

QUE SERA SERA — WHAT WILL BE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE?: TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL.

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Abstract

The transition from primary to secondary school can be a different experience for each child. Parents can sometimes feel isolated and the primary school equally powerless to assist. The type, quality and quantity of information sent can be used in different ways. Some teachers and parents question whether the secondary school uses the information efficiently or effectively. The study focused on the type of information provided on transition and how it was used. In addition, information showed how parents were included in the transition process. And finally, an examination of how the pastoral care of children was dealt with on transition to secondary school. Findings indicate that some parents feel excluded while there appears to be a disparity in pastoral care of children. Finally, the information exchange between both school sectors showed that some secondary schools rely on quantifiable test results rather than using a range of information.



Every year in New Zealand thousands of primary-aged children make the transition from primary school to secondary school. Those undertaking transition do so during part of their formative years when other fundamental changes are taking place. The Education Review Office (2001) states that "at a time when a young person's life is changing so rapidly there is an increased need for stability and a sense of continuity. The move from primary to secondary education often results in a sense of discontinuity because of the different approaches of teachers in each sector" (p.12). This contention is supported by Williams and Bonan (2002), Hawk and Hill (2001, 2004), Johnstone (2001) and Sellman (2000).

How is the transition from primary to secondary school handled in New Zealand? Is there uniformity or consistency? Is the information sent from primary school to secondary school used consistently and equitably? Are parents allowed to be part of the process? And is the pastoral care of this group of children sufficiently well developed to ensure the transition process is smooth? This article will focus on these issues and attempt to highlight shortcomings and strengths in the process, and explore possible solutions.

INFORMATION

As part of the transition process it is customary for primary schools to send information about a child to the secondary schools. In 1981, Goodall (cited in McGee, 1987, p.18) advised teachers not to place too much store in easily quantifiable data like test scores. He argued that they do not give a full picture of a child's academic achievement or of them as a person. Equally, Reid and Elley (1991) in their manual on Progressive Achievement Tests noted that "scores are useful in making decisions about what a student should be studying or learning now" (p.20) and on no "account should students be 'categorised' or 'labelled', either formally or informally with a test mark or ranking and [it should] never serve as the sole criterion of student attainment or progress" (p.28). This contention is supported by McGee (1987) who believes that a range of information should be used rather than sole reliance on a narrow range of test scores which are divorced in time. He argued that "information from primary teachers ought to be treated carefully; for it seems that it is usually a fairly reliable predictor of later academic success" (p.19). Boswell (cited in McGee, 1987) postulated that information

transferred from primary to secondary school was not always used effectively for the betterment of the student. Indeed, he noted that secondary school reliance on their judgments tended to render any pupil classifications and classroom provisions suspect. McGee noted that the type of information that was transferred varied considerably. The breadth covered Progressive Achievement Test scores and other standardised test results, report forms, I.Q test results, cumulative records with no one type being sent singly but usually accompanied with other information. Yet, again, he pointed out there was a weighting in secondary schools towards using test scores because they were quantifiable. He, also, observed that while the data was scrupulously collected, particularly by deans, there "appeared to be considerable variation among individual teachers as to the use made of the information" (McGee, p.191). Some secondary teachers, McGee discovered, placed little faith in the information they received believing the views of primary teachers to be out of touch with their summation. Interestingly, their summations were based on a brief contact with the new students as opposed to the years of accumulated knowledge gathered by primary teachers.

PARENTS

Throughout a child's early contact with the school system, parents perform a big part of the liaison between the child and school. At entry into primary school in New Zealand the parent is included as part of the early transition process from pre-school to primary education. Smith (2004) noted that "parents can help by developing a positive attitude towards school and giving emotional support during the transition" (p.13). Does the same situation apply to transition from primary to secondary school?

PASTORAL CARE

There is no doubt that school transition can pose challenges and opportunities for students. While some children experience little adverse effect, there is agreement among researchers (Hawk & Hill, 2001, 2004; Wylie et al., 2004; McGee, 1987, 2003; Cocklin, 1999) that there are adverse reactions and assimilation problems among some children undergoing transition. Indeed, McGee (1987) mentions 'a kind of mythology' (p.26) has been perpetrated. McGee (1987) suggested that "children's fears are likely to be similar to those of their parents, perhaps even influenced by parental anxiety" (p.27). He believed that the mythology which develops about transition was not helped by a vast number of parents not responding to opportunities to be involved in the process. It seems this mythology is derived from various quarters and is probably perpetrated "by older students, family members, and even primary teachers who use phrases like 'wait until you get to secondary school', as an urge to better application in work or behaviour" (p.27). This mythology can be responsible for some negative views of the new school and can heighten anxieties for the child. This contention is supported by Hawk and Hill (2004). Equally, Ako and Galassi (2004) noted in research conducted on the perceptions of students and parents to transition, that when parents played a crucial role in easing the transition process they felt positive and supportive of their children and the anxieties the children experienced were alleviated more quickly. They also discovered that if parents were welcomed by the secondary school and viewed as part of the process, a positive attitude to the new school was displayed by the child.

Equally, there was an onus on recipient schools to ease the stress and put in place mechanisms which help allay the fears and anxieties the students experience. Sellman (2000) outlined an experience in Blessed William Howard Roman Catholic School in Stafford where a conscious attempt was made to alleviate potential concerns students may have had during transition. He described how the school "decided to co-ordinate a training programme in self-confidence and conflict resolution skills to prepare pupils for the transition to secondary school with those feeder schools willing to participate" (p.27).

Conversely, Johnstone (2001) argues that the key to improving the transition for parents, students and teachers is to implement "strategies to bridge the gap between the social culture of primary and high school" (p.x). To do this, suggests Johnstone, it is necessary to implement strategies which would help all parties to adapt to the organisational culture, that is, the size and layout of the school. Furthermore, adapt to the social culture, that is, establish networks where new and fresh social contacts can be made; and assist students to assimilate their personal feelings and emotions about the school. She believes that to address all these concerns and to achieve an appropriate balance:

primary and high schools combined their efforts to establish relevant programmes tailored to address student concerns. This should occur prior to and during initial transition particularly in the areas of the high schools' social and organisational cultures, as it was in these areas that students' anxieties were focussed (Johnstone, p.4-5).

THE STUDY

The literature review highlighted possible ways to probe issues into the transfer of student information, the place of parents during transition and the pastoral care of children through the process. Three questionnaires were formulated, one for new parents whose eldest child underwent transition during the latter part of 2004 and the beginning of 2005. It was important to use these parents because their contact with the secondary school was a new experience and not tainted by contact through older siblings. The second questionnaire was designed for primary teachers involved in the transition process; and finally a survey was sent to some secondary teachers involved in transition.

Six primary schools were selected which contributed directly to a secondary school - three rural and three urban schools. Also, six secondary schools were selected - three urban and three rural. Where possible the contributing schools had links to the secondary schools in their area and vice versa so some continuity in response and process could be expected. The three rural primary schools were Year One to Six schools who contributed to Year Seven to Thirteen secondary schools. The three urban schools were full primary schools contributing to an urban Year Nine to Thirteen secondary school.

A sample of twenty-four teachers was selected, two from each of the primary and secondary schools selected for the study. These teachers were directly involved in transition from the primary to secondary level. For secondary schools it meant year seven and nine deans.

Primary school principals were asked to select two parents from their school whose eldest child moved to secondary school during the time mentioned above and provide them with a questionnaire. The selection of the parents was left to the discretion of the principals. A total of twelve parents were approached.

Analysis of the questionnaires was based on the responses received from each sample. Of the parents connected to primary school, seven out of twelve responses were returned. Of the questionnaires sent to contributing school teachers, eight out of twelve replies were received. Finally, of the secondary teachers asked to complete a form, only six out of twelve responded.

Results from this study must be treated with caution due to the limitations of the sample. With the small sample it is difficult to generalise for all transition programmes. While it is generally accepted that transition programmes and processes do exist between primary and secondary schools, the nature and breadth of the programmes will vary from locality to locality and school to school depending on the geography of the region, the composition of the community, the personnel in each institution and the requirements of the recipient schools. For some secondary schools entrance exams provide the only contact with prospective students, yet other schools conduct a detailed and inclusive programme over an extended period of time for example, involving the seamless integration of special needs students, whole day visits, and mentoring and buddying programmes.

The results do confirm trends noted in overseas studies and provide some interesting findings in relation to

information exchanged between primary and secondary schools, how parents are included, and how children are looked after throughout transition.

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY PRIMARY SCHOOLS

When asked about the sorts of information they compiled about their Year Six [Year Eight] students to pass on to secondary schools, six of the eight teachers who responded sent cumulative records, four supplied Progressive Achievement Test results, while three ensured that they sent information concerning a student's emotional wellbeing and any behavioural issues. This was partially substantiated by secondary school teacher responses. Half the secondary teachers indicated they received Progressive Achievement Test results and information related to specific educational needs, while two received information about health considerations, social and family issues, achievement information and specific behavioural requirements.

In addition, six out of eight contributing school teachers said that secondary schools requested extra information above what was initially provided. In particular, four of the six said information on health and emotional needs appeared to take precedent. Three indicated that Progressive Achievement Test stanines, work attitudes and family profiles were deemed important.

All the secondary schools teachers sampled indicated they asked for extra data from feeder schools. Four out of six specified information which would be useful to determine and help address special needs. Three wanted information on behavioural

issues so provision could be made for these children. Overall, five out of six secondary teachers indicated that this information was extremely useful, especially in class placement. In addition, three secondary teachers surveyed stated they use Progressive Achievement Test data to ascertain class placement, thus signalling a correlation between class placement and the use Progressive Achievement Test data. Of interest, three out of six secondary schools collect specific assessment information through testing on orientation day. The same number state it was specifically collected to assist with class placement. Yet, five respondents insisted that the extra data did not take precedence over other information already received. At this point one would question how necessary it was to collect extra data when the secondary schools appeared to have sufficient information to begin with.

INFORMATION EXCHANGE - SOME POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD

The study shows that participating primary schools supply a range of data on children to secondary schools. It includes reports, test information including Progressive Achievement Test results, anecdotal notes, significant behavioural and learning information, work samples and work tasks displaying a range of assessment techniques and information. Yet, some secondary schools in the study used Progressive Achievement Test results along with their own tests rather than any other data.

It appears that the use Progressive Achievement Test data in placing children in various class groupings was present in half the secondary schools sampled. Goodall (cited in McGee 1987) advises against over-reliance on easily quantifiable data and the developers of the Progressive Achievement Test, Neil Reid and Warwick Elley (1991), advise on over reliance on test data. They state that "it is not recommended that the tests be employed for routine classification of students into classes, particularly by principals of large schools whose students come from a variety of contributing schools" (Reid & Elley, 1991, p.28). Moreover, they stated "the test results will not reflect changes which may occur over the long summer vacation and therefore accuracy of the classification will be affected to an unknown degree" (p.28). Clearly, many children have moved academically during the time lag. If secondary schools are using data which is at least nine months old to determine class placements they run the risk of making inappropriate educational decisions. It could be ill-advised to make academic assumptions based on past endeavours. Reid and Elley argue that "on no account, therefore, should students be 'categorised' or 'labelled', either formally or informally with a test mark or ranking which stays with them throughout their school careers" (p.28).

Klein (2005) suggests it is preferable to use a variety of information-gathering techniques to ensure each child receives a fair deal during transition. Certainly, primary schools have the range and depth of information at their fingertips which could be used more effectively. It may require a mind shift for some secondary

schools to move from a testing regime to a more holistic method of data collection. During the survey some contributing school teachers questioned whether the information they submit was ever used. Some secondary schools, they felt, have a closed attitude to what they use and do not use. It appears that some contributing school teachers were frustrated with the knowledge that secondary schools collect additional assessment data during orientation day. Conversely, secondary school teachers argue that this is necessary to bring their data up to date.

AN HOLISTIC INFORMATION EXCHANGE

What is needed is better communication and collaboration between the sectors, that is, primary schools supply what



secondary schools want and in a useable form, and secondary schools undertake to use this information effectively. They could, through consultation, develop a system which provides information about a child's attainment. It could be measured against national curriculum achievement objectives balanced alongside pertinent learning and behavioural needs as well as providing background social and family information. One primary teacher mentioned having helped the neighbouring secondary school with formulating class groupings using the information they had available. They felt this was advantageous for the students. In particular, children's needs were specifically looked after, along with ensuring better social mixes. By fitting children to teachers it enabled the secondary school to cater for differing learning styles.

Another secondary teacher outlined meetings she had with Year Eight teachers to help with the transition process, especially with class placement and addressing specific needs. Another primary teacher described the regular contact she has with the local secondary school especially related to special needs children who were transitioned early through specially adapted learning programmes so the final move was not so traumatic. All these point to avenues where primary and secondary schools can effectively collaborate to ensure the welfare of the children is a high priority, where systems are worked out for the betterment of students, and where a wider range of information is utilised.

PARENTS AND THE TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

The seven parents who responded said they were able to make direct contact with the intended high school for their child. Of those, four indicated the contact was through open days and parent meetings. On these occasions parents were given contact details of specific staff members should they need them.

Equally, all participating parents felt involved in the transition process prior to their child going to secondary school, yet five felt this diminished once the child had entered. From the secondary school perspective, half the secondary teachers surveyed confirmed they encouraged parents to be part of the transition process, while four secondary teachers stated this involvement should only be through attendance at the new entrant evening. This means other mechanisms for involvement were neither made available or encouraged. In fact, five of the secondary teachers believed parental involvement should be on an informal basis. This belief indicated that involvement of parents was not actively encouraged, possibly limiting the development of any close parent-school relationship. Moreover, five of the seven parents who responded felt although they were being encouraged to meet with high school staff, they were apprehensive. What was not made clear was whether this was the result of no direct invitation being received, or that they felt uncomfortable with responding to a blanket invitation because it was not directed to them personally. A willingness to meet with parents was signalled by five of the secondary respondents, but how this was channelled appears limited to attendance at an evening meeting, an orientation day meeting, or an optional interview.

It was interesting to note that the exact nature of any informal contact was not elaborated. Perhaps some secondary schools were content to leave any partnership development up to parents, provided the school had given them contact options. Conversely, it could be argued that although parents wanted to be part of the transition process they felt intimidated by secondary schools based on past experiences. Harboring a jaundiced view of secondary schools was not only perpetrating the 'mythology' referred to by McGee (1987), but may be stifling any initiatives. It was possible parents were waiting for the secondary school to make the initial moves, set a direction, prepare a common ground and invite them to be part of the process.

Interestingly, all contributing school teachers felt that parents should have a part in the transition process, whether it was supporting their children or providing reassurance. Perhaps this was based on pre-school experience with a natural carry-over as children progress to the next phase of their education. They felt the prime role for parents was to support and encourage their children. In fact, half of the contributing teacher respondents believe that secondary schools tend to hold parents at 'arm's length'. This would account for all those surveyed indicating that if parents had worries about their children going on to secondary school or moving through the transition process, they tended to visit the contributing school and share their concerns with primary teachers.

Equally, five of the contributing school teachers felt secondary schools did not

do enough to help parents through the process. This contention was based upon several premises. First, five out of the seven parents surveyed felt secondary schools consider children are merely as numbers – 'bums on seats' as one parent put it; and any queries or concerns are fobbed off with standard answers. One parent said "they seem to have a standard answer for most things along the lines that the children need to take responsibility for themselves so they are to grow up." This was supported by an observation from a primary teacher who said "there is minimal contact. The high school did not actively seek these parents, interview or meet them individually. I believe and know they are left out of the loop. There is no flexibility or effort to bring parents on board. Any queries or challenges are fobbed off." Another teacher stated "I think high schools are at the stage where children are numbers in a system. They touch base with the top and bottom but the middle is lost." These comments suggest more could be done to involve parents in the transition process, despite contrary secondary school indications.

Second, it appears that contributing schools are helping and guiding parents through the process rather than secondary schools. This is substantiated by five out of the eight teachers who indicated that they consistently reassured parents and advised them on courses of action. They felt this should be done by the high school. Furthermore, three out of the eight teachers advised parents to talk to the high school to help clarify their position and do a better job for their child.

PARENTS - SOME POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD

The results reveal half the secondary schools surveyed include parents in the transition process. What of the rest? It is acknowledged it can be difficult to bring a number of new students from diverse contributing schools without the added pressure of parents. However, parents have a right to be with their children during the transition process. Maybe, schools are putting parents in the 'too hard basket'. Perhaps they feel that children entering teenage-hood do not need their parents to the same extent as younger children. While this may be a moot point, it overlooks the necessity and desire of children to have the support of their parents. It can be argued that some secondary schools may unconsciously overlook the importance and impact parents can have in smoothing transition for their children. This contention is supported by Cairney et al. (1998) and Smith (2004). Equally, Hawk and Hill (2004) and McGee (1987) recommend that the transition process

is made easier by keeping parents well informed and bringing them into the process by sharing information about what the high school is trying to do and how it intends to achieve an untroubled move for their children. In fact, most parents express a desire to be involved. They have much to offer and are waiting to be asked. This must be balanced by the realisation that, despite the best efforts of primary and secondary schools, some parents do not bother to be involved in the child's education, including transition, either out of ignorance or disinterest.

Contributing school teachers indicated they help parents cope with transition by reassuring them, by talking to them and interpreting the behaviours their children may experience. It must be remembered that for new parents to the secondary school system things have changed since they were at secondary school. Their previous contact could be punctuated with negative experiences. Consequently, they need to be guided through a more positive process so they do not perpetuate McGee's (1987) 'mythologies' about secondary school and convey the wrong messages. One must be mindful that contributing schools have built up a relationship with parents over six or eight years. While information can be passed on, it is necessary for secondary schools to grow and cultivate their rapport with these new parents. Involving parents in the transition process is one way to break down many of the mythologies and misconceptions about secondary school.

While open meetings, parent meetings and optional interviews are vehicles used for communication by many secondary schools, they only go some way in involving parents and sharing information. One parent felt more regular face-to-face contact with new parents over at least a term before the final move could solve some anxieties children have. This parent believed that there was too much paper to read

and little time to understand it meant some parents felt inadequate. She even raised the idea of fluctuating levels of literacy among parents. These people, she felt, could be disadvantaged. Here is a lesson for schools. While it is convenient to distribute paper information to a wide and diverse audience it does not suit or hit all participants. For parents faced with literacy or second language issues, face-to-face meetings, combined with the paper information, could provide a means to gain a greater understanding of the process and break down barriers by providing more understanding about secondary school.

Secondary teachers indicate a lack of time and heavy work load can negate the expansion of transition initiatives. While it is acknowledged that achieving the right mix can be time-consuming, and accommodating everyone a burden, there needs to be a balance between better parent education and involvement, while achieving a transition process in which all children are comfortable. There is a link here with Smith's (2004) notion of engaging parents to help promote a positive attitude towards school and providing emotional support for students. It could also align with the ethos espoused by McGee et al. (2003) that children who are engaged in a trouble-free transition with their parents beside them will achieve better, are better adjusted and more likely to stay at school. In addition, Hawk and Hill (2001) argue that it behoves secondary schools to support parents, enlist their involvement, and educate them into the function and job of the school. In striving for a better system, it may be possible to unlock the mystique around secondary school and, perhaps dispel McGee's (1987) secondary school 'mythology'.

PASTORAL CARE OF NEW STUDENTS

Not all children find transition from primary to secondary school easy. Parents mention their children exhibiting many of the anxieties recorded by researchers (Cocklin, 2003; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Wylie, Ferral, and Hodgen, 2004) in the field of transition. In the survey conducted, three of the seven parents indicated their children had socialisation anxieties before and after transition, that is, initial problems forming new social relationships, difficulty mixing in the new environment, social acceptance and the daunting numbers which can exist in larger secondary schools. In addition, five of the seven parents questioned said their children had organisational issues, that is, problems with timetables, getting used to the constant changing of classes, adjusting to different teaching styles, becoming lost in the large environment, contact with different teachers, coping



with the expectations of different teachers and a loss or a feeling of detachment with having no fixed regular teacher.

Contributing teachers, however, felt that children were worried about different aspects of the move to secondary school. From their experience, children exhibit a variety of anxieties. Six of the eight teachers indicated that children were worried about being bullied either by children from other schools or by older students. Three of the eight teachers mentioned the fear of getting lost, while two of the teacher respondents indicated that the number of classes was a worry. These organisational issues align with indications from parents. The key issue is to determine how the secondary schools and primary schools can work together to deal with these anxieties and what steps are taken to allay the children's fears.

Parents were divided in their response on communicating their fears to the secondary school. Three out of seven parents felt they were not listened to, whereas four of the seven felt their children's concerns were addressed in some way. In addition, three out of the seven parents believed support networks had been put in place. Two of the seven parents mentioned the existence of mentoring and buddy systems to help their children, while two of the parents affirmed the presence of peer support programmes for new entrants at schools their children attended. Thus, based on the data, there appeared to be some secondary schools investing in pastoral support programmes for their new entrants.

For the purpose of this study, pastoral care refers to the support and mentoring that can be put in place to help allay fears and anxieties which children may experience. It is possible that the support and mentoring could be short or long term. Thus, secondary school teachers surveyed believe they were doing a good job with pastoral care. All indicated that their schools communicated with all parents once their children had entered. In fact, five out of six said this was done through meetings during the first term of the ensuing year, while, two secondary teachers stated that it was done on a needs only basis.

Interestingly, primary teacher responses paralleled those of parents. Half the respondents stated they talked to children about secondary school in order to set their minds at ease. Three out of eight said they were consistently reassuring children to overcome their anxieties. It is apparent that some pastoral work is being done by primary teachers prior to orientation. Two primary teachers said they put support networks in place to help the more troubled children. They firmly believed the job they did paid dividends because six of the eight were sure children were less anxious about secondary school after the orientation visit. Yet, five of the eight teachers felt secondary schools made an effort to address the children's anxieties. This did leave a gap with some children having very little done for them. One teacher said "many of the worries are still present after the visit. The secondary school sweeps them aside." Of the secondary schools that have structures in place, half the secondary teachers questioned said the school used older students as guides or used them to answer the new entrants' questions.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

In considering the pastoral care of students after transition it is necessary to look at the effectiveness of the system to determine if there is room for growth. Although all the respondents at primary and secondary school agreed the transition system is effective, all overwhelmingly believed there was room for improvement. Of the parents who responded, five of the seven were convinced there should be more support systems. Three parents suggested a 'buddy' system as an option. They suggested that senior students could pair up with each new entrant from the first day and support them throughout their first year. In addition, they felt that the implementation of a peer support network would help augment the buddy system. In reality, would such suggestions actually work, given the work load of senior secondary students?

Contributing school teachers are more divided. Three of the eight teachers believed there should be more contact between primary and secondary school throughout the year. Some suggested more inter-staff sharing. Others believed prospective new entrants be involved in sporting and cultural visits and/or activities with local secondary schools. Others felt that senior high school students could be involved with the young people during the sporting and cultural contacts, either by conducting the visits, sharing skills or taking activities into contributing schools. Another three of the primary teachers advocated that new entrants be buddied with senior secondary school students to guide them through the transition process. One respondent suggested they be buddied "at the end of the

year so the children can relax before the holidays." Finally, two of the eight teachers felt that secondary schools need to align their teaching styles, especially in Year Nine and Ten, or earlier in some circumstances, "to match the progressive teaching being undertaken in primary schools." This aligns with Alfred Noyes' (2004) notion of parallel and continuous learning environments in secondary school reflecting previous learning and teaching in primary schools.

Four of the six secondary teachers believe improvements to the transition system lay in consultation and review. This approach would take a two-pronged attack – internally and externally generated and moderated review and consultation. The internal process would focus on feedback from students and staff, while the external procedure would revolve around discussions and feedback from contributing schools.

PASTORAL CARE – POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD

The results of this study show there are some gaps in the way children are looked after during the transition process. Some parents in this study noted their children had problems with possible bullying, school size, school programmes, school and teacher expectation and the general prospect of change. This was endorsed by contributing school teachers in their discussions with parents. It was apparent that contributing school teachers were preparing children and parents for the imminent change and its consequences. Three of the eight contributing school teachers felt an imbalance existed with them undertaking the role which should be filled by secondary schools or being forced into that role by the actions of parents. It appears this was being thrust upon them by parents who were reluctant to face the secondary school. Conversely, secondary schools cited time and work load factors as key issues which worked against addressing transition issues.

Equally, the findings indicate that some children do experience organisational and socialisation problems as hypothesised by Johnstone (2001). These are factors which secondary schools can have a major impact on. Secondary schools felt they were doing an effective job in pastoral care, but they qualify this by stating that it was being done on a needs-only basis. Does this reach all the children needing support, or is it just the tip of the iceberg? This is not explored because it was outside the scope of this study, but it is conceivable that some children slip through the system and do not receive the support they deserve. It appears that some of the secondary schools surveyed did help

students, reassuring them, giving positive feedback and supporting them until they become familiar with their surroundings.

Both parents and contributing school teachers advocate a series of pastoral support programmes as a solution for transition issues. Sellman (2000) cites the Blessed William Howard Roman Catholic School programme using sixth form volunteers to implement a series of buddy/mentoring programmes for new students. This approach was favoured by five of the seven parent respondents and three of the eight contributing school teachers. One parent believed that senior students could buddy with the new entrants from day one and help them negotiate the new environment and answer their worries. One contributing school teacher recommended the buddying system begin at the end of the previous year and the new children be buddied with a Year Twelve student so they could relax before the holidays, safe in the knowledge that someone was going to help them. This meant the time lag was not punctuated with heightened anxiety. This change was supported by one parent who described the problem she had with her son's fear of possible bullying which escalated to the point where the child started bedwetting. A buddy system, she suggested, would have eased her son's fears.

Furthermore, Johnstone (2001) suggests the only way to improve the transition regime is to bridge the gap between the cultures of primary and secondary school. Cocklin (1999) contends that developing a learning and teaching partnership between primary and secondary schools would help alleviate anxieties among children. He does suggest it would take a huge pedagogical mind shift by secondary teachers to establish this close relationship, but it is possible. May be changing the secondary school programme during the first two years to reflect primary school pedagogy with a gradual move to secondary pedagogy and organisation by the third year would help achieve continuity in learning. This is an approach described by one contributing school teacher. It is also an approach recommended by Cocklin (1999) and by the Education Review Office (2001) report on Year Seven and Eight students.

CONCLUSION

Throughout New Zealand every year thousands of children aged from 10 to 14 years are involved in transition from a primary school to a secondary school. The form and breadth the transition programmes can vary from locality to locality and school to school. The only contact some children may have with secondary school prior to transition may

be a new entrant test while others may have extensive involvement. Regardless of what and who is involved, there are always ways to improve the system and the outcomes. This study has focussed on three aspects – information exchange, parental involvement and the pastoral care of students. Within each feature there was a confirmation of favourable aspects and room for improvement and expansion.

This study highlighted a reliance on test data, despite secondary schools receiving an array of information from contributing schools. Yet, usage of the information revealed a need for a more inclusive information system be developed through open dialogue between primary and secondary schools so the advantages displayed by both sectors can be put into effect for the benefit of the students.

In addition, the role of the parents needs to be encouraged. While contributing schools have firmly established relationships with their parents, it did not appear to be as well developed within secondary schools. It is apparent that parents are important in ensuring that a smooth transition takes place. Children are better prepared and make significantly improved progress if parents are part of the process. Perhaps, more face-to-face programmes to convey information would help new parents be more prepared and unlock the mystique of secondary school. Again, more open communication between all three groups would set ideal ground rules for cooperation. Parents need to be more forthcoming and not expect the secondary school to anticipate their possible needs. By the same token, primary teachers need to encourage parents to seek support and information from secondary schools rather than rely on them to fill the void.

Finally, the pastoral care of students should be of prime concern for all in education. This is essential during the transition process which can be traumatic for some children. Some of the pathway could be prepared by primary teachers with communication and information systems which allow for the smooth movement of children. In addition, by implementing a series of support and mentoring programmes some of the problems experienced by some children could be alleviated. These programmes could involve senior students who could be paired with new students. This could help children negotiate their new environment and answer their worries.

Lastly, McGee et al. (2003) concluded that "well co-ordinated transition arrangements contribute to successful transition, and decrease adjustment time and some students may benefit most from reformed school infra-structure that emphasizes personal support for students, parent involvement, interdisciplinary team teaching and developing small schools within schools" (p.32). As with any system involving people, there is always room for improvement, development and growth.

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