

# The School Transition and Adjustment Research Study (STARS)

The School Transition & Adjustment Research Study (STARS) worked with 10 secondary schools to find out how pupils, parents and teachers view the move to secondary school. We asked them about how they felt about the transition before (at the end of Year 6), during (at the start of Year 7) and a year later (at the end of Year 7). The aim of the research is to help ensure a smooth and successful transition for all pupils.



## How do we measure a successful transition?

- We first worked on defining what a successful transition to secondary school involved and how to measure this.



We thought that a successful transition would involve pupils showing positive adjustment in social and emotional areas as well as academically (e.g. making new friends and liking school, as well as academic attainment). Transition also involves a process of pupils adapting to a new school environment so is probably best measured once pupils have had a chance to settle in.

We devised a way of measuring transition success reliably and tested this with data collected from pupils and teachers at the end of Year 7. As expected, we found that there were two areas of transition success:

- *School adjustment*
  - This involved pupils showing good attainment, good attendance, and class-room behaviour that was cooperative and not disruptive.
- *Social and emotional adjustment at school*
  - This involved pupils reporting that they liked school and did not feel lonely at school.

Some children may therefore do well in one area (e.g. school adjustment) but not the other (e.g. social and emotional adjustment).

# What were pupils concerned about before starting secondary school?

The good news was that pupil concerns reduced over time and by the end of Year 7 were much lower than at the end of Year 6.



## Once pupils get to secondary school....

Different concerns reduced at different rates:

- ★ Concerns about *getting lost* and *being bullied* decreased in the first term of secondary school.
- ★ Other concerns took longer to decrease and did not decrease until the end of Year 7. These were concerns about *discipline and detentions*, *losing old friends* and *homework*.

Pupils remained a little concerned about keeping old friends during their first year of secondary school.

- Friendships did change over the transition:
  - Only 38% of pupils kept the same *very best* friend over the transition.
  - 72% of pupils kept at least one of their three best friends.
- Pupils who lost friends did make new friends and were satisfied with these new friendships.
- Friendships had small but significant benefits for academic progression.
  - Pupils who kept the same group of really good friends across the transition showed slightly better academic progress than those who changed friends.
  - Being in a disruptive friendship group at the start of Year 7 meant academic progress was slightly lower, particularly for boys.



Our research showed that pupils' concerns were important in explaining how well they settled into secondary school. This was the focus of our booklet for pupils, in which we explain how and why specific, common concerns are likely to reduce once they are at secondary school.

We have provided schools with booklets to distribute to current and future pupils making the transition to secondary school. Please visit our website if you would like to print additional copies of the pupil booklet: [www.ucl.ac.uk/stars](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/stars)

**MOVING FROM Primary TO SECONDARY SCHOOL**

We did a survey and asked two thousand young people about their move to secondary school. We asked them to tell us about how they felt about secondary school three times – once in year 6 and twice in year 7. Surveys in the survey were much less worried by the time they got to year 7.

**At the end of Year 6, the thing that most people were most worried about was...**

**getting lost**  
and some people also said they were worried about the size of their new school. But when we asked them again after half a term at secondary school, they were much less worried about this, no matter how big their new school was.

**As most people have friends at their primary school that are going to go to different secondary schools, it's not surprising that...**

**losing old friends**  
was on their minds at the end of year 6. However, 6 out of 10 people kept in touch with their really good friends after 1 year. Some people's friendships did change, but they were happy with their new friends at the end of year 7.

**As you start your new school, you may be concerned about the...**

**homework**  
you're going to get, just like the young people in our study. Some good advice is to make sure that you understand the instructions for the homework task before you leave the lesson, and do your homework early so that you can get help if you have any problems.

**In our study, girls and boys were equally worried about...**

**being bullied**  
Your school and even your teacher had to take bullying very seriously, and the best thing to do is to tell someone, quickly. By the end of year 7, most people were less worried.

**At the beginning of Year 7, while they were getting to know all the rules, and different teachers, lots of people were quite worried about...**

**discipline & detentions**  
But when we spoke to them at the end of the year, they felt less worried, so they'd had a chance to get to know their schools and the rules.

**STARS**

We were a team from University College London, we did a survey of two thousand young people and asked them what were their thoughts and concerns about starting secondary school. We asked them when they were in primary school and also when they had started secondary school. This project was funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

We've put their answers together to give you an idea of what to expect when you start secondary school.

In summary, what we learnt from all the people who took part in this survey was that nearly everybody at the end of Year 6 has some worries and concerns. But, once pupils start at secondary school, they have many fewer concerns and become much less worried.

We hope it helps you to know that!

This booklet has covered the most common concerns. If you have any specific worries about anything to do with moving to secondary school, talk to a parent, or ask a teacher. Our research shows that it helps to share your worries.

If you would like more details on the results from our study, please visit our website: [www.ucl.ac.uk/stars](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/stars)

Please give us your feedback about this booklet by completing a simple questionnaire at [www.ucl.ac.uk/stars](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/stars)

# What are parents concerned about?

Before transition, parents were concerned about the same sorts of things as pupils.

The most common parent concerns were:

1. Bullying
2. Safety
3. The amount of homework
4. Adjusting to having lots of teachers
5. Making new friends

Interestingly, pupil concerns about homework reduced slowly across Year 7 and this is something that parents predicted children would need help with.



## Parents want to help...

The collage contains several key documents:

- Letter to Parents:** A letter from the STARs team explaining the research and providing advice on how parents can help their child with the transition to secondary school.
- Pupil Booklet:** A booklet for pupils that lists common concerns and provides strategies to manage them.
- Transition Support Guide:** A guide for parents and teachers that offers practical advice on how to support the child during the transition.

At the end of Year 6, parents thought that their child would need help with *homework* and *remembering books and equipment*.

In our information letter to parents, we suggested that parents could help their child with this in the following ways:

- ✓ By checking homework diaries.
- ✓ By encouraging their child to make sure that they understand instructions for homework before they leave the lesson, and to start their homework early so that they can get help if they have any problems.
- ✓ Having a school timetable and a list of what equipment is needed for each day at home.
- ✓ Talking to their child about what they are both worried about.

### Something to look out for....

Children whose *parents* had higher concerns settled in less well to secondary school on both areas of transition success (school adjustment and social and emotional adjustment).

Our letter to parents and pupil booklet are both available via our website:

[www.ucl.ac.uk/stars](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/stars)

# Are particular groups of pupils more concerned or more likely to make a successful transition?

## Concerns

- ★ At the end of Year 6 concerns were similar for pupils from different backgrounds including ethnicity, eligibility for free school meals and whether or not English is a first language.
- ★ Pupils with lower Key Stage 2 results and with Special Educational Needs were most concerned about the transition.



## Successful transitions

We examined whether routinely collected data from school records (gender, age, eligibility for free school meals and Key Stage 2 results) could identify pupils who were more vulnerable for poor transitions. Potentially, this could allow schools to identify groups of pupils who would benefit from extra monitoring and support. The results of this data analysis are shown in the box below for the different types of transition success.

### **Transition success measured by school adjustment**

(i.e. good attainment, good attendance, and positive class-room behaviour)

Three (overlapping) groups had significantly better scores on school adjustment measures at the end of Year 7. These were:

- 1) Girls,
- 2) Pupils with better KS2 scores, and
- 3) Pupils not eligible for FSM

### **Transition success measured by social and emotional adjustment at school**

(i.e. liking school and not feeling lonely at school)

- Older pupils and pupils with better KS2 scores did significantly better on social and emotional adjustment at school at the end of Year 7.

So, different children do better in the each area of transition success. However, pupils with lower Key Stage 2 results do less well in both areas.



# What strategies do schools use that are linked to academic progress?

Staff from the secondary schools in our study used a range of strategies to support pupil transition from primary to secondary school. A number of strategies appeared to have small but significant benefits for pupil's academic progress.

## 1. Making use of primary school information for alerting

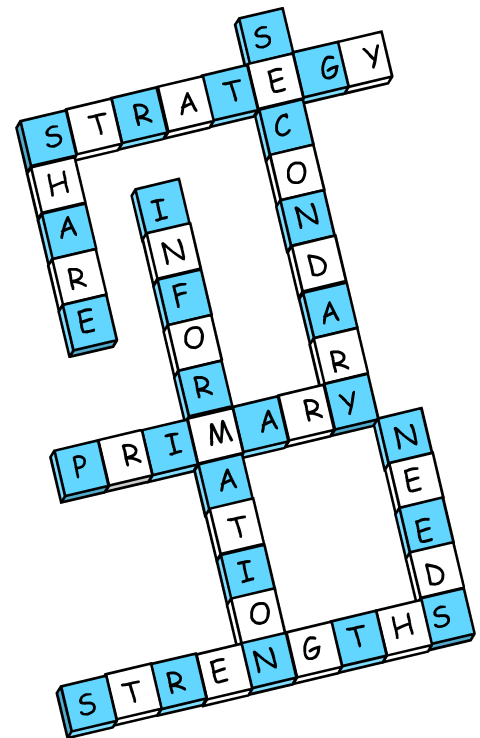
This strategy involved using information received from primary schools about pupils to inform teachers about their strengths and weaknesses.

As an example of this strategy, one school reported that they had created a document that included key words about each students' needs and abilities and disseminated this to teaching staff before the summer holidays.

## 2. Support for social needs

This strategy involved schools using information gained from primary schools to put in place supports for students with additional social needs or anxieties.

One example of this strategy involved dealing sensitively and proactively with pupils who have had previous experience with bullying and informing them of the staff members who can help if things begin to go wrong.



## 3. Extended induction arrangements

This approach involved employing strategies that lasted beyond the first week of induction.

Such strategies included having staggered lunch breaks and using activities to increase pupils' awareness of their learning styles such as by using reflective diaries.

**Other popular strategies** used by secondary schools with small but significant benefits for academic progress were information gathering about parents and home and teaching in groups according to academic ability.

# A resource for predicting transition success

We developed a simple four-item questionnaire which asked teachers how well they expected pupils to settle into secondary school. Our study shows that Year 6 primary teachers can provide very useful and reliable predictive information about their pupils using this measure.

## Setting in to Secondary School: Primary School Teacher Form

|         |                         |       |    |
|---------|-------------------------|-------|----|
| School  | Round the Corner School |       |    |
| Teacher | V. Friendly             | Class | 6F |

A study of 2000 children making the transition to secondary school showed that the ratings primary school teachers give on this questionnaire is a very reliable way of predicting how well children do academically and socially at secondary school.

Please complete the following form for the pupils in your class.

**Do you expect this child to settle in well at secondary school?**

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Not sure; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree

|                     | Academically | Socially,<br>with peers | Socially,<br>with teachers | To the new<br>routine | Totals |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
| Example: John Smith | 4            | 5                       | 4                          | 3                     | 20     |
| 1. Anna             | 5            | 5                       | 5                          | 5                     | 18     |
| 2. Bharna           | 4            | 5                       | 4                          | 5                     | 16     |
| 3. Charlie          | 4            | 4                       | 4                          | 4                     | 13     |
| 4. Daniel           | 3            | 3                       | 3                          | 4                     | 12     |
| 5. Emma-Louise      | 1            | 5                       | 3                          | 3                     | 8      |
| 6. Frankie          | 2            | 2                       | 2                          | 2                     | 15     |
| 7. George           | 3            | 5                       | 5                          | 2                     | 17     |
| 8. Harriet          | 4            | 3                       | 4                          | 4                     | 16     |
| 9. Isaac            | 5            | 5                       | 3                          | 3                     | 14     |
| 10. Jo              | 4            | 2                       | 4                          | 4                     | 16     |
| 11. Kingsley        | 3            | 5                       | 3                          | 5                     | 15     |
| 12. Luke            | 3            | 4                       | 4                          | 4                     | 15     |
| 13. Mohammed        | 1            | 5                       | 5                          | 4                     | 18     |
| 14. Neil            | 5            | 5                       | 4                          | 4                     | 14     |
| 15. Olga            | 3            | 5                       | 3                          | 3                     | 20     |
| 16. Poppy           | 5            | 5                       | 5                          | 5                     | 19     |
| 17. Qazaar          | 4            | 5                       | 5                          | 5                     | 10     |
| 18. Rhiannon        | 2            | 2                       | 3                          | 3                     | 16     |
| 19. Sarah           | 3            | 5                       | 5                          | 3                     | 10     |
| 20. Tina            | 2            | 3                       | 3                          | 2                     |        |



## How to score the questionnaire

Add up the four scores. In our research, scores of 12 or less represented the bottom 10% of pupils. Children scoring 12 or less may therefore need extra monitoring to check how they settle in to secondary school. In this example, Frankie, Rhiannon and Tina might need a little extra help.

**Settling in to Secondary School:**

|         |  |       |  |
|---------|--|-------|--|
| School  |  |       |  |
| Teacher |  | Class |  |

**Primary School Teacher Form**

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Please complete the following form for the pupils in your class.

***Do you expect this child to settle in well at secondary school?***

1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Not sure; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree

|                            | Academically | Socially,<br>with peers | Socially,<br>with teachers | To the new<br>routine |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Example: John Smith</i> | 4            | 5                       | 4                          | 3                     |
| 1.                         |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 2.                         |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 3.                         |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 4.                         |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 5.                         |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 6.                         |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 7.                         |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 8.                         |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 9.                         |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 10.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 11.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 12.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 13.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 14.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 15.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 16.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 17.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 18.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 19.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |
| 20.                        |              |                         |                            |                       |



**STARS**

School Transition & Adjustment Research Study

[www.ucl.ac.uk/stars](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/stars)

## About the research

The School Transition & Adjustment Research Study (STARS) was conducted by a team from University College London. We did a survey of two thousand young people, their parents and their teachers, as they were making the transition to ten secondary schools from around South-East England. For more information about the study, as well as other resources, visit [www.ucl.ac.uk/stars](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/stars).



This project has been funded by the Nuffield Foundation, a charitable trust that aims to improve social well-being through research and innovation in education and social policy. [www.nuffieldfoundation.org](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org)

