught more formal subjects (i.e. literacy and numeracy) in the mornings and taught what they termed as the ‘more practical’ subjects, such as PE, music and art, in the afternoons. One teacher explained ‘we try to do the most structured lessons in the morning and then they don’t have to concentrate as much in the afternoon’.

This teacher reported that she felt constrained by the curriculum for Year 1 ‘we have a lot to get through in Year 1 and just have to get on with it’. Another teacher expressed concern about the appropriateness of the Year 1 curriculum and approach, but she had not taken any action as she did not feel it was something she had control over:

*We haven't got enough of the practical activities for the children [in Year 1] and it all moves on too quickly...the pace is too fast...nothing is being consolidated. We should all have role play situations for these children for things like teaching money but we don't because they have to start recording [in Year 1].*

In addition to pedagogic approaches, the majority of those interviewed mentioned friendships as being important for children. In the six schools that had mixed-age classes, Reception classes had been split in half to join classes comprising both Years 1 and 2. In these cases, teacher reported that they had taken friendships into consideration when allocating children to classes because this helped children to adjust. For example, one teacher commented: ‘they [the children] are with some friends from last year and that helps’. In addition, several teachers kept the same groups for children to work in during the first half-term in Year 1. For example, one teacher explained: ‘we haven't moved the groups around yet, we will re-organise them but we haven't done that at the moment because the children are used to working in those groups and that helps them’.

Four schools had arranged for members of staff to move up to Year 1 with the children. In some cases the staff were teachers and in others they were members of support staff. This meant the children had a familiar adult to support them in Year 1 which created continuity and provided reassurance for children who were less confident. For example, one teacher explained:

*I think because they have me [the teacher they had in Reception] again and in the other class the Nursery Nurse moved up with them, each class have one familiar face in the class. We are thinking about continuing this practice by rotating the Nursery Nurse in Reception so they then move up to Year 1 with the class.*

Some Year 1 teachers ensured that routine activities such as registration, assembly and fruit/snack time were organised in a similar way in Reception and Year 1. This was considered to aid children's adjustment as children knew what to expect if the daily routine was similar in Year 1.

Having similar rules and expectations was mentioned by two teachers as important in relation to adjustment as it provided continuity for children. As one of these teachers explained:

*I think there is a continuity of expectation really, not on work but more sort of behaviour and attitude to other children and fellow pupils ... and that helps...there is a continuity of attitude and expectation, and in the way that disruptions are dealt with.*

One school used puppets in both Reception and Year 1, in order to create continuity for the children (see also Chapter 3).

Year 1 teachers were asked what specific support was given to children who had not yet achieved the Early Learning Goals. The majority of teachers said that it was part of the teaching assistant's role to provide additional support for these children. They also said that tasks would be differentiated so that work was appropriate for their level. One teacher explained: 'we do try to start where they come from so they are not working on Year 1 objectives as such; well they are, but it is really watered down'. In some schools teachers reported that they planned to target certain children for intervention work after Christmas.

In one school where the children were set by ability in Year 1, children who had not achieved their Early Learning Goals would return to Reception class on occasions as it was felt this was a more appropriate environment for them.

In two of the schools that were operating an integrated, play-based approach, teachers said that this enabled children of all abilities to succeed: 'they can work at their own level and there will always be opportunities for them to be working at a level that is academically appropriate'. One of the teachers said that because the environment enabled the children to progress at their own rate, 'less able' children (those children in the lower ability groups) could 'continue to develop the Early Learning Goals' whilst in Year 1. However, one teacher in a school that had introduced the subject-based curriculum said this question was irrelevant because she did not refer back to the Early Learning Goals once children were in Year 1, preferring to measure children's progress against the National Curriculum levels.

### **6.2.6 Year 1 teachers' use of records and assessment data**

Teachers were asked how they had used the information provided in the Foundation Stage Profile (FSP). Most Year 1 teachers said they had used the FSP for specific purposes, especially allocating children to ability groups and setting targets for individuals. Three teachers reported using the information to help them group the children by ability and three teachers reported using the Profiles to help them set targets. One teacher commented that, although she used the information from the Profile for target-setting, she found this difficult as the criteria were so different in the Foundation Stage:

*I don't find the Foundation Stage Profile information an awful lot of use for things like that because the criteria for what you are judging at the end of key stage 1 is so different. I look at the Profiles and try to make a judgement but it is time consuming and not very easy to do.*

One Year 1 teacher reported using the Profile to identify children's individual learning styles. However, this teacher suggested that Year 1 staff could not 'rely solely on Reception teachers' accounts as 'they don't always understand the full needs and differences in Year 1'.

In one case, a Year 1 teacher said that she had not used any of the information in the Profiles: 'we haven't [used the information] we haven't looked at them [the Profiles] at all...we just don't have time'. Two teachers made similar comments, saying that the Profile was 'too in-depth' and this made it difficult for Year 1 staff to use: 'I rarely use the Profile, it is unmanageable, there is just no time in school to absorb it all and for it to be meaningful'. Another teacher reported that she carried out her own assessments once children were in Year 1: 'It has been a glance [at the Profile] to be honest. You make your own judgements even with your grouping... you tend to do it yourself'.

The Year 1 teachers reported receiving various other records and assessment data from the Reception staff including:

- examples of work (three teachers)
- literacy and numeracy records (three teachers)
- written reports (two teachers)
- reading records (one teacher)
- Performance Indicator in Primary Schools (PIPS) data (one teacher)

When asked what information teachers had found most useful, only one teacher named the Profile. This particular teacher had moved up with the children from Reception class, which meant she had been responsible for completing the Profiles for the children in her Year 1 class:

*For me, I find the Foundation Stage Profile most useful, because it covers so many different areas... including the relationships they have with other children as well as literacy and numeracy. I don't think you can keep going back to it though. If I had taken over a different class I would have liked to have had time set aside to share information about the children... I think one to one [oral liaison] is better than paper and reports.*

Seven Year 1 teachers said they found the oral exchange of information most useful. This was because it was more of a two-way process which enabled them to ask questions. Comments included: 'speaking to the people they had

been with I found much more useful' because they could 'talk about things that are not always valued by assessments' and 'if I had any quick thing I want to discuss she [the Reception teacher] was really good because she has had first-hand experience with the children'.

Two Year 1 teachers reported that they found the school records and literacy and numeracy records most useful as this information helped them to group the children by ability and work out who may need extra support in these areas.

### **6.2.7 Communication with parents after the transition**

During the second visits to the case-study schools, we asked the Year 1 teachers if they had met with the parents of the children in their new class and, if so, for what reason. The majority of teachers said they had met most of the parents of the children in their class, but many of these meetings were informal.

Five of the 12 case-study schools had organised a formal meeting for parents during the first half of the autumn term. Year 1 teachers reported that these meetings had provided an opportunity for parents to formally meet their child's new teacher, see the classroom and find out a bit more about the Year 1 curriculum. For example, one teacher explained:

*We had an introduction talk in the second week for parents. They could come and look at the classroom and volunteer to help with group reading, and the parents commented on it being useful.*

However, when asked if this meeting had helped to support children's learning the same teacher suggested that it had had a limited impact: 'I think they [the parents] can be selective in what they take back'.

Most other Year 1 teachers felt that the meetings had helped to support children's learning because they had made parents more aware of what their children would be learning in Year 1 and the teaching strategies that would be used. They had also provided an opportunity to 'explain strategies' that parents could use to help their children at home both 'academically and socially'. One teacher commented: 'I think if parents are aware they can help their children at home things can change a lot, but you need to help them know how to help'.

Two schools had already held their parents' evening which had provided an opportunity for parents and teachers to meet to discuss how the children had adjusted after the transition. In one school a teacher reported that the meeting had supported learning as it had enabled her to 'talk through expectations' in terms of homework and to discuss any problems that might have arisen with

the children's parents. However, she reported that staff found it difficult to involve parents at the school and only a third of the parents in her class had attended the parents evening.

Year 1 teachers at two schools reported arranging meetings with parents whose children had Special Educational Needs (SEN). Other professionals who were working with the child were also invited to these meetings and children's individual progress towards targets was discussed.

Five teachers said that they had a great deal of informal contact with parents at the start and end of the day. These teachers explained that they tried to encourage informal communication and operated an 'open-door' policy so that any concerns from parents could be dealt with straight away.

However, Year 1 teachers at a few of the case-study schools reported that they felt it was inappropriate and unnecessary for parents to bring their children into the classroom. For example, one teacher explained that parents were asked to drop their children off in the playground: 'We don't really have much time to talk to parents...we take the children into the classroom in the morning and we ask parents not to come up with issues then as it is such a busy time.'

## 6.2.8 Training about the transition to Year 1

During the first visits, three of the 11 Year 1 teachers reported that they had recently received specific training/support in relation to the transition to Year 1. Two of these teachers had received training/support from their Local Education Authority (LEA) and the other teacher had received school-based training that had been arranged by the headteacher.

The LEA training had focused on the Foundation Stage curriculum and approach, the Foundation Stage Profile and making links between the Early Learning Goals and the National Curriculum for Year 1. The two teachers who had attended the training had found it really useful:

*I had a half day two or three weeks ago... it was very helpful, I must admit. They covered the Profile in great detail and explained how we were to take it into Year 1. They gave us a very concise but very clear idea of the difference between the old Reception and the new Foundation Stage two... it is different from the way it was before... now we know where they are coming from... the differences were explained and it was a very, very useful course.*

The headteacher at the other school had made arrangements for the Year 1 staff to visit another school that had continued the Foundation Stage pedagogy into Year 1. One of the Year 1 teachers reported that she had found this experience really useful:

*I think we all felt pretty aware of the philosophy down in Foundation Stage but it was how we made that match with Year 1 learning objectives in that free-flow setting... all the staff [at the school they had visited] were on hand to tell us about their experiences.*

All members of staff at this school held a meeting after the visits and discussed the issues raised. As a result, they decided to adopt a similar play-based approach in Year 1 at their school.

One of the teachers who had not had access to any training on transition issues expressed an interest in attending training. She suggested that this might provide Year 1 teachers with ideas on how they can help to smooth children's transitions: 'maybe if there was some transition training put in place...we would be a bit clearer in ways we could help a bit more'.

During the second visits, teachers were asked how familiar they were with the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage. Two teachers said that they knew it well because they had recently taught in Reception classes. However, four teachers reported that they were not familiar with it at all. Three of these teachers had taught in Reception before the introduction of the Foundation Stage. One teacher commented:

*I have worked in Reception but that was before the Foundation Stage came in so it was much more formal and you were teaching the National Curriculum then in Reception classes... I have seen the levels on children's IEPs [individual education plans for children with special needs] but other than that I don't really know much about it.*

The remaining Year 1 teachers reported that they were fairly familiar with the guidance. One teacher said that she had a copy of it to which she referred on occasion. Several teachers reported that they would like to look at the guidance more closely and develop more of an understanding of the principles behind it but they just did not have the time.

The Year 1 teachers who were familiar with guidance said that it had influenced the way they taught the Key Stage 1 curriculum, particularly in terms of providing for play-based learning and child-initiated activities. One teacher commented:

*I am trying to adopt similar approaches... but in Year 1 it is difficult. In Reception they are more like nursery now and in Year 2 they are trying to prepare for the juniors and I am trying to bridge the gap. I feel as though I am being pulled one way and another way and it is difficult to get it right. It does worry me sometimes because I feel maybe I am not doing enough for Year 2 or I am doing too much for them [the children].*

Year 1 teachers were asked if they would find further training or support useful in relation to transition and if so what kind of training and from whom (e.g. school level or LEA level). Twelve teachers said they would benefit from additional training/support and the majority felt that this should be external training provided by the LEA because 'a lot of Year 1 teachers feel the same'. One teacher reported that school based training and support would be most useful as it would enable more collaboration between the Foundation Stage staff and those in Year 1:

*It would be useful to have school level training and opportunities for more discussion with the Foundation Stage staff. I suppose it would be useful to know more about what goes on in Reception and to discuss the Profiles.*

The areas in which Year 1 teachers requested training were:

- making links between the Foundation Stage and key stage 1 (seven teachers)
- the Foundation Stage Profile (five teachers)
- good practice and opportunities to share ideas (two teachers)
- how to involve parents in the transition process (one teacher).

The most common issue for which Year 1 teachers requested training was how to make links between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Some Year 1 teachers wanted more information about Foundation Stage practice as they felt this could help them to deliver the Year 1 curriculum using similar approaches. Others wanted training on progression so that they could build on what children had learnt in Reception without moving too quickly. Comments included:

*It would be useful to have more information about the Foundation Stage so we are really familiar with it. I think reading the Profiles helps but any training on how you could deliver the Year 1 curriculum in a slightly more practical way, how you could fit it into a more Foundation Stage approach... that would be most useful.*

*It would be useful to have training on how to develop the curriculum from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 over time and how to go from one to the other. Sometimes I think that we are going too quickly and they move on too soon. I suppose if we had some training it would give us some ammunition for management. We could then feed that back and justify what we are doing like maybe continuing the Foundation Stage up until Christmas for instance.*

There was evidence from the interview data of some uncertainty from Year 1 teachers about the purpose of the Foundation Stage Profile (for examples see Section 6.2.6) and several teachers said they would like some training to enable them to use the Profile to inform their Year 1 planning.

Three Year 1 teachers said they would like the opportunity to visit other schools to see how they were managing the transition. For example, one teacher said: 'I would like to go and visit other schools with the same type of systems and compare notes about what they are doing and see how they go about their planning, sharing ideas'. Another teacher said:

*I would find it useful to have some more ideas for setting up... ways of using resources in an interesting way that stimulates and pulls children in...we have visited another school before and it was really useful going to see other practitioners and seeing what they had in their rooms.*

As well as identifying their own training, one teacher felt that it was important for training to be addressed at senior managers so that the issues relating to transition would be appreciated and addressed from a whole-school perspective. She said training could enable managers to develop more of an 'understanding of the problems with the transition to key stage 1'. She felt it was easy for senior managers to lose track of the issues 'because they haven't been teaching for such a long time' and that training could help to address this problem.

## **6.3 Summary of issues for Year 1 staff**

### ***Preparation for the transition***

- The liaison between Reception staff and Year 1 staff consisted mainly of one-to-one discussion about the children's progress and development.
- All of the Year 1 teachers said that Reception teachers passed on the Foundation Stage Profiles and various other records and assessment data to them.
- The Year 1 teachers planned to use these records to group the children by ability, to set targets and to inform their planning.
- Only one Year 1 teacher reported having any contact with parents before children made the transition to Year 1 which meant that in most cases parents did not have an opportunity to discuss any concerns with their child's new teacher before the transition.

### ***After the transition***

- The majority of Year 1 teachers reported that there were differences in the learning environment in Year 1, most commonly: less space, less adult support, less play equipment and limited access to the outside.

- In the majority of schools the opportunities for child-initiated activities were limited. Child-initiated activities were limited to ‘golden time’ once a week and were used as a reward for completion of work.
- Visits to the case-study schools revealed differences in the approaches to teaching adopted by the Year 1 teachers. Teachers in a number of schools had changed their approach specifically to aid transition.
- Year 1 teachers in three schools were continuing the integrated, play-based approach into Year 1 and planned to gradually increase the structure. These teachers reported that the continuity in learning had helped to smooth the transition.
- In schools that had introduced a subject-based, more structured teaching approach teachers reported that they had tried to reduce the amount of structure in the afternoons to help the children to adjust to the changes.
- The majority of Year 1 teachers had spent at least one morning with their new class before the transition. Teachers felt that these visits had provided children with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the Year 1 classroom and get to know their new teacher.
- A few schools had organised a series of visits for children and had invited parents into school to meet their child’s new teacher and see their child’s new classroom. These activities were considered to have aided children’s transition.
- The majority of Year 1 teachers and support staff felt it was important for children to have good listening skills, to be able to work as a group and to be able to get on with tasks independently of adult help.
- The majority of Year 1 teachers felt that the children were coping well with the transition to Year 1. However, four teachers reported that some of the children in the class had found it more difficult.
- The majority of Year 1 teachers had noticed differences in the way that individual children had responded to the transition and reported that younger, ‘less able’ children (those performing at a lower level), children with EAL, children with SEN, and boys were identified as those finding it more difficult to cope with the changes.
- The information in the Foundation Stage Profile was not always used by Year 1 teachers. Some teachers commented that Profiles were unmanageable and difficult to use.
- Most Year 1 teachers said they had met with parents by the end of the first half-term, but only five schools had organised a formal parents’ meeting by the time of the case study visit.
- The majority of Year 1 teachers felt they would benefit from additional training and guidance in relation to transition, especially on making links with the Foundation Stage and using the FSP.



## 7 School management issues

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter is based on 30 interviews with school managers in the 12 case study schools. Interviews were held with 12 Headteachers, ten Foundation Stage Coordinators (FSCs) (two schools did not have FSCs in post at the time of the research) and eight school governors. All the interviews took place during the summer term of 2004.

Each respondent group was asked slightly different questions relating to their specific role in the transition from Foundation Stage to Year 1. The headteacher interview schedule was the most detailed, asking about all the themes below:

- Professional background
- How schools had adapted their environment to implement the Foundation Stage curriculum
- The use of assessment tools, including the Foundation Stage Profile (FSP)
- The role of school governors in relation to transition
- The roles of school staff in relation to transition
- Communication with parents about transition issues
- Provision of staff training and support for transition.

As the headteacher interviews were the most extensive, the information in this chapter focuses primarily on their views. However, information from the FSCs and governors is included, where appropriate.

### 7.2 About the interviewees

Most of the 12 headteachers were highly experienced, having worked in education for 20 years or more. The length of time they had spent working in their current schools ranged from two to 26 years. Eight had trained to teach the primary school age range, and two specialised in the early years of education.

Five of the headteachers had received further training related to early education since their initial qualification (on science in the early years, the Foundation Stage and the use of the FSP). One headteacher had received training on transition, although this focused on the transition between Years 3 and 4 or 6 and 7, not transition in the early years.

Two of those who had received no training in the early years since their initial qualification mentioned that they had taken advantage of 'on the job training',

having learnt from their experiences of teaching in a nursery, Reception or Year 1.

The ten Foundation Stage Coordinators had between five and 35 years of teaching experience. They had been teaching younger children for between two and 25 years.

Most FSCs had initially trained for the three- to five-year-old age group, though some had been trained for the 'whole primary range'. Most had also received some post-qualification training, including courses specifically related to the Foundation Stage curriculum or Profile. Several had also received training on other aspects of the Foundation Stage such as transition (particularly between nursery and Reception), the learning environment, outdoor provision and observation and assessment. One FSC had undertaken a Masters degree, which included a module on Early Years.

Most of the eight school governors had more than one area of responsibility. For example, they represented staff or parents and had responsibility for non-teaching staff, Early Years, children with special educational needs or Gifted and Talented. Two were Chairs of governors. Most of the governors interviewed had a close relationship with the school: two were support staff and several had children or grandchildren attending the school.

### **7.3 Accommodating the Foundation Stage curriculum**

The headteachers and FSCs were asked whether their school had made any changes to buildings or outdoor space in order to accommodate the Foundation Stage. All the headteachers said that their schools had adapted the building in some way, most commonly to create a more suitable space. Headteachers had rearranged the use of space, for example by converting a staff room into a play area, redecorating and rearranging classrooms to allocate space for role-play areas. In three cases, more extensive building work was not appropriate because the school was relatively new, however, in one case the headteacher said that the school did not have sufficient funds to make radical changes.

Heads and FSCs in all 12 schools said that their schools had space for outdoor learning, although many described their outdoor areas as '*undeveloped*'. Not all had a specific outdoor area designated for children in the Foundation Stage and only three provided children with free access to an area equipped with sand, water and large toys. Most of the FSCs said that there were still adaptations they would like to make to the outdoor environments in order to make them more suitable for the FS. Those that did not have designated outdoor areas for the FS were planning to build one in the future, with some heads saying that they had already met with architects and secured funding for

these changes. It was evident that these headteachers were keen to provide outdoor learning environments for Year 1 too. However, none had such provision at present (aside from the general playground area).

## **7.4 School policy and practice on transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1**

Headteachers and Foundation Stage Coordinators were asked if their schools had a policy on transition to Key Stage 1 and, if so, how this policy had been developed. Most reported that their school did have a policy on transition, although about half described it as 'informal'. For example, one headteacher said: 'I suppose the main thing at the moment is that we have principles that we are applying and they underlie what we are doing.'

All those headteachers and Foundation Stage Coordinators who described their policy as informal said that they planned to formalise the policy in the near future. Reasons given for having not done this already included: dealing with other challenges; focusing on implementing the Foundation Stage curriculum; and, in one case, not having a Foundation Stage Coordinator.

In four schools, practice on transition had formed part of a more extensive policy relating to the Foundation Stage. One headteacher said she disliked formalised, written policies as she felt approaches to transition should be more dynamic and responsive.

Three of the schools with a more formal policy gave copies to the research team. Transition to Year 1 was mentioned briefly in two, but one school had produced a two-page document including notes on the approach to transition, curriculum guidance, teaching approaches, planning, resources and assessment.

Headteachers were asked about the school development plan and whether transition was currently a focus within it. In half the case study schools, headteachers reported that it was.

Headteachers had a variety of reasons for including transition in the SDP. These included making the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 more child-centred; developing play and discovery learning; a need to address issues of a three-form entry and high proportion of pupils with EAL; overcoming downward pressure from Key Stage 1; addressing the difference between the curriculum and pedagogy in Reception and Year 1; and concerns about continuity of assessment between the two year groups.

## **7.5 How were policies on transition developed?**

Headteachers were asked to comment on how their school policies had been developed and by whom. Some described how they had arrived at their current policy, however informal it was at present. Others described how they would go about developing the policy when the time was right to formalise it. All of them reported that a wide range of people had been (or would be) involved. These included:

- staff in Nursery, Reception and Year 1
- teaching assistants
- Foundation Stage coordinators
- Head Teachers themselves
- governors
- parents
- children (through school councils)
- LEA officers
- other schools.

Headteachers also commented on the ways that policy had been (or would be) created. These ranged from informal to formal approaches, for example, on head based the policy on ‘my own practice as a class teacher translated into leadership and management’, another said she would collaborate with all key players. Some saw this as a developmental process, for example, one head said that establishing practice should happen first before making it into policy and another explained that the Foundation Stage staff and Year 1 teachers were experimenting with different methods of addressing transition issues. Others described more formal methods of policy development, including a working party and meetings to the implications of legislation and official guidance.

## **7.6 Assessment and the Foundation Stage Profile**

Headteachers were asked what approach they had adopted, if any, to help Reception teachers complete the Foundation Stage Profiles. Not all headteachers offered support to staff for this activity. Of those who did, the majority said their Reception teachers were given release time to complete the FSP and other assessment tools. This included deploying support staff to free teachers to complete assessment records. One headteacher mentioned that the Reception teachers used INSET days to complete assessment records.

When answering this question, most headteachers took the opportunity to express their thoughts about the FSP. They had mixed opinions on its usefulness. One Headteacher commented: ‘it is all very new, I’m not sure what

staff think about it.’ A few were critical of the FSP’s structure and usefulness. One headteacher felt strongly:

*[The FSP] isn’t used at all apart from having to fill it in and send it off! It is poorly written and thought out. It is unprofessional; staff are told to do focused observation which removes them from their job of teaching. Staff fill it in more conscientiously than I would. It is total waste of their time. What helps with transition is the discussion between staff with the class list. The profile damages that.’ Another commented: ‘Personally I am not comfortable with the complexity of it. It’s devised with good will, to do the best for the children, but there are mixed views about what is required. It’s difficult to interpret and impossible to get evidence for every attainment!’*

## **7.7 The role of subject coordinators, support staff and school governors**

### **7.7.1 The role of subject coordinators**

Headteachers were asked what role, if any, subject coordinators had in advising staff in Key Stage 1 and the Foundation Stage teaching. Their responses were split between those that described some degree of involvement and those who said there was little or no involvement.

Headteachers thought that the role of subject coordinators in the Foundation Stage was more difficult than their role in Key Stage 1, because many subject coordinators had no experience of the Foundation Stage. In addition, a small number of headteachers said that they perceived a gap between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 that subject coordinators found difficult to traverse. One respondent commented: ‘If you are the Literacy coordinator, how can you be expected to be an expert in literacy in Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2?’

A few headteachers felt that their subject coordinators were able to advise on Foundation Stage teaching. One headteacher explained that, due to a policy of rotating the teachers and year groups, most of the teachers in the school had taught in Reception and so had a good understanding of the issues concerned. In another school, the headteacher said that it was not always appropriate for subject coordinators to advise on teaching, but they could keep all Foundation Stage teachers fully informed of courses, resources and new initiatives that would help them to keep their practice up to date.

Headteachers felt it was a challenge for subject coordinators to remain well informed about Foundation Stage approaches. In one school the headteacher explained that they had made it a personal development goal for subject

coordinators to find out about how their subjects fitted into the Foundation Stage.

FSCs were also asked this question. They felt that subject coordinators who were not based in the Foundation Stage did very little to support the transition from Reception to Year 1. This was because the subject coordinators were not familiar with the Foundation Stage curriculum and were not well placed to advise them. Some commented that other teachers thought of the Foundation Stage as '*separate*' or '*tagged on*' to the National Curriculum. As one FSC commented: 'I think a lot of staff feel that they don't know much about the curriculum in Foundation. This makes it difficult'. Rather than subject coordinators advising them, FSCs said they had offered advice to subject coordinators to help them understand how their subject area linked to the Foundation Stage.

### **7.7.2 The role of support staff**

Headteachers and FSCs were asked about the deployment of support staff. All said that at least one non-teaching member of staff worked in each Reception and Year 1 class. In a few cases they talked about the support staff as full partners, who worked with teachers in the classroom and were involved in curriculum planning. Other school managers referred to support staff more as resources that would be deployed throughout the school as necessary. The main tasks that support staff carried out were identified as:

- working with SEN pupils
- literary and numeracy support
- working with small groups of children.

### **7.7.3 The role of school governors**

Head teachers and FSCs were asked about the roles of governors in transition. Most reported that they did not currently have a governor responsible for the Foundation Stage. A small number added that they did not feel this was necessary.

According to headteachers, governors were only involved in transition issues when these infringed on other areas. One respondent gave the example of the governors becoming involved in discussions about transition at a time when the school was considering sharing their school site with a local nursery school. In this case, the discussion centred on the transition from nursery to Reception.

The governors were asked about their role in transition. The discussion focused on whether the transition between Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 had been discussed at governors meetings. Most said that this transition had not been discussed during meetings, although a few mentioned that other aspects of the Foundation Stage had. Typically these were related to whole school issues such as building work and funding. A few also mentioned organising meetings at which information was passed on to parents.

## **7.8 The concerns of parents and others during transition**

Headteachers did not feel that parents had particular concerns about the transition from Reception to Year 1. They felt that most parents took it for granted that this was a natural progression for their children. They added that if parents did have concerns about any issue, it was crucial to address these worries by intervening early.

The literature review had revealed some concern for particular groups of children during transition. We therefore asked schools about their provision for potentially vulnerable groups, including children with special educational needs (SEN), English as an additional language and children from minority ethnic groups.

Most schools took an integrated approach to supporting children with SEN, with support being coordinated by SENCOs, teaching assistants and additional teachers from outside the school. One headteacher commented that it was easy to meet the needs of children with SEN in Reception because of the high numbers of staff available. Several heads said they were reluctant to label children too early, and preferred to consider each child as an individual.

Most of the case study schools had very few children who spoke English as an additional language (EAL). In the two schools where they did have pupils with EAL, heads felt it was important to support the parents of the children as well as the children themselves. These schools had a member of staff with responsibility for this group. One commented that representation of such parents was low at meetings, which was something that staff were keen to address. In order to do so, the school had used an interpreter to facilitate communication.

## **7.9 Training for transition to Key Stage 1**

Headteachers were asked whether training on the transition to Key Stage 1 was available to their staff. Eight of the headteachers were unaware of any training opportunities specifically related to transition between Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 available in their area. Several mentioned training on

the Foundation Stage (including transition) which was offered by Early Excellence Centres. The remaining four were aware of training opportunities in their area (though not necessarily offered by the LEA) and reported that a number of their staff had attended such courses and found them very useful.

One headteacher reported that his school had actually hosted training visits for other schools. These had been aimed at schools that were interested in seeing how they had approached implementing the Foundation Stage curriculum and how they tackled transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

The response of FSCs was similar to that of the headteachers. Most were not aware of any training specifically aimed at transition. Two had attended LEA courses on the Foundation Stage but reported that these had not focused on transition to Key Stage 1.

## **7.10 The influence of headteachers' backgrounds and experience on their approach to early years policy**

In considering headteachers' views, we were interested to explore whether their views appeared to differ in relation to their training and experience of the early years. This issue was even raised directly by one of the headteachers, who said:

*The OFSTED inspector asked me where I got my ideas for the curriculum for this school. I said 'I am an infant teacher' and he said 'That's all you need to say to me because infant teachers have a different perspective to the curriculum than primary school heads who have been junior teachers'.*

The analysis revealed that there was some evidence of a link between headteachers' background/experience and the priority they attached to provision for the early years. Headteachers who had trained initially to teach infants, had subsequent training in relation to Early Years or had experience of teaching Early Years appeared to have a more 'child centred' approach to transition and the Foundation Stage. This was evident in their interest in the following:

- children's experiences of the Foundation Stage
- children's experience of transition to Year 1
- the priority placed on transition policy within the school
- inclusion of transition issues in the school development plan.

Three of the headteachers talked about what had inspired them to focus on Early Years and/or this transition in particular. One headteacher said:

*What we found a few years ago was that we had put so much energy into developing a Foundation curriculum which was active and challenging, that when children went to Year 1 they were stood looking longingly through a door at where they had come from. It was sad to see them and we sat down and talked about why that was happening and started changing the physical environment in Year 1 and [thinking about] how to deliver the curriculum too.*

Another of the Headteachers recounted that the high priority given to this transition had come from:

*Values and beliefs about what should happen to children in any transition stage. My driving principle is that for a smooth transition it is not a question of replicating what has gone before, it is a question of creating an environment and an approach which builds on what has gone on before but has sufficient familiar features to enable children to feel secure and confident.*

A third said: 'I am sure if we can get transition right it will help to raise the standards of the children.'

One of the issues raised by headteachers concerned the pressure to prepare children for more formal learning. There was some debate about whether this preparation should begin in the Reception year. One head teacher said: 'I think the major force in education recently has been towards standardisation for assessment purposes. So you start looking at Reception children as potential Year 6 level 4s.' Another said:

*There was the pressure of SATS and the pressure was being applied downward. We've got to get the children to be able to do this, so you have to do that and therefore Reception has got to be more formal. I wasn't keen to bow to that type of pressure so we were looking at it the other way round. How to get the best examples of Foundation Stage moved into Year 1 and still continue with the quality of and raising standards in Year 2, the SATS.*

Not all headteachers felt that transition was an immediate priority for their school. For example, one headteacher had taught infants and Reception and had attended relevant training offered by the LEA. Despite this, transition issues and the Foundation Stage were not currently high on the school's agenda. The school had an informal policy on transition in general (not specific to Year 1) but no mention of it was made on the school development plan. This headteacher explained that the school had inadequate space for Foundation Stage, and this placed restrictions on the school's ability to

implement the curriculum. Consideration of transition issues, he felt, would therefore have to wait until this was resolved.

### **7.11 Summary of the school management issues related to transition**

- The transition to Year 1 was considered important by most headteachers and FSCs. Most schools had an informal policy on the transition.
- Transition to Key Stage 1 was mentioned in the school development plan in half of the case study schools.
- Most schools had adapted their environments to improve the delivery of the Foundation Stage curriculum.
- Headteachers commonly supported staff in completing the FSP by giving them non-contact time. Some headteachers expressed concern about the time it took to complete the FSP.
- Governors had not been very involved in issues concerning this transition but had been involved in some issues concerning the Foundation Stage.
- Where subject coordinators did not have experience of working in the Foundation Stage, their role in supporting transition was felt to be undermined by a lack of knowledge of the Foundation Stage curriculum and approaches.
- Headteachers felt that parents were not particularly concerned about their child's transition to Year 1.
- Most respondents were aware of training relevant to the Foundation Stage, some of which included transition issues.

## 8 Schools' transition practices

This chapter describes some of the practices adopted in case-study schools to aid children's transition to Year 1. It provides an over-view of transition strategies, illustrated with examples from the case study schools. The chapter ends with a description of the multiple strategies adopted by one of the schools.

This research aimed to identify 'best practice' approaches for managing the transition successfully and with minimal disruption to the child's development. However, we cannot claim with any certainty that the examples provided here constitute 'best' or even 'effective' practice. Many of the staff we interviewed explained that they had implemented various strategies with the intention of helping children manage the transition to Year 1, but they were not entirely sure whether the strategies had had the desired effect. This would require a longitudinal study to assess children's developmental outcomes over time. In putting together the information for this chapter, we have highlighted what the case study schools were doing and provided examples of practices that interviewees perceived to have been helpful.

### 8.1 Types of transition practice

The practices adopted in case study schools to help smooth transition to Year 1 fell into three main categories, concerned with induction, continuity and communication. These are outlined below.

#### **Induction**

Practices used to introduce children to year 1 included:

- Arranging specific transition activities for children towards the end of the Reception year (e.g. visits to their new classroom, opportunities to meet their new teacher)
- Including Reception class children in 'whole school' activities (such assemblies and playtimes)
- Involvement of Reception children in joint activities with Year 1.

### **Continuity**

Practices used to ensure continuity of experience for children included:

- Adopting similar routines and having similar expectations of children's behaviour in Reception and Year 1
- Ensuring curriculum continuity between Reception and Year 1 (introducing 'Year 1' activities in Reception, and 'Reception' activities in Year 1; using similar themes in both years)
- Providing space and equipment for play-based activities in Year 1 (especially sand and water and role play)
- Ensuring continuity of staffing in Year 1 (teachers and/or teaching assistants 'moving up' to Year 1 with the children).

### **Communication**

Practices designed to establish a clear understanding between the school and others involved in transition included:

- Communication between staff in Reception and Year 1 (passing on children's records, joint curriculum planning, involvement of Reception staff in assigning children to groups in Year 1)
- Communication between Reception staff and parents (meetings and written communication)
- Communication between Reception staff and children about their expectations of Year 1.

The following sections give examples of transition practices in each of these categories.

## **8.2 Examples of induction practices**

The case-study schools adopted a number of practices aimed at introducing children to the kinds of experiences that they would encounter in Year 1.

### **8.2.1 Visits to Year 1 classes**

It was common practice for teachers to arrange for Reception classes to visit the Year 1 classes towards the end of the school year. Some of these visits were very brief, consisting of little more than a walk through the classroom. More commonly, Reception children spent a session doing 'Year 1' activities with their next teacher.

One school (I) had arranged a series of visits for Reception class children. The Reception teacher explained:

*One group go round to Year 1 once a week for an afternoon and spend the afternoon there with the Year 1 class and the Year 1 teacher. That has given them a taste of what it will be like in Year 1. Later on in the term they will have a day when they will all go as a class for a visit.*

When we spoke to the Reception children in this school, they said they knew what Year 1 would be like.

**Researcher:** What do you think it will be like in Year 1?

**Girl 1:** I went there for a visit. We will do things like pictures when we go to Year 1

**Girl 2:** I already know because I have been there because we had 'change over classes'.

**Boy:** We went in their class already. Everybody moved up and I went in the Year 1 class.

One of their parents said her daughter had benefited from these visits:

*She talked a little bit about the routine, she said that she already knew [the Year 1 teacher] and knew what to do. She had met [the teacher] and she now considered that she knew her and she knew what was expected of her.*

Another parent said:

*[My son] said that everyone moves up and the children in Year 6 were going to go to secondary school, so he knew exactly what was happening. [The visits] were really good and he liked it and liked the teacher and was really comfortable with it.*

The Year 1 Teaching Assistant in School B explained her school's system of visits whereby the Reception class visited Year 1 and the Year 1 teacher visited the Reception class. The teachers ensured that children were welcomed to the new class at the beginning of the school year:

*They [the Reception children] have visits from teachers and also visit the Year 1 class. Teachers read stories in their Reception class and they paint pictures which are displayed when they arrive in their new class. They also have named chairs and pegs so they know what is theirs in the room.*

## **8.2.2 Induction to the school community**

Several teachers mentioned that Reception children would be required to mix with children from the rest of the school once they started in Key Stage 1, but few identified any strategies to help children with this. However, staff in School F organised ‘a sing-along’ every Friday for children in Reception, Year 1 and 2. This enabled the children to visit their next classroom, meet the teacher and get used to larger groups of children (they would be joining a mixed class for children in Year 1 and 2). The staff said that they actively encouraged children to help one another – ‘everyone is looking out for everyone’ – and that children in Year 6 organised games for ‘the little ones’ during lunchtime play.

## **8.3 Examples of practices to ensure continuity**

Many teachers said that they had similar expectations of children in Reception and Year 1. Curriculum continuity was most commonly achieved by Reception class teachers introducing elements of the Key Stage 1 curriculum. Some Year 1 teachers adopted aspects of the Foundation Stage curriculum (especially elements of role play and a degree of free choice). A few schools ensured continuity of staffing for children as they moved to Year 1.

### **8.3.1 Continuity of approach in Reception and Year 1**

Several of the case-study schools attempted to provide activities and equipment in the Year 1 classroom that was familiar to children from the Reception class.

In School D, the Reception class was next door to the Year 1 class. The layout of the two rooms was similar, with both having areas devoted to role play and reading. The Teaching Assistant who worked in the Year 1 class explained that Reception activities were continued from Reception, although staff ensured that they were ‘more challenging’ in Year 1. This school used puppets to help create continuity for the children. The Reception puppet was called Molly and the Year 1 puppet was called Morris. Teachers used them to teach phonics. One of the children referred to the puppet when asked what sort of things he did in Year 1: ‘I read stories and play with Morris – he is a friend who lives behind the board.’

### **8.3.2 Continuity of staffing**

A few schools ensured that a member of staff ‘moved up’ to Year 1 with the class. Most often this was a member of support staff, although occasionally a teacher accompanied their class. In School I, the nursery nurse said that she had ‘moved up’ with the Reception class in the previous year:

*'I actually went up with them, for mornings only, for half a term. I think that it really helped them to have a familiar face. Even though they need to be reminded to put their coat on their peg, it is a familiar face reminding them... From a transition point of view it helped them.'*

## **8.4 Examples of practices aimed at improving communication**

Schools had adopted a number of strategies to aid communication about transition between staff, and with children and parents.

### **8.4.1 Communication between staff**

As mentioned in Chapter 5, most schools had 'hand over' meetings between staff in Reception and Year 1. For example, the Reception teacher in School E explained:

*We are having handover day on Friday when we will be able to talk to each of the Y1 teachers in turn... telling them about the children their personalities what they like and just any information that we think it is important for them to know. As well as this we have transition forms which we fill in for each child, which says their score on the FSP, the number of high frequency words they know [and] their reading level. It is also a chance to make them aware of any issues with family background. [These meetings] are a mixture of informal chat, although the information is presented in quite a formal way, [and] the academic information. Each of the children has also done a piece of work for their new teacher which they have written on independently, we haven't given them any help with their writing so the teachers will be able to see what stage their writing is at.*

### **8.4.2 Communication with children**

Few staff mentioned communicating with children about their move to the next year group when asked about their transition strategies, although it is quite possible that this was a 'taken for granted' part of their practice.

School E had organised a series of such visits for Reception children to familiarise themselves with the Year 1 classroom. During one such visit, the teacher gave the children an opportunity to discuss their expectations of Year 1 and to raise any concerns they might have:

*They had a PSHE [Personal Social and Health Education] lesson with me, and we discussed any worries that they might have, and what they thought Year 1 was going to be like... I think that the transition activities were very, very useful... they [the children] were well prepared, as prepared as they could be.*

Staff in School F said they raised the subject with children in Reception, as one member of staff said: ‘They are told that they are getting so clever they are almost too clever to be in [Reception] any more, so they know what is happening?’.

### **8.4.3 Communication with parents**

Most of the schools provided parents with some information prior to transition. In most cases this consisted of a letter informing parents about practical issues such as who would be their child’s Year 1 teacher and dates for parents’ evenings. Two schools provided copies of more detailed information that was sent to parents in the first term of Year 1. One of these gave general information about the school, homework timetables and details of the Year 1 syllabus and targets; the other gave answers to common question about Year 1 and provided some information on how parents could support their child’s learning at home.

Most of the case-study schools arranged meetings with parents, although these did not usually take place until after the transition. For example, the teacher of a mixed Year 1/2 class in School J invited parents to stay on in the classroom after bringing their children to school. The teacher explained that the intention was to show parents how best to help their child with reading and maths. This strategy was prompted by a belief that ‘Parents are very important, they know their kids best, and the school should support parents and provide them with information about how they can best support their kids.’ The headteacher commented on this new strategy: ‘[The teacher] has trialled this and it has been successful. We have had a lot of parents who do stay to do something with their children in the mornings and we are keen to continue that... It is about settling the children into the new classes in September.’

School E invited parents of children in Reception class to visit the class their children would be joining the following year. Parents were invited into school for a coffee morning during the summer term when they could accompany their children on a visit to the Year 1 class.

Two parents talked about the coffee morning both had found it a useful experience for themselves and their children:

*I thought that the parents’ coffee morning was a useful activity, it was nice to meet the new teacher and see who else was in the class ... the*

*only problem with these things is that all the parents want to speak to the teacher so it is quite crowded. He [my son] seemed to enjoy it; he just carried on and played with the children in the new class. I think he liked the day; he liked knowing who his teacher was.*

*That [the visit] went smoothly... it was great because she [my daughter] is a confident kid in that way and she is even less shy when I am with her... We just glanced around the classroom, did some pictures some drawings and so on, just normal stuff like that. We enjoyed it... really it was only for half an hour, but it was good.*

## 8.5 One school's approach to transition

One of the case study schools had developed a strategy which featured a number of practices designed to ease the transition between Reception and Year 1. It was evident from the interviews with staff and parents that these practices were perceived to have been successful. The comments from children at this school stood out as being particularly positive about the process of moving from Reception to Year 1 and also in relation to their experiences of Year 1.

The impetus for the school's approach had come from the head teacher who had taught in both nursery and Reception and had been part of the local EYDCP. The staff had been focusing on the transition from nursery to Reception and had then turned their attention to transition between Reception and Year 1. Transition was identified as a priority in the school development plan.

Both teaching and support staff said that they aimed to create a sense of continuity between Reception and Year 1. They wanted to make Year 1 'an experience for children to look forward to'. Staff prepared Reception children for transition by encouraging them to become more independent of adults. A teaching assistant described how they introduced more structured activities towards the end of the Reception year:

*When we do the literacy and numeracy hour now they [the children] have a got a job that they do on their own – 'cos in the beginning of the Reception year there is an adult with them when they do the jobs. So it is just making them more independent really, so that when they are ready for Y1 they can just go up there.*

The school created continuity between Reception and Year 1 by:

- Arranging for the Reception children to meet their new teacher before the end of the Reception year
- Keeping the two class groups intact during the move to Year 1 in order to preserve friendship groups.

- Moving teaching assistants up to Year 1 with the Reception classes. This provided children with continuity in staffing.
- Using similar class routines in Reception and Year 1 (e.g. keeping the same registration routine and order of activities)
- Creating continuity in learning resources (the Year 1 class was equipped with sand, water and play-based learning resources). Year 1 staff also organised outdoor activities for children linked with all areas of the curriculum.
- Keeping a similar curriculum structure in Year 1 and introducing aspects of the Key Stage 1 curriculum gradually over the year.

The headteacher explained the school's system for ensuring that children met their new teacher in advance:

*The teachers go and visit the children in their own classrooms and the children go and meet the teachers... They [the children] all go to the classrooms and spend some time with the teacher and talk about what is going to happen next year...it is then something to look forward to.*

*We have introduced an evening where children can bring their parents to see the classrooms and their new teacher. The summer holidays are a bit worrying for children if they are not sure what is going to happen to them. I think we need to get rid of the uncertainty for everyone.*

*I am lucky because I have quite a stable staff. I think it is more difficult if you have a high turnover of staff. When I have a new teacher starting, I arrange for them to come in for a day before the new term and spend time with their new class.*

A parent explained how these activities had helped her child settle in to Year 1 (in this case, the Reception class teacher had 'moved up' with the class.):

*Having the same teacher and being with her friend [has helped my daughter to settle]. A lot of the routines are familiar to her and... I think she has definitely benefited from the fact that they have had a more play-based approach this year.*

The Year 1 teacher talked about the school's approach to curriculum planning. She said there were many similarities between Reception and Year 1:

*The work has moved on, and that is the biggest difference. Some of the activities have moved on anyway naturally because of skills progression. We share some resources with Reception and nursery. We have the same equipment including the sand and water – this equipment might be linked with other curriculum areas, for example numeracy.*

When we visited the school in the autumn term, the children pointed out some of the similarities between Reception and Year 1:

**Researcher:** What is different about your new classroom from the one you were in last year?

**Girl:** We have the same toys, the Lego. We still play with the cars.

**Boy:** We still have the garage, which is my favourite game.

**Girl:** Yes, we have sand and water because we brought it with us.

**Boy:** We play with that when we do our jobs... We do choosing like we did in Reception.

One of the main differences highlighted by the children in Year 1 was that they now got to take part in a whole-school activity afternoon. This involved all children in the school, from Year 1 onwards. Children chose from a variety of arts activities and took part in them with children from other year groups. Even though this was not a transition strategy, it was something that Reception children looked forward to doing when they were in Year 1. One child identified this as his favourite thing: 'We get to make things, we meet up with other children from other classes: not Reception, because they don't do it.'

A parent said:

*'[My child's] favourite thing about being in Y1 is that she now gets to join in with [the activity afternoon] because she is creative and it is an outlet for her and it is a chance to see some other friends that she knows in the school.'*

In relation to communication, staff:

- Held informal discussions between staff working in Reception and Year 1, supplemented by the use of formal assessment records to identify each child's stage of development
- Spoke to parents informally at the end of each day; invited parents to the school when specific problems arose and held parents' meetings at the beginning of the school year.

The staff explained that the school had introduced an evening in the summer term when parents and children could visit their new teacher.

*At the beginning of the school year... we have a 'meet the teacher' morning, where we ask parents to spend some time in the school... They talk about ways that they can come in and help or support... just making them feel welcome and to be part of the class. I think that that is important for parents.*

One of the parents we spoke to had attended this meeting:

*Parents' coffee morning was good because it was nice to meet the new teacher. She gave out information that you wouldn't hear otherwise and it was quite nice being able to hear her talk when she is new and you don't know her at all.*

In addition to the changes they had already implemented, school staff planned to make further changes aimed at easing transition for children moving to Year 1. They said they wanted to continue closing the 'gap' between the Foundation stage and Key stage 1 by creating even greater continuity between the two stages and by introducing the Year 1 curriculum requirements gradually during the year.

The school was planning to provide a well-resourced outdoor space for children in Year 1. The Year 1 teacher explained that the current provision for outdoor activities was limited: 'They do have access to outdoor space, but they have to have an adult with them, because the outside area is near the rear gate.' The Foundation Stage Coordinator outlined the school's plans to develop this area in future, to enable children in Year 1 to access outdoor provision more freely:

*We are going to try setting up the outdoor area... The headteacher is quite keen on changing things so [we will make] some structural changes – getting rid of some of the work benches to make room for sand and water play and putting a gate outside so as we can enclose a little area for the outdoor play.*



Girl in Year 1 'Me playing outside making a model'

## 9 Overview of findings, discussion and conclusion

This study set out to investigate children's transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. It collected evidence from a number of sources, namely research literature, telephone interviews with staff in 60 schools, and case study visits involving children, parents and staff in 12 schools.

Transition involves moving from one environment and set of relationships to another. It is, however, important to consider the wider context in which the transition is taking place: what is it that children are moving from and to? Children in most European countries do not begin 'formal schooling' until the age of six. England is one of the few countries in Europe with a school starting age of five and where most children start school at four (see Sharp, 2003). Therefore, in most other countries, transition to school is aligned with the transition from a play-based, exploratory curriculum to a more formal curriculum, and it takes place when children are at least a year older than their English counterparts.

Following the introduction of the Foundation Stage Curriculum, English three- to five-year-olds have been offered a flexible curriculum based around six areas of learning. During Key Stage 1 (from the age of five), they begin to experience a subject-based curriculum with prescribed programmes of study. The style of teaching and learning changes, with children moving from learning through play-based activities with opportunities for self-initiated learning, to a more formal context, with learning activities led by the teacher. During children's second year in Key Stage 1, they will be required to complete National Curriculum Assessments, the results of which (in combination with teacher assessments) are of major importance to their schools.

The formation of the Foundation Stage to include the Reception year has been welcomed by many practitioners. Research on effective pedagogy in the Foundation Stage (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) has confirmed that the most successful settings catering for children aged three to five take an approach to pedagogy consistent with the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage.

As the second year of the Foundation Stage takes place in Reception classes, the transition to school has been de-coupled from the transition to a formal learning environment. This has the potential to make transition to Reception easier, because the curriculum and pedagogy is more appropriate for young children and is familiar to those who have attended an Early Years setting. But teachers have been encouraged to introduce some of the more structured elements of the curriculum in Reception in order to help prepare children for

the requirements of Year 1 (DfES, 2003). The question remains of when (at what age and stage of development) children are ready to take on the requirements of formal learning.

## **9.1 To what extent are concerns about the effectiveness of transition grounded in practice?**

In commissioning this study, the DfES was aware of a concern that in some schools the transition to Key Stage 1 may be too sharp and that children's learning could thus be put back. However, it was not clear to what extent this concern was widespread or well founded. Existing information on the subject was sparse and somewhat contradictory (see Chapter 2).

The evidence from the current study suggests that teachers do consider the curricula and pedagogy in the Foundation Stage and KS1 to be quite different from one another. They also feel that these differences hold challenges for children and schools. However, when asked about their ability to manage the transition, teachers and school leaders, as professionals, stated that they were able to manage the transition satisfactorily, although some areas remained problematic.

Staff told us that the main challenge was posed by the move from a play-based approach in the Foundation Stage to a more 'formal and 'structured' curriculum in Key Stage 1. Some teachers (in both Reception and Year 1) reported feeling 'torn' and 'pulled in different directions' in trying to maintain FS practice while being all too aware of the amount of content in Year 1 and the need to prepare children for their National Curriculum Assessments in Year 2. The introduction of the full literacy hour and the daily mathematics lessons was experienced as problematic because it was difficult to get young children to sit still and listen to their teacher. Most teachers were making efforts to smooth the transition for children by introducing elements of curriculum continuity throughout the Foundation Stage and into Key Stage 1, but this was not easy to achieve, and those that had attempted it were not always confident that they had got it right.

## **9.2 What are the key issues affecting children, parents and staff?**

There are a number of common themes running through the information gathered from the three stakeholder groups (children, parents and staff). However, the interviews confirmed that each group has different perspectives and priorities in relation to the transition to Year 1 (this supports the findings of previous research on transition by Dockett *et al.*, 1999; Dockett and Perry, 2002; Perry and Dockett, 2003a and b).

### 9.2.1 Key issues for children

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 presented to them in Year 1 and were bored by sitting and listening to the teacher during 'carpet time' (which was particularly associated with the literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson). On the other hand, children enjoyed the status of being 'bigger/more grown up' and some children welcomed the greater challenges presented to them in Year 1, especially if they were able to master new skills.

For most of the children, the move from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 involved the following changes:

<b>Foundation Stage</b>		<b>Key Stage 1</b>
Play-based	—————▶	Work-based
Active	—————▶	Static
Led by adults or children	—————▶	Directed by adults
Thematic	—————▶	Subject based
Emphasises a range of skills	—————▶	Emphasises listening and writing

### 9.2.2 Key issues for parents

The key issue for parents was their need for information about the transition. Parents wanted to know what would be expected of their child so they could help prepare them for the new year. The summer holidays provided an ideal opportunity for parents to do some learning activities with their child and they wanted to know what kinds of activities would help their child most in Year 1.

Parents also wanted to meet the prospective Year 1 teacher before the end of the summer term. Some parents were concerned about their child's ability to cope with the increased workload in Year 1 but had not felt able to speak to the staff about their concerns. Some parents compared the support and information that they and their child had received when their child started school unfavourably with the preparation offered for the transition to Year 1.

The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project has recently published its final report (Sylva *et al.*, 2004). The study demonstrated that parents can make a key contribution to young children's progress in intellectual and social development by providing a high-quality learning environment (for example, by reading with their child, teaching songs and rhymes, teaching the alphabet and numbers). It would seem wise for schools to

capitalise on this support by ensuring that parents have the kind of information they need.

### **9.2.3 Key issues for school staff**

Most Reception teachers introduced elements of the Year 1 curriculum in the summer term of the Reception year to help children cope with the demands they would face in Year 1. This usually involved introducing the daily mathematics and literacy session as whole-class activities. However, about a third of the 14 Reception class teachers felt that this kind of ‘structured activity’ was not in keeping with the philosophy of the Foundation Stage and questioned whether it was appropriate for young children.

All the Reception teachers passed on the Foundation Stage Profile and other records to the children’s Year 1 teachers and most had a ‘handover session’ with their Year 1 counterparts before transition. Most of the Year 1 staff said they used the FSP to allocate children to ability groups and for curriculum planning, although there were some concerns about the usefulness of the FSP.

Headteachers and Foundation Stage Coordinators thought that parents were not concerned about the transition to Year 1 because they saw it as part of their child’s natural progression through school. Foundation stage staff felt it was important to inform parents about the transition to Year 1 so they could support their child during the summer holidays, but organisational issues got in the way. A few schools arranged meetings for parents of Reception children in the summer term, but most arranged parents’ meetings towards the beginning of the autumn term. Only one school enabled parents to meet their child’s Year 1 teacher before the beginning of the new academic year. Some schools provided written information, but this was usually very brief and consisted of little more than a letter.

Staff felt that children needed to have 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, being able to listen to the teacher and to sit still. Staff recognised that children found it difficult to adjust to the greater workload and the reduction in opportunities for learning through play. This mirrors the conclusions from two previous studies (Hendy and Whitebread, 2000; Potter and Briggs, 2003) which suggested that children lose opportunities for independent learning as they move through school.

Staff felt that there was a need for training and advice on handling transition, particularly aimed at teachers in Year 1, or joint training for teachers in both Reception and Year 1.

### **9.3 Do specific issues affect particular groups of children?**

Teachers felt that, while most children coped well with transition and quickly settled into Year 1, those with certain characteristics were more likely to experience difficulties. Children experiencing difficulties were more likely to:

- Be younger in the year group or ‘less mature’
- Be less able
- Have special educational needs
- Speak English as an additional language.

These children might find it difficult to adjust to Year 1 because of the greater demands for them to be able to listen and follow instructions, sit still, concentrate on a given task, work on their own, record their work (in writing), cope with the increased workload and the reduced opportunities for play. Year 1 teachers said they supported children experiencing difficulties by giving them easier tasks and more adult attention. In some cases, they arranged meetings with parents in order to discuss their child’s particular learning needs.

### **9.4 Conclusion**

The findings from this study indicate that the transition to Key Stage 1 does pose challenges for schools, children and parents. On the positive side, most staff felt they were managing the situation and most children seemed to be coping well with the move to Year 1.

The process of transition may be viewed as a period 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.

It is evident that the children, staff and parents we interviewed were largely content with the quality of children’s experiences in the Foundation Stage: the challenge was posed by the requirements of Key Stage 1. Children enjoyed school in Year 1 and relished new challenges. But they also spoke of their dislike of ‘hard work’, their nostalgia for play activities and the boredom of sitting on the carpet. For some children, therefore, the primary strategy document ‘Excellence and Enjoyment’ (DfES, 2003) offers a somewhat different vision of children’s experiences in primary school: ‘As well as giving them the essential tools for learning, primary education is about children experiencing the joy of discovery, solving problems, being creative in writing, art, music, developing their self-confidence as learners and maturing socially and emotionally’ (DfES, 2003: Executive Summary).

## 9.5 Recommendations

This research has suggested that certain actions could be taken to help ensure a smooth transition for children from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1. These suggestions are aimed at two levels: school and national policy.

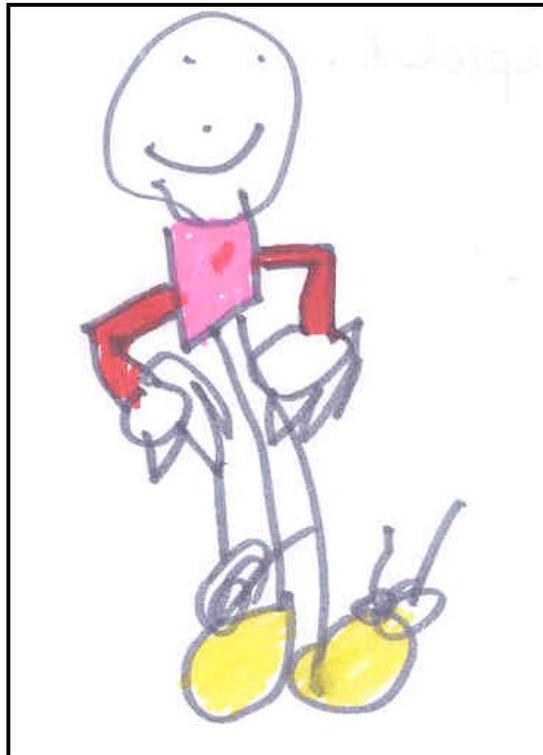
### School policy

- Schools staff should view transition as a process rather than an event.
- Transition practices are important, and schools should adopt more than one strategy to ensure induction, continuity and communication. However, more research needed to identify particularly effective transition practices.
- Schools should ensure that children's friendship groups are maintained in the move to Year 1.
- Where possible, schools should enable staff to 'move up' to the next year with the children.
- Communication about transition should take place between staff, with children and with parents both before and after the beginning of Year 1.
- Where possible, school managers should provide non-contact time to enable teachers in both the 'sending' and 'receiving' classes to discuss individual children and to plan to meet their needs. School managers should encourage staff to plan for continuity and progression, for example through the use of familiar themes, routines and activities.
- 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.
- School managers should consider whether it is possible to arrange for parents and children to visit their new classroom together. They should ensure that children are well informed about the move to Year 1.
- Teachers should consider the needs of younger/less mature children, those who are less able, have SEN or EAL; and be ready to provide them with greater support during transition.
- 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.

### National/regional policy

- Ideally, the Reception teachers should be able to continue offering the full Foundation Stage Curriculum until the end of the year.
- 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 listening to the teacher should be reduced. Year 1 teachers should be encouraged to increase opportunities for active, independent learning and learning through play.
- Reception and Year 1 teachers need further guidance on how to deliver the requirements of the national literacy hour and daily mathematics lesson in ways suitable for young children.
- Guidance is needed to help teachers to find alternatives to the requirement for children to record their work in writing at the beginning of Year 1.
- Staff would benefit from training on transition, especially those in Year 1. Training should raise awareness of the Foundation Stage curriculum and help teachers to integrate elements of the Foundation Stage approach with the Year 1 curriculum. More guidance is also needed on how to use the Foundation Stage Profile, support children and communicate effectively with parents.



Boy in Year 1 'Me with two fingers in my pockets walking along. I'm in school on my way to Room 12 where I will make a spider.'



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## APPENDIX Technical information

### A1 Search strategy and methods adopted in the literature review

This appendix details the search strategy and methods adopted for the literature review. It includes the selection criteria for including/excluding material, the search methods used, and also the way in which relevant studies were analysed and reviewed.

#### A1.1 Selection criteria

The first step in this review was to set clear parameters for the type of material that would be relevant for the review. These parameters are detailed below.

<b>Overall focus:</b>	Empirical research, government reports and policy documents on the concerns expressed by children, parents and teachers about the effectiveness of transition practices.
<b>Time scale:</b>	Work published between January 1993 and February 2004
<b>Age range:</b>	Early years, primary and secondary.
<b>Geographical scope:</b>	International literature (providing that it is published in English)
<b>Sources of literature:</b>	Published articles, books and monographs, reports and conference papers. Selected descriptive accounts, policy documents, opinion pieces and unpublished literature if relevant in contextualising the research evidence.

These parameters were selected in order that relevant research, opinion pieces and policy documents could be reviewed. The inclusion of international research was important as it was felt that this might highlight any gaps in the UK-based research literature. It was felt important to include studies for 1993 onwards as this would identify whether or not concerns about transition were present *prior* to recent policy changes in early years education.

#### A1.2 Search Methods

Using the search parameters described above, relevant research was identified using a number of complementary search methods.

These included:

- Bibliographic database searches of educational/social science research databases.

- Checking the cited references of received material for other relevant references.
- Contacts were made with experts working in this area in order to identify additional relevant material.

The identification of material took place through a number of stages. The researchers worked with an information specialist who was responsible for conducting the searches. The searches generated extensive lists of potentially useful research which was considered in relation to the study's aims and parameters in order to provide a more focused list of studies for review. As each of these pieces of research was received it was analysed for its relevance. At this stage, it was necessary to reject some of the research literature because it was clear that it was not pertinent to the review. Rejected literature included articles focusing on the impact of puberty on children's transition from primary school to secondary school; childcare issues in the Early Years rather than Early Years education; and items focusing on specific curriculum issues in other countries.

### **A1.3 Review Process**

A framework was developed by the research team in order to aid the analysis and writing of each summary. This also helped to ensure that there was commonality in the review process as each of the reviewers used an identical framework. The framework encouraged the reviewer to focus on specific aspects of the research material, these foci included: research design, sample, research methods and the findings. The reviewers recorded their comments on the quality of the research., This allowed them to discuss issues that were of particular relevance to the review. The search strategy combined a number of sources to identify potentially relevant studies

### **A1.4 Framework for Reviewing Research Publications**

The research used the following set of headings to provide a structured framework for reviewing each piece of literature:

- Reference
- Relevance to the review questions
- Age/level of education
- Purpose of the study
- Design
- Country/geographical area
- Sample
- Methods (data collection and analysis)
- Main findings

- Implications (authors)
- Reviewer's comments.

## **A1.5 Database searches**

A range of different educational, sociological and psychological databases were searched. Search strategies for all databases were developed by using terms from the relevant thesauri (where these were available), in combination with free-text searching. The key words used in the searches, together with a brief description of each of the databases searched, are outlined below. Throughout, \* has been used to indicate truncation of terms, and (ft) to denote free-text search terms.

### ***Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)***

ASSIA is an index of articles from over 600 international English language social science journals. The database provides unique coverage of special educational and developmental aspects of children.

- #1 Pre-school Children
- #2 Nurseries
- #3 Early Childhood Education
- #4 #1 OR #2 OR #3
- #5 Infant Schools
- #6 Primary Schools
- #7 Kindergartens
- #8 Elementary Education
- #9 Elementary Schools
- #10 #5 OR #6 OR #7 OR #8 OR #9
- #11 #4 AND #10
- #12 Transition
- #13 Transition Programmes
- #14 #12 OR #13
- #15 #14 AND (#4 OR #10)
- #16 Pedagogic Practice
- #17 Reggio Emilia

### ***Australian Education Index (AEI)***

AEI is produced by the Australian Council for Educational Research. It is an index to materials at all levels of education and related fields. Source documents include journal articles, monographs, research reports, theses, conference papers, legislation, parliamentary debates and newspaper articles.

- #1 Pre-school Education
- #2 Pre-school Programs
- #3 Early Childhood Education

- #4 Child Development Centres
- #5 Day Care Centres
- #6 Pre-schools
- #7 Nursery Schools
- #8 #1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4 OR #5 OR #6 OR #7
- #9 Reception Classes
- #10 Transition Classes
- #11 Lower Primary Years
- #12 Primary Education
- #13 Kindergarten
- #14 Elementary Education
- #15 #9 OR #10 OR #11 OR #12 OR #13 OR #14
- #16 Transition Programs
- #17 transition\* (ft) OR transfer\* (ft)
- #18 #16 OR #17
- #19 #8 AND #15 AND #18

### ***British Education Index (BEI)***

BEI provides bibliographic references to 350 British and selected European English-language periodicals in the field of education and training, plus developing coverage of national report and conference literature.

- #1 Pre-school Education
- #2 Early Childhood Education
- #3 Nursery Schools
- #4 Infant School Education
- #5 Infant School Pupils
- #6 Reception Classes
- #7 Foundation Stage Profile
- #8 Transfer Pupils
- #9 Early Experience
- #10 Developmental Continuity
- #11 pre-school (ft) OR pre-school (ft)
- #12 primary (ft)
- #13 transition\* (ft) OR transfer\* (ft)
- #14 #11 AND #12 AND #13
- #15 Pedagogy
- #16 Teaching Process
- #17 #15 OR #16
- #18 Primary Education
- #19 Primary Schools
- #20 (#18 OR #19) not (#1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4 OR #5 OR #6)
- #21 #17 AND #20
- #22 Reggio Emilia (ft)

## **Canadian Business and Current Affairs (CBCA)**

CBCA provides indexing and full text access to the principal educational literature publications in Canada, covering all significant reports of government departments, faculties of education, teachers' associations, large school boards and educational organisations. Over 150 educational periodicals, plus educational articles in over 700 general journals and newspapers are indexed.

- #1 Pre-school\*
- #2 Nursery
- #3 Day Care
- #4 Early Childhood Education
- #5 #1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4
- #6 Primary
- #7 Primary Level
- #8 Primary School
- #9 Elementary
- #10 Elementary Level
- #11 Elementary School
- #12 Kindergarten\*
- #13 Kindergarten Level
- #14 #6 OR #7 OR #8 OR #9 OR #10 OR #11 OR #12 OR #13
- #15 Transfer\*
- #16 Transition\*
- #17 Transition Years
- #18 #15 OR #16 OR #17
- #19 #5 AND #14 AND #18

## ***Current Educational Research in the United Kingdom (CERUK)***

CERUK, which is sponsored by the National Foundation for Educational Research and the Department for Education and Skills and supported by the Eppi-Centre, covers current and recently completed research in education and related fields.

- #1 Pre-school Children
- #2 Pre-school Education
- #3 Early Childhood Education
- #4 Foundation Stage
- #5 Nursery Education
- #6 Play Groups
- #7 #1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4 OR #5 OR #6
- #8 Reception Classes
- #9 Primary Education
- #10 Infant Education

- #11 #8 OR #9 OR #10
- #12 #7 AND #11
- #13 Pre-school to Primary Transition
- #14 Infant to Primary Transition
- #15 Transition Between Key Stages
- #16 Transition Between School Years
- #17 Transfer Pupils
- #18 #13 OR #14 OR #15 OR #16 OR #17
- #19 Pedagogy
- #20 Classroom Practice
- #21 #19 OR #20
- #22 #7 OR #11
- #23 #21 AND #22

### ***ChildData***

ChildData is produced by the National Children's Bureau. It encompasses four information databases: bibliographic information on books, reports and journal articles (including some full text access); directory information on more than 3,000 UK and international organisations concerned with children; Children in the News, an index to press coverage of children's issues since early 1996; and an indexed guide to conferences and events.

- #1 Pre-school Children
- #2 Pre-school Education
- #3 Early Childhood Education
- #4 Nursery Classes
- #5 Nursery Schools
- #6 Playgroups
- #7 Foundation Stage
- #8 Foundation Stage Profile
- #9 #1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4 OR #5 OR #6 OR #7 OR #8
- #10 Primary Schools
- #11 Infant Schools
- #12 Reception Classes
- #13 #10 OR #11 OR #12
- #14 Transition
- #15 #9 AND #13 AND #14
- #16 Starting Pre-school
- #17 Starting School
- #18 #16 OR #17
- #19 Pedagogy
- #20 Reggio Emilia

### ***The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)***

ERIC is sponsored by the United States Department of Education and is the largest education database in the world. It indexes over 725 periodicals and currently contains more than 7,000,000 records. Coverage includes research documents, journal articles, technical reports, program descriptions and evaluations and curricula material.

- #1 Pre-school Education
- #2 Prekindergarten
- #3 Early Childhood Education
- #4 Nursery Schools
- #5 Early Experience
- #6 #1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4 OR #5
- #7 Kindergarten
- #8 Elementary Education
- #9 Primary Education
- #10 Infant School
- #11 British Infant Schools
- #12 Reception Classes (England)
- #13 #8 OR #9 OR #10 OR #11 OR #12
- #14 Transfer Students
- #15 Transition
- #16 Transition to School
- #17 Transitional Programs
- #18 transition\* (ft)
- #19 transfer\* (ft)
- #20 #14 OR #15 OR #16 OR #17 OR #18 OR #19
- #21 #6 AND #13 AND #20
- #22 Student Adjustment
- #23 (#6 AND #13 AND #22) NOT #20
- #24 Reggio Emilia Approach

### ***PSYCINFO***

This is an international database containing citations and summaries of journal articles, book chapters and technical reports, as well as citations to dissertations in the field of psychology and psychological aspects of related disciplines, such as medicine, sociology and education.

- #1 Pre-school Education
- #2 Pre-school Students
- #3 Nursery Schools
- #4 Nursery School Students
- #5 Early Experience
- #6 #1 OR #2 OR #3 OR #4 OR #5

- #7 Primary School Students
- #8 Elementary Schools
- #9 Elementary School Students
- #10 Kindergartens
- #11 Kindergarten Students
- #12 #7 OR #8 OR #9 OR #10 OR #11
- #13 School Transition
- #14 Transfer Students
- #15 School Adjustment
- #16 #13 OR #14 OR #15
- #17 #6 AND #12 AND #16
- #18 Pedagogy
- #19 #6 OR #12
- #20 #18 AND #19

### ***System for Information on Grey Literature in Europe (SIGLE)***

SIGLE is a bibliographic database covering European non-conventional (grey) literature in the fields of humanities, social sciences, pure and applied natural sciences and technology, and economics.

- #1 education (ft)
- #2 school\* (ft)
- #3 #1 OR #2
- #4 transition\* (ft)
- #5 #3 AND #4
- #6 pre-school (ft)
- #7 nursery (ft)
- #8 early childhood (ft)
- #9 #6 OR #7 OR #8
- #10 primary (ft)
- #11 Reception (ft)
- #12 elementary (ft)
- #13 kindergarten (ft)
- #14 infant (ft)
- #15 #10 OR #11 OR #12 OR #13 OR #14
- #16 transfer\* (ft)
- #17 begin\* (ft)
- #18 #4 OR #16 OR #17
- #19 #9 AND #15 AND #18

### ***Author searches***

- #1 Hargreaves, Linda
- #2 Pianta, Robert C.

## A2 Sampling characteristics of the telephone interviews and case-studies

### A2.1 Telephone interview sample

An initial sample of 120 schools was drawn from the NFER schools database. This allowed for an expected response rate of 50% which was achieved. The sample was stratified by four variables:

- Key Stage 1 Achievement band
- LEA type
- School type
- Region

Table A1 summarises the sample characteristics

**Table A1 SAMPLE SUMMARY**

	Population Satisfying Requirements		Selected in Sample		
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	
TOTAL		9228	100.0%	120	100.0%
Achievement Band (KS1 missing)		149	1.6%	2	1.7%
Overall performance 2002)	Lowest band	2241	24.3%	29	24.2%
	2nd lowest band	1887	20.4%	25	20.8%
	Middle band	1698	18.4%	22	18.3%
	2nd highest band	1613	17.5%	21	17.5%
	Highest band	1640	17.8%	21	17.5%
LEA type	London Borough	1120	12.1%	14	11.7%
	Metropolitan Authorities	2180	23.6%	27	22.5%
	English Unitary Authorities	1549	16.8%	21	17.5%
	Counties	4379	47.5%	58	48.3%
Primary school type	Infant/First	2470	26.8%	32	26.7%
	Primary/Combined	6758	73.2%	88	73.3%
Region	North	2810	30.5%	35	29.2%
	Midlands	3108	33.7%	45	37.5%
	South	3310	35.9%	40	33.3%

### A2.2 Administration of the telephone interviews

LEAs were contacted in mid January to inform them of the schools in their authorities that would be invited to participate in this evaluation exercise. LEAs were asked to contact NFER and withdraw any unsuitable schools. One

school was withdrawn by their LEA before invitation letters were sent to schools. One hundred and nineteen schools were then contacted shortly after and invited to take part. Two schools were withdrawn by their LEAs after the invitation letter had been sent to schools.

Schools that were willing to participate were asked to provide contact names for both the Foundation Stage Coordinator and a Year 1 Teacher at their school, along with relevant telephone contact details. Schools were informed that the NFER would select one of the teachers listed and would conduct a short telephone interview with the selected teacher during February or March. The response was slow, but quite positive. A reminder letter was sent to non-responding schools at the end of January in an attempt to increase response.

By the cut-off date, 58 per cent of schools had returned a reply form indicating their willingness to take part in the project.

**Table A2 Response to request for telephone interviews**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Schools drawn in sample	120	100
Schools withdrawn by LEAs	3	3
No reply	37	31
Schools declining to participate at initial invitation stage	10	8
Schools agreeing to participate	70	58

### **A2.3 The Case study sample**

Twelve schools were selected for case-study visits. These schools were selected on the basis of the following information:

- School type
- Region
- Key Stage 1 achievement bands
- Range of transition issues and practices, as described by telephone interviewees.

Table A3 shows the distribution of achievement bands in the case study sample where 1 is the lowest band and 5 is the highest band. The table

demonstrates an even distribution of achievement bands across the sample of case study schools.

**Table A3**

KS1 achievement band	No. Schools
lowest band	2
second lowest band	2
middle band	3
second highest band	3
highest band	2

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