



Estyn

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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

The impact of transition plans

An evaluation of the use of transition plans by
primary-secondary school partnerships to
improve the quality of learning and standards

June 2008



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide advice in response to Estyn's annual Ministerial remit from the Welsh Assembly Government. The report evaluates the initial impact of transition plans and their use by primary-secondary school partnerships to improve the quality of learning and standards. It includes case studies of good practice in key areas.
- 2 Transition plans are the means by which secondary schools and their partner primary schools formalise their arrangements to work together on curriculum, learning and assessment issues that relate to the 7-14 phase of education.
- 3 This report:
 - looks at the quality of transition plans;
 - identifies the key factors that are driving improvement;
 - identifies areas for further work; and
 - makes recommendations about how this work should be developed in the future.
- 4 The report is intended for the Welsh Assembly Government, senior managers and staff in primary and secondary schools, and local education authority officers and advisers. The report may also be of interest to institutions that train teachers and to church diocesan authorities.

Background

- 5 In 'The Learning Country' (2001) and its successor, 'The Learning Country: Vision into Action' (2006), the Welsh Assembly Government set out its commitment to improve continuity and progression in learning for all pupils moving from primary to secondary schools.
- 6 In 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government, using Wales only powers at section 198 of the Education Act 2002, introduced a requirement that maintained secondary schools and their maintained feeder primary schools draw up transition plans jointly to support the transition of pupils from primary to secondary school. Section 198 also provides that regard must be given to Assembly guidance in determining whether a particular school is to be regarded as a "feeder primary school" in relation to a particular secondary school.
- 7 The statutory regulations and requirement to produce transition plans are set out in National Assembly for Wales Circular 30/2006, 'Guidance on the preparation of key stage 2 to key stage 3 transition plans'. They required schools to put initial transition plans into place by 1 September 2007 to support Year 6 pupils making the move to Year 7 in September 2008.
- 8 Since 2002, Estyn has provided a series of reports and advice to the Welsh Assembly Government that has established the evidence for action to improve transition planning. We have reported that, while most schools have improved some aspects of transition, particularly pastoral support, only a few primary and secondary schools have comprehensive arrangements to secure effective transition arrangements, including:
 - agreed approaches to managing and co-ordinating transition with partners;
 - joint curriculum planning to ensure continuity and progression in learning;
 - arrangements to achieve continuity in teaching and learning that build on primary school methods;
 - ways to achieve consistency in assessment and to monitor and track pupils' progress against prior attainment; and
 - the means to evaluate the impact of transition arrangements on standards.
- 9 As a result, pupils often slip back when they move from primary to secondary school because they do not receive teaching appropriate to their needs and abilities.
- 10 Circular 30/2006 provides detailed guidance to schools and local authorities on the statutory requirements for transition plans and good practice in improving provision for learners when they transfer to secondary school. The Welsh Assembly

Government has made resources available in the Better Schools Fund¹ to improve continuity and progression in learning for pupils moving into key stage 1 and moving between key stages. In addition, the Welsh Assembly Government has made additional funding of £5 million available to local education authorities (LEAs) in 2006-2009 through the key stages 2-3 transition grant. The transition grant supports innovative and exemplar projects that focus on key elements of transition plans.

11 This report builds on other Estyn publications, including:

- Transforming schools (Estyn, 2007);
- Review of the contribution of the Aiming for Excellence programme to the raising of standards in key stage 3, (Estyn, November 2006);
- Recommendations on implementation of transition provisions in the Education Act 2002 (Estyn, 2004);
- Moving On...Effective transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3 (Estyn/Welsh Assembly Government/ACCAC, 2004);
- Moving On...Improving learning, (Estyn/Welsh Assembly Government/ACCAC, 2004);
- the bilingual video package Raising standards in information and communications technology in key stage 3 (BBC Wales/Estyn/Welsh Assembly Government/ACCAC, 2004);
- the bilingual video package Raising standards: Transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3 (BBC Wales/Estyn/Welsh Assembly Government/ACCAC, 2004);
- Bridging the Gap – Developing and using bridging units to support effective transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3 (ACCAC/Welsh Assembly Government/Estyn, 2004);
- A survey of Welsh as a second language in key stage 2 and key stage 3 and transition (Estyn 2004);
- the bilingual video package Raising standards in literacy and numeracy in key stage 3 (BBC Wales/Estyn/Welsh Assembly Government/ACCAC, 2002); and
- Aiming for excellence in key stage 3 (Estyn 2002; reissued 2004).

12 The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:

- Estyn inspection reports of primary and secondary schools inspected since September 2007;

¹ The Better Schools Fund provides targeted support for local authorities and schools to develop new initiatives and innovation to address local and national priorities

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- interviews with officers responsible for school improvement in eight LEAs;
- interviews with headteachers, transition co-ordinators, governors, parents and Year 7 pupils in eight primary-secondary school partnerships; and
- scrutiny of documentation provided by schools and LEAs, including 50 transition plans.

Main findings

- 13 Overall, the first generation of three-year transition plans meets Welsh Assembly Government requirements. Plans include information on how schools intend to improve arrangements in the five core aspects of transition. Nearly all plans also include arrangements in optional areas, such as pastoral links. Many schools had already met some of the requirements before they became statutory in September 2007.
- 14 However, transition plans vary significantly in quality. Most are at least satisfactory and a few are very good. The clusters² of schools that have the best plans know what they have achieved so far and have identified specific priorities for improvement that they plan to address over the three-year period 2007-2010. Their transition plans are an integral part of their school improvement agenda and include measurable outcomes for learners.
- 15 The common shortcomings in many transition plans are that they:
- are not evaluative enough;
 - are not specific enough to inform planning over a three-year period;
 - do not include, where appropriate, national or local initiatives, for example RAISE³ funded projects;
 - focus too much on processes and not enough on outcomes; and
 - do not enable the cluster to measure the impact of planned action.

Planning, managing and co-ordinating transition

- 16 Most clusters have good arrangements to manage and co-ordinate transition, although some transition co-ordinators do not have enough time to carry out the role as set out in the transition plan. Primary and secondary schools are not always equal partners in transition planning. This means that clusters often do not take sufficient account of the organisation of the primary school curriculum when they plan the curriculum in key stage 3.
- 17 Although it was recommended that schools consult widely in the preparation of the plan, too few schools did this early enough or in a manner that enabled parents and pupils to influence the transition plan. Many governing bodies have approved their clusters' transition plan but most are not well-informed enough to monitor how it is implemented or what impact it has.

² LEAs use different terms to describe groups of schools that comprise the secondary school and its feeder primary schools. These terms include 'clusters', 'catchments', 'consortia' and 'families of schools'. For the sake of consistency, the term 'cluster' is used in this document.

³ RAISE is a Welsh Assembly Government initiative to Raise Attainment and Individual Standards in Education. Schools where more than 20% of pupils are entitled to free school meals get extra funding to help low-achieving pupils do better.

Curriculum planning

- 18 Most secondary schools and feeder primary schools work well together to develop some aspects of curriculum continuity, including planning units and schemes of work that span key stages 2 and 3. This work has helped to accelerate pupils' progress but there is still a lack of challenge in Year 7 in some subjects in many schools. The guidance suggested that schools consider whether action is needed to improve linguistic continuity. However, only a minority of transition plans include details of schools' arrangements to improve linguistic continuity in Welsh when pupils move to secondary schools.
- 19 Very few secondary schools have considered offering a more integrated approach to the delivery of the curriculum that builds on the way that pupils learn in the primary school.
- 20 Many transition plans identify the need to develop skills across the curriculum more consistently. However, few plans explain how this will be done. Too few clusters have plans for primary and secondary schools to consider together the revised national curriculum orders, the skills framework or related documents on improving learning.

Teaching and learning

- 21 Most transition plans identify the need to make teaching and learning more interesting and challenging. Peer observation, whereby primary and secondary teachers observe lessons in each others' schools, has led to a number of successful initiatives to improve teaching and assessment for learning. A key feature of the best transition plans is the use of in-service training on a cluster basis so that effective teaching techniques are shared and used widely.
- 22 Overall, secondary teachers are more aware of pupils' learning needs when they transfer to the secondary school. However, transition plans do not give enough attention to meeting the learning needs of particular groups of learners. When individual pupils are not offered the support they need to access the Year 7 curriculum or the more able are given repetitive, low-level work, this leads to disengagement and a perception among pupils that lessons are not useful or interesting.

Assessment, monitoring and tracking

- 23 Most primary and secondary schools have begun to assess and moderate pupils' work together in one or more of the core subjects. Many clusters have also started to produce portfolios of pupils' work that exemplify achievement at different levels. The majority of transition plans do not show how this effective practice will be extended in line with the roll out of statutory requirements during 2008-2010.
- 24 Opportunities for moderation of teacher assessment vary too widely. Few LEAs have strategies to ensure the accuracy and consistency of teacher assessment across their primary schools at the end of key stage 2.

- 25 Almost all clusters have good systems to transfer assessment data and all secondary schools use a good range of data to track pupils' progress through key stage 3. However, many secondary departments do not use it to plan timely intervention for pupils whose progress is too slow, for example, pupils who have difficulties with basic skills, particularly boys, or pupils who have had additional support in the primary schools through RAISE funded programmes.

Evaluating the impact of transition plans

- 26 All transition plans state when the plan will be reviewed and by whom. There are good arrangements to monitor improvement initiatives but little detail on how their impact will be evaluated in terms of improved outcomes for learners. This is a serious shortcoming of the majority of transition plans. Success criteria in many plans refer to completion of planned activities rather than to their impact on the quality of learning or pupils' progress and standards. Schools have not given enough consideration to the kind of information they will need to collect to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of transition plans.

The impact of transition plans

- 27 The impact that transition plans have made since September 2007 varies according to how much work clusters had already done before the plans became a statutory requirement. In clusters where schools have already worked together, many improvements are already in place and there is evidence of their positive impact on pupils' progress and standards. Some clusters are at an early stage in improving transition and it is not possible yet to evaluate the specific impact of transition plans because the first cohort of pupils to whom the transition regulations apply are still in Year 6.

Local authority support for transition planning

- 28 Local authorities play a key role in supporting effective transition. All LEAs have a good understanding of schools' transition plans but the amount of support that LEAs provide varies significantly between authorities. A few LEAs have well-developed policies and practice for improving transition but most LEAs are not monitoring the process of transition planning or outcomes rigorously enough. The majority of clusters are uncertain about how they will fund work planned for the last year of the current transition plan in 2009-2010.

Pupils' views on transition

- 29 Year 7 pupils think that teachers and transition activities have prepared them well for their new school. Pupils' views suggest that many transition initiatives are improving their learning experiences but they are repeating work or doing work that is too easy for them in some lessons.

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 ensure that transition plans have clear objectives and specific priorities for improvement in the short and long term;
- R2 ensure that transition plans include national and local priorities;
- R3 ensure that the impact of the plan can be evaluated with reference to improvements in pupils' learning and standards of achievement;
- R4 consider in clusters the revised national curriculum orders, the skills framework and related documents to achieve consistency of approach to implementing new requirements across key stages 2 and 3;
- R5 consider offering a more integrated approach to the delivery of the curriculum in key stage 3 that builds on the way that pupils learn in the primary school;
- R6 give priority to cluster group assessment and moderation of pupils' work in line with the roll out of statutory requirements during 2008-2010;
- R7 give more attention in transition plans to meeting the needs of specific groups of learners, including more able and talented pupils, boys and pupils with poor basic skills; and
- R8 formalise arrangements to take full account of the views of pupils, parents and governors, when they review their transition plans.

Local authorities should:

- R9 ensure that transition has a high profile in their work on school improvement;
- R10 monitor the quality and impact of transition plans more closely; and
- R11 provide support to clusters to improve transition plans that have shortcomings.

The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- R12 monitor and evaluate the roll out of the statutory requirements for assessment at the end of key stage 2;
- R13 make funding available in the Better Schools Fund for clusters to implement their transition plan in 2009-2010; and
- R14 review the impact of transition plans in 2009-2010 to evaluate their impact in the longer term.

The quality and content of transition plans

- 30 Overall, the first three-year transition plans meet Welsh Assembly Government requirements. They include information on how schools intend to consolidate and improve their arrangements in the five core aspects of transition:
- managing and co-ordinating the transition of pupils from the feeder primary schools to the primary to secondary school;
 - continuity of curriculum planning;
 - continuity in teaching and learning;
 - continuity in the assessment, monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress; and
 - monitoring and reviewing the plan for the purpose of assessing its impact on standards achieved by pupils admitted to the secondary school and a consideration of how the transition process might be better managed.
- 31 Almost without exception, transition plans also include information about optional areas, for example,
- pastoral links to meet pupils' personal and social needs at transition;
 - sharing of information about pupils' achievements, attainment, attendance and behaviour that supplement the existing statutory requirements met through the Common Transfer System;
 - communicating the learning needs of individual pupils; and
 - provision for feeder primary schools that is different from the provision for the other feeder primary schools.
- 32 The quality of most transition plans is at least satisfactory and the quality of a few is very good. Overall, they formalise existing arrangements and identify appropriate areas for improvement. However, there are significant variations in their quality.
- 33 Although the guidance makes clear that there is no set format for a transition plan, most clusters have adopted the template offered as an example in the Welsh Assembly Government guidance, or similar versions that LEAs have provided, as the model for their own transition plans. In many cases, schools have copied the model rather than adapted it to reflect their clusters' local needs and priorities. As result, many transition plans are too generic for planning specific improvements over the three-year period 2007-2010.
- 34 Most clusters have planned work for 2007-2008 in more detail. The quality of this short-term planning, which often takes the form of a development plan, is better. Clusters have identified appropriate actions, tasks, responsibilities, time scales, and, in some instances, costs and the source of funding.

- 35 Very few clusters have carried out a thorough evaluation of the impact of the current transition arrangements on the quality of learning and standards. These clusters know what has been achieved so far and have identified specific priorities for improvement.
- 36 Most schools have used the additional in-service days in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 to work together in clusters to improve transition between key stages 2 and 3. These days have been used most effectively where primary and secondary teachers have worked together to:
- prepare schemes of work that span Years 6 and 7;
 - agree improvements to teaching and assessment methods;
 - plan ways to develop skills across the curriculum; and
 - moderate assessment and produce portfolios of pupils' work that exemplify progress and achievement in national curriculum subjects.

Case study 1

Effective transition planning

In one large cluster of schools in south Wales, the transition plan sets out clearly its aims, objectives, priorities for improvement, lines of accountability and how the cluster will evaluate the impact of the plan on the quality of learning and standards.

The cluster has a wide range of material that it uses for transition purposes. The material is attached to the transition plan. All teachers have a copy. The material includes:

- the agreed curriculum map of topics that each school teaches in each subject from Year 5 to Year 8;
- a copy of the bridging project that all schools use to develop pupils' creative skills;
- the cross-curricular project that is timetabled for four hours a week in Year 7 to develop pupils' thinking and learning skills;
- procedures to transfer information and track pupils' progress; and
- questionnaires that capture the views of staff, pupils and parents.

The cluster has a common programme of in-service training and meetings for 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 to improve transition. The programme reflects the six priorities of the Welsh Assembly Government Better Schools Fund guidance and, critically, the priorities of the cluster. In 2007-2008, training focused on effective teaching strategies. In 2008-2009, the cluster plans to develop a common approach to developing and tracking pupils' skills across all subjects in key stages 2 and 3.

Project work includes visits to beacon schools, joint planning for the development of thinking, organisational and research skills, and the production of common tasks for assessment and moderation in English, mathematics and science. These projects are good examples of the way the steering group identifies priorities and targets activities to meet the needs of pupils and teachers.

37 However, across and within LEAs, clusters of schools are at different stages in improving transition. The common shortcomings in many transition plans are that they:

- are not evaluative enough;
- are not specific enough to inform planning over a three-year period;
- do not include Welsh Assembly Government and LEA initiatives, for example, moderation of teacher assessment, programmes funded by Basic Skills Cymru, or RAISE funded projects;
- focus too much on processes and not enough on outcomes; and
- do not enable the cluster to measure the impact of planned action on the quality of learning and standards of achievement.

Core aspects of transition planning

Managing and co-ordinating transition

- 38 Secondary schools and their feeder primary schools have worked together for many years on pastoral arrangements that help pupils feel socially and emotionally confident when they move from primary to secondary schools. In addition, particularly in the last five years, many primary and secondary schools have worked on joint initiatives to improve aspects of curriculum, learning and assessment across key stages 2 and 3. As a result, many schools had already met some of the requirements of transition plans before transition plans became a statutory requirement in September in 2007.
- 39 In 2006-2007, most secondary schools and their feeder primary schools set up steering groups to develop their transition plans. Steering groups include representatives of all or some of the partner schools. Most steering groups have responsibility for drawing up the transition plan and usually monitor the activities that underpin the plan. However, they do not measure the impact of those activities well enough.
- 40 Steering groups work most effectively where they include senior school managers who ensure that the transition plan is an integral part of schools' development plans. This happens best where there are well-established links between the steering group and management networks within each partner school and the cluster. In the best practice, transition developments are a regular agenda item at cluster headteachers' meetings.
- 41 A designated transition co-ordinator leads and co-ordinates the work of most steering groups. The transition co-ordinator is often, but not always, a secondary school senior manager. This arrangement reduces the burden on primary headteachers but, as a result, primary schools are not always full and active partners. This means that primary school curriculum models do not link smoothly with key stage 3 patterns of curriculum delivery.
- 42 In one cluster of schools, the secondary and feeder primary schools advertised the post of transition co-ordinator within the cluster to reflect the importance of the role. In another, the secondary school funds two days a week for the transition co-ordinator to manage the transition plan and co-ordinate and monitor related activities on behalf of the cluster. However, in some clusters, transition co-ordinators do not have enough time to undertake the role as described in their transition plans.
- 43 In the best transition plans, there is a clear statement of the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the transition process. Making such a statement helps to make plans coherent and transparent but this is not a common feature of most transition plans.

Curriculum planning

- 44 Since 2002, when Estyn published the first of the 'Aiming for Excellence' documents, most secondary schools and feeder primary schools have worked together to improve aspects of curriculum continuity between key stages 2 and 3. Broadly, this work falls into three categories:
- developing subject schemes of work and frameworks to teach key skills that span key stages 2 and 3;
 - producing bridging units for use at the end of Year 6 and start of Year 7, mainly in the core subjects; and
 - devising curriculum projects or units of work for use in Year 6 that prepare pupils for work in Year 7.
- 45 This work has helped primary and secondary teachers to develop a good understanding of the curriculum across both key stages. As a result, many schools have amended schemes of work to make Year 6 work more challenging and to remove repetition in Year 7. However, there is still a lack of challenge in Year 7 in some subjects in many schools.
- 46 Jointly-prepared units of work have been very successful, particularly units on algebra and data handling in mathematics and investigations in science and design technology, using information and communications technology (ICT). The units have reduced the work of Year 6 teachers because development work and subject expertise is shared across schools in the cluster. However, the majority of such units are in the core subjects. Only a few clusters plan to extend this good practice in all subjects systematically over the next three years.
- 47 Some schools have used, or plan to use, the Better Schools Fund, the transition grant or development funding from the General Teaching Council for Wales for joint curriculum planning. The most effective work builds on first-hand evidence of teaching methods and examples of pupils' work.

Case study 2

Joint curriculum projects

One secondary school and its feeder primary schools in north west Wales piloted curriculum projects in 2006-2007 using funding from the transition grant and time made available during external examinations in the summer term of 2006. A secondary subject specialist worked with the Year 6 teacher from one of six of the primary feeder schools to develop a unit of work in each of the following areas:

- using algebra and number walls in mathematics;
- ICT and T-shirt design;
- art and model design in the style of an Austrian artist;
- introduction to French;
- a scientific investigation; and
- an extended mathematical investigation.

Each curriculum project began with a training day when the primary and secondary teachers prepared four lesson plans that they would teach together in the summer term of Year 6, comprising two lessons in the primary school and two in the secondary school.

The work was carefully documented and resources and project materials were shared with all the schools in the cluster so that all Year 6 teachers could use them. The cluster is repeating the work in a further six subjects this year.

The projects have improved teachers' understanding of how pupils learn. As a result, from September 2008, there are plans to adopt theme-based teaching in English, expressive arts and humanities in Year 7 and primary teachers are planning to do some Year 7 work in Year 6.

- 48 Transition plans provide an opportunity to review curriculum organisation for 7-14 year olds. However, only a very few clusters have looked closely enough at the wider issues of curriculum organisation. Almost all transition plans assume a model of curriculum delivery in key stage 3 that is still fragmented into segments of subject-based learning taught by different teachers. Very few secondary schools have considered offering a more integrated approach to the delivery of the curriculum that builds on the way that pupils learn in the primary school.
- 49 Many transition plans refer to the need to develop skills across the curriculum more consistently, building on the way in which skills are taught in the primary schools. However, few plans explain specifically how this can be done, for instance, by integrating thematic projects across a number of subjects as an approach that can help to make learning less fragmented.
- 50 Few transition plans include arrangements for primary and secondary schools to consider together the revised national curriculum orders, the skills framework or related documents on improving learning to achieve consistency of approach in implementing new requirements across key stages 2 and 3.

Case study 3

Developing skills

In a south Wales cluster, joint curriculum planning on schemes of work that span key stages 2 and 3 has led teachers to produce a skills map that shows where and how skills will be taught in the core subjects in Years 5-8. The cluster intends to extend this work to all subjects in 2008-2009.

The aim of the skills map is to develop pupils' thinking, organisation and learning skills systematically. Each teacher knows which skills to focus on in units of work and knows the progression that is expected from year to year.

Teachers have introduced more challenging tasks in schemes of work that make pupils think more for themselves. The outcomes have raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and accelerated pupils' rate of progress.

Teaching and learning

- 51 Most transition plans identify the need to make teaching and learning consistently challenging, particularly between Years 5-8. The most common approach is to use peer observation whereby primary and secondary teachers observe lessons in each others' schools. Many schools have begun the process and plan to extend their programme of reciprocal visits. This has led to a number of successful initiatives to improve pupils' generic thinking and learning skills.
- 52 A number of schools and LEAs have provided high-quality training for teachers to help pupils to understand different learning techniques and develop thinking skills. Many transition plans have identified the need to use these techniques more widely across schools and departments to make learning more effective. A key feature of the best transition plans is the use of in-service training on a cluster basis so that effective teaching techniques are shared and used consistently.
- 53 Peer observation has also made teachers more aware of the learning needs of individual pupils when they transfer to the secondary school. Overall, however, transition plans do not give enough attention to the needs of particular groups of learners. When individual pupils are not offered the support they need to access the Year 7 curriculum or the more able are given repetitive, low-level work, this leads to disengagement and a perception among pupils that lessons are not useful or interesting.

Case study 4

Developing a learning and teaching framework

All the schools in one cluster in the Valleys have written a learning and teaching framework that contains pupils' work from the early years to key stage 4.

The cluster consists of an 11-16 secondary school of just under 1,000 pupils and four feeder primary schools.

The cluster wanted to ensure that there was consistently good practice in teaching and learning in all its schools. In particular, the cluster wanted to accelerate pupils' progress when they transferred from primary to secondary school. The teaching and learning co-ordinators from all five schools led the project. They worked with teachers from all schools to identify examples of effective teaching and learning that had an impact on the quality of pupils' work.

The framework identifies ten features of effective learning, including developing communication, numeracy and ICT skills, using reason and imagination to work out problems, working with others and understanding how to learn. Each feature is described in terms of what an effective learner should achieve.

Each entry in the framework includes information on:

- the context of the work and the learning objectives;
- planning and how the lesson was taught; and
- the learning outcomes with examples of pupils' work.

The framework includes 33 case studies covering the majority of subjects as well as key skills. There is a section containing the work that Year 6 pupils did in lessons at the secondary schools during their induction visits. A section at the end summarises the characteristics of effective teaching.

The case studies illustrate clearly the standards that pupils reach in different key stages. Any teacher using the framework can understand the level they can expect pupils to be working at. This has proved a manageable tool to convey to key stage 3 teachers the standards of work at key stage 2 as well as showing primary teachers how they can prepare pupils for work in Year 7.

The teaching and learning framework has been an effective tool for sharing effective teaching methods and raising expectations of pupils' achievement.

Assessment, monitoring and tracking

- 54 Most primary and secondary schools have begun to assess and moderate pupils' work together in one or more of the core subjects but the majority of transition plans do not show how this effective practice will be extended in line with the roll out of statutory requirements during 2008-2010.

- 55 Many clusters have started to produce portfolios of pupils' work that exemplify achievement at different levels in the core subjects. In these clusters, first-hand evidence of the best work of Year 6 pupils is raising teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve in Year 7. It has also helped the secondary school to identify the additional help that some pupils need, for example, to improve writing.
- 56 In particular, primary and secondary schools are planning to make assessment more consistent across key stages 2 and 3 by ensuring that teachers share objectives and assessment criteria so that pupils can assess their own progress, and know how well they are doing and what they should do to improve their work. Most transition plans include arrangements for joint training to ensure a common approach to the use of assessment for learning.
- 57 Almost all clusters have good systems to transfer assessment data and some LEAs undertake detailed analyses of attainment to help schools track the progress of pupils and to set targets. This aspect of transition plans is often very good. One LEA has an ambitious project to enable schools to transfer all information, including moderated portfolios of pupils' work, electronically.
- 58 All secondary schools use a good range of data to track pupils' progress. However, many schools and departments do not analyse or use it to plan timely intervention and support for pupils whose progress is sometimes too slow, for example, less able boys, or more able and talented pupils. Transition plans do not give enough attention to ensuring that all pupils make progress in the twelve months after they have moved from the primary school.

Case study 5

Effective arrangements for assessment and tracking progress

A cluster of schools in north Wales has refined and formalised its arrangements for monitoring and tracking progress.

Primary schools transfer data for each pupil to the secondary school electronically. This data includes reading and spelling ages, attainment by attainment target in the core subjects of the national curriculum and a copy of the Year 6 report.

This data is given to heads of department, Year 7 tutors and subject teachers. The secondary school monitors and tracks pupils' progress twice a year throughout key stage 3 using a range of evidence, including achievement grades, progress reports and samples of pupils' work. The primary school receives copies of pupils' Year 7 progress reports.

The cluster has good plans to evaluate how well the system supports individual pupils. It has also set targets for 65% of Year 7 pupils to achieve at least level 5 in all the core subjects in 2008. Prior attainment data provides evidence that this is challenging but achievable.

Evaluating the impact of transition plans

- 59 All transition plans state when the plan will be reviewed and by whom. There are good arrangements to monitor improvement initiatives but very little about how clusters evaluate their impact in terms of improved outcomes for learners. This is a serious shortcoming of the majority of transition plans.
- 60 Only a few steering groups have used the checklists in Appendix 2 of the Welsh Assembly Government Guidance for the purpose of rigorous self-review when drawing up their transition plan. In most transition plans, success criteria refer to the completion of planned activities rather than to their impact on the quality of learning or pupils' progress and standards. Schools have not given enough consideration to the kind of information they will need to collect in order to be able to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of transition plans.
- 61 A few transition plans state clearly that their purpose is to improve the quality of learning and pupils' progress and achievement. These plans have specific objectives and milestones for evaluating the impact of the plan. There is a schedule of reviews and the evaluation criteria include quantifiable measures and targets.

Optional aspects of transition planning

- 62 Although the following aspects of transition are not a statutory part of transition plans, all the clusters visited for this survey have included these aspects in their transition plans because they see them as essential for the well being and progress of learners.

Pastoral links to meet pupils' social and emotional needs

- 63 In addition to well established arrangements to help pupils feel confident when they change school, many clusters have made further improvements to meet pupils' social and learning needs. These improvements include:
- extended periods of induction in the secondary school during Year 6, including subject lessons and activities to develop pupils' social and problem-solving skills;
 - partnering pupils with older pupils as 'buddies' or 'mentors' to help them understand the school's expectations and routines, and in some cases, to support their learning; and
 - the use of tools such as diary planners in Year 6 to help pupils improve their organisational skills in readiness for Year 7.

Sharing information about pupils

- 64 Most primary schools are formalising the different ways they share information with the secondary school about pupils' achievements, attendance and behaviour. Many use pro-formas to bring together information that helps secondary teachers get to know pupils quickly and provide support early to pupils at risk of not making a successful transfer to their new school. In the best examples, pupils contribute to this process through personal profiles that include their own records of progress and targets for Year 7.
- 65 Some LEAs have improved their support for schools to improve attendance and reduce exclusions. Educational welfare officers, educational psychologists and learning and behavioural support teams work together more closely as integrated teams in clusters and get to know pupils and their needs well. Some clusters have developed a joint behaviour-management policy. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them when they transfer to the secondary school.

Case study 6

Sharing pupils' profiles and details of individual learning needs

In one large comprehensive school, primary schools send pupils' own profiles to the secondary school in the summer term before the induction programme takes place. Copies of Year 6 reports and data on attainment, attendance and behaviour are sent electronically, including individual learning plans and details of aptitude in extra-curricular activities. Information is also provided on standards and the needs of pupils for whom English is a second language. This information provides a baseline for pupils' first progress review in the autumn term in Year 7.

The sharing of information has become more consistent and systematic.

Communicating the learning needs of pupils

- 66 In their transition plans, a few clusters give attention to improving how they meet the needs of specific groups of learners. Almost all primary schools pass on very good information about pupils' additional learning needs so that their needs are usually very well met in the secondary school. However, few transition plans identify specifically how they identify and meet the needs of more able and talented pupils or pupils who have difficulties with basic skills, particularly boys.⁴ Very few transition plans show how the secondary school will continue to provide support where needed for pupils who have had additional support in the primary schools through RAISE-funded programmes.

Ensuring continuity in Welsh

- 67 Welsh-medium secondary schools receive good information about Year 6 pupils' attainment in Welsh as a core subject. A few secondary schools that are involved in the Welsh Assembly Government and Welsh Language Board Welsh immersion pilot programme provide well-planned 'immersion' programmes for pupils who transfer from English-medium primary schools. One secondary school in north Wales provides a six-week immersion programme for these pupils in the summer term of Year 6. This prepares them well for learning all subjects through the medium of Welsh in Year 7.
- 68 Only a minority of transition plans include details of schools' arrangements to improve linguistic continuity in Welsh as a second language when pupils move to English-medium secondary schools. As a result, many of these schools do not know enough about pupils' proficiency in Welsh to ensure that teaching is pitched at the right level in Year 7. This can lead to repetitive and low-level work that pupils find boring. Arrangements to share information on pupils' attainment in Welsh are usually most effective where athrawon bro teams are involved in the teaching of Welsh in English-medium primary schools.

⁴ The section on transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3 in Estyn's publication, 'Best practice in the reading and writing of pupils aged 7 to 14 years', March 2008, provides more information on this.

Transfer arrangements from non-designated feeder primary schools

- 69 A small number of schools in certain categories are exempt from the statutory requirement to produce a transition plan. These include primary schools that have links with a number of secondary schools and where less than 50% of pupils transfer to one school. Where a school with key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils has a total of 50 or fewer registered pupils and a school with key stage 2 pupils only has 32 or fewer registered pupils, such schools also are not required to produce a transition plan. In addition, a significant number of secondary schools in Wales receive pupils from primary schools in neighbouring English counties. In some cases, the number of pupils transferring to secondary schools in Wales can account for up to a third of the Year 7 cohort. Some secondary schools may admit pupils from as many as 15 or more non-designated feeder primary schools in any one year.
- 70 In practice, almost all secondary schools work as closely as possible with non-designated feeder schools. The degree to which they do this depends on resources but most secondary schools receive a good range of information about pupils and visit all feeder primary schools where feasible. Some transition co-ordinators ensure that non-designated feeder primary schools receive a copy of the cluster transition plan and regular information on transition developments, including copies of bridging projects and invitations to relevant in-service training and headteachers' meetings. Almost all secondary schools include Year 6 pupils from all feeder primary schools and their parents in induction programmes.

The impact of transition plans

- 71 The impact that transition plans have made since September 2007 varies according to how much work clusters of schools had already done before transition plans became a statutory requirement. In clusters where schools have already worked together to improve pupils' progress in key stage 3, using guidance in the Aiming for Excellence publications, many improvements are already in place and there is evidence⁵ of their positive impact on pupils' progress and standards.
- 72 Statutory transition plans have given a higher priority to transition and strategic planning for improvement. The process of drawing up the transition plan has been a catalyst for bringing together separate transition initiatives that have similar aims. However, some clusters are at an early stage in improving transition and it is not possible yet to evaluate the specific impact of transition plans because the first cohort of pupils to whom the transition regulations apply are still in Year 6.
- 73 As a result of observing lessons in each other's schools and working together on joint curriculum and assessment projects, the quality of teaching is improving. However, only a few schools plan significant or innovative changes to how the curriculum is organised in Year 7 as a result of peer observation or joint planning arrangements.
- 74 Although most clusters are committed to improving the quality and reliability of teacher assessment at the end of key stage 2, opportunities for moderation between schools vary too widely. Few LEAs have strategies to ensure the accuracy and consistency of teacher assessment across their primary schools.

⁵ Estyn's 'Review of the Contribution of the Aiming for Excellence programme to the raising of standards in key stage 3', November 2006, provides a statistical evaluation of the impact of the Aiming for Excellence programme on pupils' learning experiences and on standards of achievement at key stage 3.

Local authority support for transition planning

- 75 Local authorities play a key role in supporting effective transition as part of their school improvement strategies. Schools are required to send copies of transition plans to their LEA. 'Guidance on the preparation of key stage 2 to key stage 3 transition plans' suggested that LEAs be given the opportunity to comment on transition plans as they are developed.
- 76 LEA arrangements to help schools improve transition are not consistently in place across all authorities. Most LEAs have a good understanding of their schools' transition plans but the amount of support that LEAs provide varies significantly. For example, some authorities provided stimulating awareness-raising events to launch the Guidance and have a clear strategy to improve transition that has been agreed with schools. In other authorities, schools have produced transition plans on their own and access LEA support on request. In a few authorities, schools have not had enough support. With a few exceptions, LEAs are not monitoring the process of transition planning or outcomes rigorously enough.
- 77 Many schools are uncertain about funding for transition work in the short and long term. In many authorities, there is a lack of clarity and transparency about the funding available to schools for transition initiatives. Some authorities have used the transition grant to fund county-wide initiatives such as electronic systems for passing on information about pupils' attainment and samples of pupils' work. Other LEAs have asked schools to bid for transition grant money for innovative projects. Others have distributed the transition grant to clusters of schools to implement transition plans, sometimes giving the same amount of funding, irrespective of the number and size of schools in each cluster. As a result of the late announcement by the Welsh Assembly Government in autumn 2006 of the availability of transition grant for 2006-2007, some LEAs and schools were late in setting up transition initiatives. Schools are currently using the Better Schools Fund, the transition grant or development funding from the General Teaching Council for Wales to fund transition work but the majority of clusters are uncertain about how they will fund work planned for the last year of the current transition plan in 2009-2010. There needs to be funding in the Better Schools Fund in 2009-2010 to maintain the momentum in improving transition when the transition grant comes to an end in 2009.
- 78 A few LEAs have particularly well developed policies and practice for improving transition.

Case study 7

Effective LEA support for clusters developing transition plans

In one LEA in north Wales, a senior adviser, supported by an advisory teacher, has responsibility for transition as part of his work to help schools improve learning and raise standards at key stage 3.

The LEA has provided schools with high-quality guidance on transition planning that links closely to national and local school improvement initiatives, such as RAISE, the revised national curriculum orders, improving teaching and learning, cross-phase assessment and moderation of pupils' work and 'assessment for learning' projects.

The adviser and advisory teacher support transition co-ordinators well and attend meetings of cluster steering groups to monitor developments. They meet all the transition co-ordinators four times a year. At these meetings, transition co-ordinators review transition initiatives and LEA staff share findings from their monitoring visits. The authority provides materials that transition co-ordinators can use in their clusters, including a compendium of transition developments in the LEA as a whole. Planning and funding arrangements are transparent and everyone understands them.

As a result of monitoring, the LEA drew schools' attention to the need to give more attention to monitoring the impact of initiatives. The LEA drafted a questionnaire for schools to use with Year 7 pupils on their perceptions of the challenge of work in Year 7 and other issues relating to transition and collated and analysed the responses for schools. The findings provided very useful feedback from learners that in some respects did not match schools' perceptions. As a result, transition co-ordinators have revised their transition plans to focus on improving teaching and standards. The schools found the exercise very useful and intend to use the pupil perception survey each year as one way to evaluate improvement over time.

Involving pupils, parents and governors

- 79 Most schools ask pupils for their views after events such as induction days have taken place. Only a very few schools have specifically asked the school council and other pupils for their views on transition and how it could be improved.

Case study 8

Consulting pupils about transition

In a south Wales cluster, headteachers organised a day for all the school council representatives from Years 5 to 11 in the five cluster schools to come together to discuss transition. The event was given a high profile and held in a conference centre away from school.

The local Assembly Member, the local authority participation officer from the Young People's Partnership and the five headteachers attended as observers. The proceedings were planned and organised by the pupils. Each school nominated a pupil to take a lead in organising the day.

Pupils worked in groups to discuss a range of issues that concern them when they move from primary to secondary school. These issues were recorded and then included in the cluster transition plan.

The cluster plans to organise a similar transition forum annually to review developments. The next forum will take place at the Senedd in Cardiff.

- 80 Very few transition steering groups include parents. Schools are increasingly using questionnaires to seek parents' views and are beginning to use responses to make important changes. For example, some schools are introducing a parents' evening in the autumn term of Year 7 to provide an early opportunity to discuss pupils' progress in their new school. A few steering groups plan to involve parents in their annual evaluation of the transition plan and some schools have provided parents with information about the plan in newsletters or their school prospectus. However, overall, schools have not consulted parents about transition early enough or in a way that enables them to influence the transition plan.
- 81 A few transition steering groups include a governor from one of the partner schools. Some schools involve governors in transition activities. Although some steering groups intend to involve a governor from each school in an annual review of the transition plan, in most cases they did not involve governors in the process of drawing it up. Many governing bodies have approved their cluster's transition plan but most are not well-informed enough to monitor how it is implemented.

Case study 9

Governors' involvement in transition plans

In one large secondary school in south Wales, the governing body is involved in drawing up and monitoring the transition plan through the work of a sub-group. This group has a very good understanding of the plan and activities to improve transition.

Governors attend transition activities such as cross-phase curriculum projects, induction activities and meetings for parents before and after pupils transfer schools. By talking with staff, parents and pupils, they monitor improvements in transition arrangements.

Members provide regular oral feedback to the governing body and an annual written report. As a result of the success of pilot schemes, the governing body has approved additional funding for changes to the curriculum in Year 7 and to extend curriculum initiatives in ICT.

Pupils' views on transition

- 82 During our visits to eight secondary schools, we asked a sample of about 12 Year 7 pupils in each school which aspects of transition they found helpful and which they would like to see improved. Here is a summary of their responses:
- 83 Year 7 pupils:
- think that teachers and transition activities prepare them well for Year 7;
 - enjoy induction periods in the secondary school during Year 6 because they experience new work;
 - find transition projects in the summer term of Year 6 interesting and challenging;
 - particularly like being paired with older pupils as 'buddies' or mentors because they help with a range of aspects, both academic and social; and
 - find diary planners useful as organisational tools and would like to have them in Year 6 as well.
- 84 Year 7 pupils do not like:
- variations in teachers' expectations of them; and
 - doing easy work or work they have done before. This occurs in a few subjects in each school and particularly in ICT.
- 85 In a few schools, Year 7 pupils do not like:
- bridging projects that teachers do not complete in Year 7 because pupils from some feeder schools have not done the first part of the work in Year 6; and
 - homework in the summer holidays before they go to the secondary school because some teachers do not look at it in Year 7.
- 86 These responses show that many transition initiatives are improving the quality of pupils' learning experiences but practice remains variable.