
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES' TRANSITION COMMISSION

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with an update as to the results of the Director of Children's Services' Transition Commission involving primary and secondary schools in the Borough.

Information and Analysis

2. In 2006 GCSE examinations Darlington secondary schools recorded poor contextual value added scores for Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4.
3. Permanent exclusions from Darlington secondary schools rose to 42 for the year 2005/6.

What does Transition mean to children and young people?

4. Young people see the move from primary to secondary school as an important stage in their lives. They have a basic list of requirements based around the transition process. They would like:
 - (a) To visit their secondary schools before they move
 - (b) To have their new teacher visit them before they move
 - (c) To meet other pupils who will also be starting at the school
 - (d) To know when transition events are going to be so they can be sure not to miss them; and
 - (e) To know who to speak to if they are bullied.
5. The goals and strategies set out in the paper 'Delivering School Standards and Every Child Matters in Darlington' are based on the widespread consultation undertaken during the review of Darlington's Children and Young People's Plan. The plan sets out broad priorities for action and covers:
 - (a) Reducing rates of teenage pregnancy
 - (b) Improving the provision of information, advice and guidance
 - (c) Improving the stability of children's placements
 - (d) Reducing absences and exclusion from school
 - (e) Improving academic progress for all children and young people
 - (f) Improving opportunities for the 14 -19 age group; and
 - (g) Empowering children and young people to have a greater voice and influence over local decision-making and delivery of services.
6. These aims must be supported by individual business and project plans across all contributing agencies. One area, which it is agreed requires immediate attention and is implicit in a number of those aims, is that of the transition of young people in Darlington from primary school to secondary school and the associated dip in pupil performance in some parts of the Borough. It is important that we identify what more we can do to

support transfer to ensure that Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 value added is as high as possible (Darlington schools had the worst CVA in England in 2006 though there was improvement in 2007 and the LA is now ranked 123rd out of 149 Authorities). The young people of the town should see the transition process as being supportive of their needs.

7. The Director of Children's Services, Murray Rose, has therefore commissioned work to:
 - (a) Ascertain the present position re transition between Key Stage 2 and 3 in Darlington; and
 - (b) Formulate an action plan for improvement based on the evidence gathered.
8. David Heaton OBE, the retiring Principal of Queen Elizabeth 6th Form College, has acted as independent Chair of the commission and has been supported by the Assistant Director for School Improvement and Development, Andrew Dunn.

Budget

9. The Commission had a budget of £10,000 to cover additional costs.

Timescale

10. The Commission on Transition began its work in mid June 2007 with an initial 'Where are we now?' meeting between the Chairperson, David Heaton and the Assistant Director for School Improvement and Development, Andrew Dunn. The deadline for the Transition report of 31st December 2007 has been met but should be seen as the end of work around transition in Darlington, merely a milestone in its development. Discussion initially focussed on the identification of a series of key questions. These are listed below together with information pertinent to each question, which has been gathered over the six month period of the commission. It was imperative that a sound evidence base re present practice as regards transition across Darlington formed the basis of discussion and debate over the period of the commission:

Key Questions

11. What is the current approach to the issue of Transition between Key Stages 2 and 3 in the Borough?

Formal and informal discussions with Darlington head teachers point to concern re the effectiveness of transition arrangements across the Borough.

Some primary schools feed children to a number of secondary partners and report little consistency in the range of information which they are asked to provide. Deadlines and timescales vary from secondary school to secondary school as does the format, quantity and quality of information required as regards individual children. There is a sense of frustration from some primary head teachers that the information they provide often fails to reach the intended target in secondary school, resulting in 'a series of unfortunate events' involving the pupil concerned. The concerns expressed above from a primary perspective are mirrored in some secondary schools i.e. consistency/accuracy re information provided, failure to meet deadlines etc. Frustration also exists in both primary and secondary schools re the process of data collection. It was felt that a more coordinated approach involving, for example, the Performance and Development Team in Children's Services could result in census data from primary schools being used to pre-populate transfer forms used between primary and secondary schools.

12. What is driving this approach, and how well is it working? What is the outcome that Darlington wants and what does it really mean?

There appeared to be no common agreement across Darlington's schools as to what transition actually meant. Some colleagues regarded transition as a process whilst others felt it was an event or series of linked events culminating in a transition day or days when Y6 pupils 'visit' their secondary school on a taster basis. Others see a seamless academic progression linked to assessment for learning as their aim for all young people. Agreement must be reached on what we are trying to achieve through/during the transition process before we change it. Different partners in the process all have different outcomes in mind. A consensus of opinion must be reached through open dialogue involving head teachers, teachers from all phase groups involved with the transition process, SENCOs, young people, parents and any other relevant stakeholders before progress can take place. Evidence compiled during the commission's work will help this development.

13. Is there an overarching strategy for Transition and if so how is it structured and what are the key roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders involved in the Transition process?

Strategy for transition appears to differ from school to school and cluster to cluster across the Borough. There is no Darlington wide agreed strategy. Where transition is reported to be good it appears to be based around an agreed set of principles between school leaders, for example between Carmel R.C. College and its partner primary schools. A common strategy including a core offer for all Darlington children and young people would be of benefit to all involved with transition. This should be based on existing good practice from within and outside the Borough. It should set out who is responsible, what they are responsible for etc. To have a map or even photos of their new school.

14. What is being done to challenge current performance and what is being done to share best practice?

During the 2006/2007 academic year The Children's Fund have supported a piece of work focused on the transition into secondary education of year 6 pupils with a statement of SEN in Darlington schools. The aim of the project was to identify good practice around transfer from primary to secondary school so that children, particularly those with additional needs, could have greater success in the transition process. The work was coordinated by Charmian Hobbs, Senior Educational Psychologist in Darlington. The final report outlines good practice found around the town and suggests that:

- (a) Lots of good things are happening in Darlington to help pupils during their move
- (b) All pupils felt settled in year 7 after a few months
- (c) Pupils felt better after they had met their new teachers and visited their new schools
- (d) Pupils who had felt bullied were able to have their problems resolved
- (e) Parents and pupils felt happy about the help they received during the move; and
- (f) Teachers work very hard to make this time easier for pupils.

15. The bullet points set out above can only give a flavour of the content of the final report which has been widely circulated by Darlington Parent Partnership. However the original objectives of the project can, with only minor amendments, be used in the wider context as the basis for the future transition of all Y6/Y7 pupils in Darlington:

- (a) To explore the successes and concerns expressed by pupils, parents, and schools in Darlington around the Y6/7 transition of all pupils
 - (b) To support the transition of pupils into the secondary phase of education by providing support, information and signposting to services as required; and
 - (c) To make recommendations to schools and support services regarding good practice in Y6/7 transition and to identify ways that this can be put into action through the development of sustainable objectives for the future.
16. The report goes on to recommend that the following should be considered in all future transitions work involving children and young people transferring from Y6 to Y7 in Darlington so helping to overcome any perceived barriers to improvement.
17. The development of a formal, structured town wide transition strategy should be examined. This should be informed by current good practice occurring within schools, emphasising current strengths and incorporating methods for improvement such as those identified above. Components of this strategy might include:
- (a) Guidelines and timelines for transition procedures within the authority,
 - (b) Clearly identifies roles/responsibilities of primary and secondary school staff; and
 - (c) Authority wide provisions needed by schools in order to liaise earlier with families (i.e. making class lists available earlier so families can be notified earlier about transition events).
18. In order to address parents and pupil feedback regarding the timing and adequacy of information received, the development of guidance materials should be considered, perhaps in the form of a booklet, DVD, etc. This guide would provide parents/carers with appropriate information about transition planning, including dates of key transition meetings, events, etc, along with tools to help parents prepare their children for this period. Any examples of best practice currently taking place at schools should be incorporated into this guide.
19. On a school wide level, teachers should be fully supported in their role related to transition. Appropriate secondary staff should be enabled to make visits to primary schools, and opportunities should be established for primary staff to visit secondary settings. Transition arrangements should be clear and consistent but allow for sufficient flexibility to ensure individual requirements can be met.
20. The concern of bullying needs to be addressed both on a strategic, authority-wide level and on a school-wide level, ensuring that effective policies and strategies are in place and that these are clearly communicated to new pupils and their parents/carers. This would include perhaps the translation of school bullying policies into ‘child – and parent-friendly’ language and ensuring that dissemination of these policies occurs alongside distribution of other translation related materials mentioned above.
21. Many issues raised prior to transition were able to be resolved before the start of Y7 with the assistance of an impartial outside researcher (a Transitions Champion?), who was able to fulfil the role of liaising with the schools and families and of signposting to necessary services/resources. Consideration should be made with regard to the possibility of providing this type of support during the transition period, either by an external agency or by key staff within the primary/secondary school clusters. Schools may also consider nominating a particular individual to a transitions coordinator/liaison role.

22. Another issue is the lack of on going evaluation taking place as regards transitions, in the form of staff reflecting on their transition practice within the school and between primary and secondary schools, as well as in the way of seeking and giving feedback with pupils and parents before and after the transition period. Consideration should be made to incorporating on going formal evaluation procedures into the above mentioned authority wide strategy and/or within schools themselves.

How will improvements be sustained?

23. While no town wide transitions strategy exists at present within Darlington a great deal of work associated with transitions is taking place. Darlington is small enough to solve the problem of transition.
24. Partnership is the key to moving this agenda forward.

Transition Conference 31 October 2007

25. As mentioned previously the gathering of an evidence base of present practice was necessary if development around transition was to occur. The opportunity to debate issues arising from that evidence and agree on a common way forward was also imperative. The first Darlington Transition Conference took place on 31.10.07 at Carmel RC College. Delegates representing many Darlington schools and other stakeholders listened to presentations on:
- (a) 'The Enthusiasm for Change' from David Heaton.
 - (b) 'How We Can Ensure That Transition is a Positive Experience for All Young People'. From Charmian Hobbs, Darlington's Chief Education Psychologist.
 - (c) 'The exciting and innovative practice which already exists across the Borough as regards transition' from representatives of all Darlington secondary schools.
 - (d) 'The need for Cultural Radicalism or thinking outside the box as regards teaching and learning and how this could affect transition' from Andrew Dunn.
 - (e) 'Getting Transition Right' from Murray Rose, Director of Children's Services in Darlington.
 - (f) 'Feedback from the Darlington student body on transition' presented by Ben Powell, Trainee Educational Psychologist.
 - (g) 'Feedback from parents of present Y7 children in Darlington schools on the transition process' presented by David Chambers, Darlington's Choice Adviser; and
 - (h) 'Cracking the Transfer of Transition Data' by Chris Bracken.
26. Stakeholders then highlighted their priorities as regards the development of transition across the Borough. The priorities are detailed below and together with the information presented previously form the basis of our Transition Action Plan which is appended to this report (**Appendix A**).

Ideas to Take Forward to our Action Plan highlighted by Delegates at the Darlington Transition Conference

27. Once a 'Darlington Core Package' around transition has been agreed by Darlington schools, all involved must adopt those ideas. No school should opt out.
28. Earlier and wider engagement is necessary. Secondary school teachers should 'get into' primary schools and meet children. They should 'entice' prospective students and their parents into secondary schools through performances, open evenings, drop in sessions, multi agency meetings and good teaching etc. This should happen when the children are in Y4, 5 and 6 and culminate in an extended transition week or fortnight in the final term of Y6.
29. Communication in general should be improved between teachers and schools covering the KS2/3 interface and should be developed to better include 'other' information e.g. pupils talents. Face to face contact is very important. Teachers need to hear specific information on individuals to avoid future problems. All schools should commit time and if necessary funding to this process.
30. A Darlington wide transition system built around agreed practice and appropriate time lines should be developed. This should involve the development of curriculum packages where by work is begun in the primary school and continues after the summer break in secondary schools. Pupils identified as vulnerable for whatever reason should be invited to attend summer school to boost academic achievement or aid their pastoral transfer.
31. Darlington students should produce a 'DVD' with the working title, 'A day in the life of a Year 7' which should be used by all Darlington Primary schools as part of the transition process.
32. The 'Darlington Transition Core Package' should be reviewed annually. Findings should be discussed at a Transition Conference to be held in the autumn term of each academic year.
33. The Local Authority should deal with parents appeals with regard to transfer to secondary school by the end of June at the very latest. The process of application for a place at secondary school could begin earlier in the year?
34. Delegates also considered:

(a) How can we create the right ethos as regards transition?

Possible areas of development included:

Y6 pupils to spend extended periods at their most likely secondary school or any secondary school. If the transfer process is common this shouldn't present a problem.

It should be common practice that Y6/7 teachers swap schools.

Parents should be involved as much as possible.

(b) How can we encourage partnership working?

Possible areas of development included:

Arrange review meetings with all involved 'agencies'.

Undertake an assessment of needs for each pupil and encourage earlier identification of vulnerable pupils.

Pupils to use IT skills to compile a rolling pen portrait on the learning platform. They can attach examples of their work which when picked up by their secondary school should provide an up to date insight into the pupils true level of academic ability.

(c) How can we ensure improved continuity of learning on transfer?

Possible areas of development included:

More staff collaboration to reduce defensiveness. Y6 SATs do matter.

Greater teamwork and continuity of planning between Y6/7 teachers.

Review what is taught, how it is taught and the length of the school day.

(d) How can we better meet children's needs through appropriate support and intervention?

Possible areas of development included:

TAs and other support staff could transfer with children for a period of time.

Secondary schools could make more contact with homes/parents.

Organise a bridging week or weeks with a common Borough wide timetable and curriculum which takes note of the movement of staff and pupils. Pupils would spend part of the week in their primary school and part at the secondary to which they were transferring.

Joint management of after school and holiday activities.

(e) How can we ensure that administration processes around transition are improved?

Possible areas of development included:

The development of a comprehensive, relevant and clear information exchange system so informing timely planning and provision for all Darlington young people.

The Way Forward

35. A well planned programme of transition can greatly help children in their move from primary to secondary education. Although young people have a 'new start' at their secondary school it does not mean that they have to engage in 'new learning' **if** the adults involved can ensure continuity and familiarity through effective transition. The attached action plan is intended to summarise the information detailed previously and continue the development of a 'Can Do' attitude toward improving transition in Darlington.
36. 'Getting transition right is important. Transition is school standards. Transition is 'Every Child Matters'. Transition is not simply a mechanical event, although there are processes we have to get right. Transition is about our culture, values and ambition. Together we can design a system that ensures that all Darlington children achieve their potential. Making a success of transition is in our hands.'

Legal Implications

37. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

38. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Impact on Looked After Children

39. Improvements to the Transition process from primary to secondary school education will have a positive impact on Looked After Children and will be in line with the recommendations in the Children's Plan published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Recommendation

40. Members are asked to note the content of this report

Andrew Dunn
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Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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