

# **The Experiences of Pupils with SEN and their Parents at the stage of Pre-Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School**

Keywords: Special Education Needs, transition, primary, post-primary, parents, pupils

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### **Abstract**

The experiences of pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN) and their parents at pre and post-transition from primary to post-primary school have received little literature attention. This current paper outlines the outcomes of the post transition experiences of pupils with SEN and their parents and provides a follow up to their pre –transition experiences from a comprehensive research project conducted in the Republic of Ireland. Twenty six pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN) and twenty seven parents of pupils participated in focus groups after their transition to post primary school. Emergent themes for pupils included: settling in; asking questions, provoking questions; and it's not as bad as you think it's going to be. Emergent themes for parents included: social support is key to settling in; communication problems; and prevention is better than cure. Critical issues emerging from the data are discussed .

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### **Introduction**

The literature on post-transition experiences converges on the view that the first few weeks at post-primary school represent a period of apprehension for pupils (Gorwood, 1986; Measor and Woods, 1984). Tobbell (2003) outlined five themes that appear to summarise relevant emotions and concerns: school as community; learning experiences; feeling lost; adult or child; and what makes a good teacher.

Early in the post-transition period, pupils have already begun to detect changes in the style of peer interactions. For example, popularity is contingent upon fitting into smaller groups, rather than the whole-class integration that characterises primary school, and there is less socialisation with younger peers. In conjunction with these social issues, pupils experience significant changes in the academic environment of post-primary school. Specifically, the new learning experiences are dominated by more teachers and more subjects. Overall, the evidence suggests that this more diverse environment is perceived by some pupils as less accommodating to individual needs than primary school (National Disability Authority, 2008).

Even the different physical environment brings numerous challenges (Tobbell, 2003). For example, while pupils often receive a month's grace for being late for class immediately after transition, most believed it took longer to get to know the layout of the new school. Indeed, pupils spend time at the end of one class worrying about how they will get to the next one. As noted elsewhere, these concerns are off-set with positive perceptions, and the worries about being late for class are balanced by perceived increases in status and freedom that come with changing classrooms. Pupils also discriminate a sense of being treated as older, specifically as young adults rather than children. Again, this comes with mixed emotions. On the one hand, they feel greater stature, while on the other pupils feel they lack competency and self-confidence.

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Tobbell (2003) concluded that the teacher-pupil relationship at post-primary school was not highly reciprocal, and as a result pupils were less positive about these teachers, relative to primary school. For example, pupils' definitions of what makes a "good teacher" are based on explaining difficult topics and making learning fun, but they criticise post-primary teachers for speaking too quickly, not know pupils' names; and being interested only in pupils who excel in their subject. Similarly, Smyth, McCoy and Darmody (2004) reported that the majority of comments about teachers were negative and centred around harsh punishments for minor infringements.

### *Pupils with Special Educational Needs*

According to Evangelou et al. (2008), pupils with SEN do not report post-transition experiences that differ markedly from their counterparts without SEN. If any, the key distinguishing feature for the former involve arrangements for accessing support outside normal classes (Forgan and Vaughn, 2000; Maunsell, Barrett and Candon, 2007).

### *Parental Transition Experiences*

In a large-scale study, Alston, Sammons and Mortimore (1985) found that parents were generally satisfied with their post-transition experiences. Areas of less satisfaction centred specifically around limited contact with post-primary schools and pupil-based worries that included: bullying, safety, homework and making new friends.

## **Method**

The current study investigated the transition experiences of pupils with SEN and their parents at the post-transition period. Qualitative methods were employed for this purpose.

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### *Samples*

#### *Schools*

The total sample of 30 schools was generated by a database provided by the NCSE and other contacts known to the Research Team. These were stratified according to geographical region (North West, West, East and South of Ireland) and rural versus urbanised.

#### *Pupils*

Of the 32 pupils who participated in the pre-transition study, 26 took part again at post-transition, plus one pupil with multiple disabilities who was unable to participate at pre-transition.

#### *Parents*

Of the sample of 27 pupils, 26 of their parents participated at post-transition. In all cases, the parent directly involved was a mother (only two fathers of the two of the sample pupils also attended the focus groups).

### *Materials*

The materials comprised of questions to guide pupil focus groups and questions to guide parental focus groups.

### *Setting*

#### *Pupils*

Twenty-six pupils each attended one of seven focus groups, each of which contained 3-8 children. One pupil (P14) opted for a one-to-one interview for logistical reasons. Allocation to focus groups was governed primarily by logistics. All discussions took place in quiet rooms of

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seven of the schools involved. Only the researcher, the researcher's assistant and the pupils were generally present. Where focus groups were conducted in a special school, an SNA was also present. The single one-to-one interview was conducted in very similar circumstances to the focus groups, except for the absence of the child's peers and the presence of an advocate for the child.

### *Parents*

Of the 26 parents, 23 attended one of five focus groups, each of which contained 3-6 parents. Three mothers opted for individual interviews. Parental focus groups and interviews were conducted in the same schools as the pupil focus groups.

### *Procedure*

Following initial expressions of interest at pre-transition, parents were contacted directly by the researcher, who then met with both parents and pupils to discuss participation. Participation occurred between October and December of 2009, in the first term of first year in post-primary school (excluding September to allow a period of settling in).

### *Focus groups*

All focus groups ranged in duration between 40 and 60 minutes, depending on level of pupil/parent input. The focus groups followed a semi-structured interview format. The themes guiding pupil focus groups were: (1) Experiences of transition versus expectations, (2) Helpful activities and (3) Continuing worries. The themes guiding parental focus groups and interviews were: (1) Continuity of resources, (2) Realisations of expectations, (3) Child's current experience, (4) Child's level of integration, (5) Access to a significant adult to assist child, (6) Parental experiences and (7) Views of transition process.

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### *Data collection*

All aspects of data collection were identical to the pre-transition study.

### *Data analysis*

All aspects of data analysis were identical to the pre-transition study, except that the focus group data from post-transition was finally used to retrospectively re-evaluate the earlier analyses provided for the pre-transition focus group data.

## **Results**

### ***Pupils' Focus group data***

Three interrelated themes emerged from data analyses: (1) Settling in; (2) Asking questions, provoking questions; and (3) It's not as bad as you think it's going to be.

### *Settling in*

Pupils accounts of their early experiences in post-primary school centred around understanding new rules and new relationships with peers, older pupils and teachers. Lack of familiarity of first encounters and being the youngest pupils were evident in their recollections of first days.

P1 (Pupil with MGLD): It was scary the first time I walked in.

P3 (Pupil with Multiple Disabilities): It was really strange .... and there was people you didn't know and you didn't know what to say to anybody.

P4 (Pupil with ADHD): ...all of the other fellas were looking at you... like, 'cos we were only the first years.

However, organised activities and games helped establish good rapport among pupils and a sense of school community.

P33: ... we played musical chairs that was a bit stupid but kind of fun and you had to find somebody whose birthday was the same time as you.

Pre-existing relationships also served to buffer initial anxieties for some pupils.

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P15 (Pupil with Multiple Disabilities): I was a bit nervous, yes. But it was ok on the first day...All of the lads were here so that was good 'cos you knew some people. So that was good.

Nonetheless, concerns about school rules remained, so much so that the discontinuity with the primary school culture seemed palpable.

P4: They have different rules, you just have to know what they want.

P26 (Pupil with EBD): One week you can do something and then you can't. It gets very confusing sometimes and then some of the teachers have different rules from the others.

'Being given out to' and a sense of injustice of being reprimanded for inadvertent rule-breaking continued to be emphasised.

P28 (Pupil with Dyslexia): ...I was really upset 'cos I was only asking for a pencil, but she said I should have put up my hand...but I just forgot to... One day this teacher said to me 'Do you know that you're not supposed to do that?' and I says 'No' and she still gave out to me.

P31 (Pupil with Hearing Impairment): He [the teacher] didn't give me time to explain or anything, he just gave out and I got ten lines for being late too.

Overall, pupils expressed difficulties in trying to 'understand' teachers' interpretations and implementation of rules.

P32 (Pupil with Multiple Disabilities): I thought it was better in the primary school with the teacher and that. I don't like having loads of teachers. It can get very, like, you don't understand them all and some of them are ok, but some of them get really cross with ya.

P2: "They don't like you to ask them questions, so you learn not to ask questions. I got into trouble for that with some of them".

Homework also presented difficulties which often coincided with pupils' specific disabilities and available supports. For example, while several pupils with MGLD reported homework difficulties, others with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties reported discipline problems already.

P27 (Pupil with Multiple Disabilities): I'm always in trouble. They all hate me. They hated my sister too. That's why they hate me.

P26: I keep getting put on report and I have to get the teachers to sign this sheet after every class. Then I have to bring it to my tutor on Friday.

On balance, others had begun to adjust to the new rules, especially with the help of significant others.

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P4 (Pupil with ADHD): I was getting into loads of fights, but its ok now. Mr. X (Tutor) keeps an eye on me and I can go to him if somebody is annoying me.

### *Asking questions, provoking questions*

The benefits of formal peer mentoring in assisting the new first year pupils to negotiate social interactions and gain relevant information were clear. Specifically, these pupils benefited from receiving information, practical and emotional support, friendship, advice and advocacy.

P34 (Pupil with Multiple Disabilities): Mine is one of the girls from the older years and she's nice...She is very nice to me.

P31: Loads of us were thinking about bullying and that, but the mentors help out with that. So I think there is always somebody to help you if you want.

P26: I was panicking and saying 'Oh God, she's going to kill me' and then she [the mentor] came into the locker room and she saw me crying and she sorted it out.

Mentors seemed particularly important for pupils who were intimidated or reluctant to ask teachers for help.

P39 (Pupil with Multiple Disabilities): It's good, like, to have an older fella to ask things, like, and not be asking the teachers. Like, sometimes you might just feel stupid asking them, like the teachers, but now they are ok [the teachers]. But, you know it's just easier to ask them [the mentors].

P28: If you are not sure of something, you don't mind asking somebody that you know, but I wouldn't ask somebody that I didn't know. I would be too embarrassed.

P38: The teachers tell you to ask questions and that if you need anything just to ask them. I just don't like asking.

Indeed, pupils were acutely aware of the potential stigmatising impact of disclosing their SEN (even indirectly through their absence in specific classes to access support) and its impact of fitting in.

P28: It's a bit embarrassing, like, 'cos the other girls ask you why you are not doing Irish and you don't know what to say. So, I just say I just don't. I mean I don't want to tell them that I have dyslexia.

P7 (Pupil with Multiple Disabilities): I feel, like, I just wouldn't want the teachers to know. I'd just rather be treated as everybody else, like.

Nonetheless, some pupils highlighted the need for support and discussed differences in support provision between primary and post-primary school.

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P4: Well, like, in my last school I had somebody to help me. I used to go to him for extra classes and that and they don't have that here, 'though I think some of them go and get some help. Do you think you could ask them about that for me?

P6 (Pupil with Multiple Disabilities): Ehm, well it's a lot different, the resource class here, 'cos over there I had a specific time to go over, and I'd come over, and, like, some days we'd do schoolwork. But here, it's, like, only when I'm upset I come, I've only come here [to the resource room], like, four times.

*It's not as bad as you think it's going to be*

Despite initial fears and some difficulties, many pupils gave post-primary school a qualified endorsement.

P1: It's not that bad...I would be saying to them [other first year pupils] not to be worrying 'cos the teachers are there to help ya and they do, like, and it's ok really.

P3: Yeah, it's not half as bad as you think it's going to be and you get to know your way around ok.

Initial concerns about the physical environment and homework were displaced by increasing confidence and independence.

P12 (Pupil with Dyslexia): Maybe three/four weeks later we got, like, more used to the freedom, like, the move from class to class. The subjects, I like. I actually like movin' class to class. When you're movin', it, like kinda, clears your head of the other subject.

P6: It felt easier 'cos all the homework I got on Tuesday, most of it's not due' til Thursday. So, if I'm busy on Tuesday, I don't have to do it 'til Wednesday.

Enthusiasm for trying new subjects remained high, with further emphasis on applied subjects (e.g. web pages, making Christmas gifts in woodwork) as a potential source of praise by parents and teachers.

P4: I like some of the new subjects. Metalwork is deadly, like, and the computers are cool too. Its way better than primary school.

P32: I like home economics 'cos you do cooking and that and make stuff and I like art and sometimes science because sometimes we do experiments and that. Yeah, I like those, but I don't like all the reading and maths and that. Oh it's very hard.

### *Parents' focus group data*

Focus groups and interviews conducted with parents yielded three themes: (1) Social support is key to settling in; (2) Communication problems; and (3) Prevention is better than cure.

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### *Social support is key to settling in*

Similar to pre-transition, social integration and its impact on other domains was central to parental concerns.

PA43: ...well the organisation, as I said and then if he [child with Asperger's Syndrome] is upset or anything he can go to this room and all of the teachers know that he can ask for time out and there is a system. Oh yes of course, he gets his resource and that with Mrs X [resource teacher], but it was more important to have things in place for him socially. The academics will follow.

Indeed, when asked how her child was getting on, another parent spontaneously answered in the following socially-oriented terms:

PA31: Aye. X [child with Hearing Impairment] is doing ok. Loving the sport, and that, and making friends. He seems to be getting on fine. No problems so far.

The same respondent indicated the belief that the children were also focused on social matters:

...they really just want to be the same as everybody else.

And some parents highlighted difficulties.

PA25: Well X [child with Dyslexia] is very quiet and I think she is finding it, em you know, difficult, like, to make new friends. But she is getting there...but she finds it hard.

Consistent with pre-transition sentiments, some parents attributed these difficulties to the loss of friendships with primary school counterparts.

PA7: X [child with Multiple Disabilities] still misses primary school. I think he finds it hard. Like, he has not really made any new friends...In the primary school he hung around with the younger ones in the school, not the lads or girls in his class. So, I think he probably finds the whole friends bit difficult...I'd be afraid that he would just get left behind, you know. He talks about the kids from his primary school more than anybody new, but it might just take time with him, you know. But I do worry about him [parent becomes upset].

In contrast, parents reported positive experiences when their children already 'belonged' to a community of existing friends or relatives at the new school.

PA3: X [child with Multiple Disabilities] was delighted to be going because all of her cousins are there. So, she knows loads of people and she couldn't wait to start. So, em, the first day was no problem...The cousins being in the school already was good for X and she has settled in now.

PA28: Yeah X [child with Dyslexia] was fine the first day, a bit nervous, like and that, and she had made arrangements to meet some of the girls, so they could walk in together.

Parents talked glowingly about transition planning initiatives by support services and schools in terms of fostering an early sense of school community.

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PA17: Well, the kids went off on a hike for the day and were all split up from their friends. And they had to get to know some other kids, and that, and they brought lunch, you know em the usual, but he [child with MGLD] really enjoyed it.

PA43: X [child] of course was anxious. But, I told you about the Summer programme that they ran in the school. So, that really, really helped him. I can't emphasise that enough. It did him the world of good and definitely reduced his anxiety. The school used his July hours and did out a programme for him and some other students that were going to start in the autistic unit and they did a couple of things in July. Like, they went to the pictures and bowling and in the school they worked out timetables and got to know the school, em you know, the layout and that. It worked very well for him. Now he still found it difficult at the beginning, but I don't think it was as bad for him as it could have been.

However, many believed that these activities should be specific to pupils with SEN, at least to some extent.

Parents also reported the need for their children to feel supported and welcomed by teachers, and that a 'watchful eye' was an important aspect of positive staff attitudes.

PA25: I felt that the evening [welcoming first years] was important for the kids because the evening was just about them, like just the first years. And they felt very important and X [child] said to me afterwards that the first day they had a lovely welcome as well.

PA38: That's good 'though, isn't it like. They are looking out for my fella [child with ADHD] as well. So, I think that will help the boys settle down more, once they know that the school is looking out for them."

Once again, mentoring was highly valued. In fact, PA34 described how her son was so impressed with assistance from his mentor that he hoped to be a mentor himself.

X [child with Multiple Disabilities] enjoys it and finds it works for him [the mentoring programme], but it's not about his behaviour or other people annoying him, it's about helping him to get around and his safety. And I think he realises that for him it's important...X is even saying that he would like to be a mentor when it's his turn, you know, when he is in fifth year.

Overall, there was a general consensus that mentoring was crucial to successful transition, because the children felt safer and less afraid when they had someone to go to with their problems.

PA4: He [child with ADHD] was getting into fights all of the time at the beginning. But his housemaster has taken him under his wing and he is doing much better. He is doing well in his school work and he is in a high class. I think that has helped him. His housemaster has told him that when there is trouble he should go looking for him. That has really helped and he is not getting into trouble at all now. They have made great efforts with him.

### *Communication problems*

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Consistent with accounts of transition planning, information regarding pupils' SEN did not appear to be distributed or used appropriately. PA39 angrily reported the following incident in which her child had not been allowed to use the bathroom.

I mean all the other wee girls and boys stared and...he [child with Multiple Disabilities] was right upset...Well he was having problems about the toilet so I had to go up and sort that out...He didn't get there in time because the teacher wouldn't let him out, so I had war with the school...I asked to see the principal and then he and Mrs X [resource teacher] had a meeting with me...It was obvious that the teachers had not read the notes and Mrs X had given them to them, so it was not her fault. She is very good and none of the teachers were aware about the chair [specialised to address a severe physical disability] either, so they don't know how important it is for him and he was just in bad form all the time and tired.

Similar difficulties emerged with cognitive challenges.

PA17 (Pupil with Dyslexia): When I went up to the parent teacher meeting, I was shocked that none of them [teachers] knew that he was dyslexic and some of them were saying things about him, that is like em. The problem's that he has dyslexia and not because he's lazy or anything.

Some parents also reported that their children were already struggling academically, especially with organisational skills and weekly tests.

PA39: He would always have found it difficult to get his homework done. Now it's even worse. Sometimes he has not written his homework down properly and then forgets what he has to do. I have been up to the school about it, but there are so many teachers that it's difficult to get your point across. His tutor has said that she will tell them, but it has not changed.

Paradoxically, where information was transferred, parents of pupils who had exemptions from subjects expressed dismay with designated alternative activities, in which the children were "left to their own devices" and told to "get on with other work". This was perceived as a missed opportunity to provide extra language and literacy support.

Some parents also believed that their children's 'labels' were being generalised in making premature educational decisions.

PA12: He [child with Dyslexia] was only two weeks in the school and I got this letter home to say that he was being moved into a special maths class. In all of his assessments, they had said that maths was his strength. I could not believe it. I protested strongly to the school and their attitude was "we're only trying to do our best". But they were not doing their best for my son. They wanted to get numbers up to create this "special maths class" and it's like "Oh let's put X into that class because he has dyslexia". He got 95% in his mid-term and his maths teacher could not understand why they decided so early to move him. He was also supposed to get extra support for his English, but this has not happened. There is a teacher there who has done all of the courses and was supposed to set up this class. But she is involved in the school musical and that is taking up all of her time. I will be glad when it's over because then I hope he will get what he needs.

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These issues were attributed to lack access to teachers, at which parents felt perplexed, misunderstood and ‘written off, thereby unable to prevent (otherwise avoidable) problems for their children.

PA6: Well for me everything takes so long to get sorted...I'd like to talk to the teachers to actually tell them what he's [child with Multiple Disabilities] like...and when I went to the first year head I was told the same ‘wait until the parent teacher meeting’ [three months into the school year].

PA6: I think that for parents like us, em, there should be some type of system where we can voice our fears and, em you know, talk to somebody before things get out of hand.

The uncertainty regarding the continuity of SEN supports persisted and caused parents considerable stress and upset.

PA27: Well X [child with Multiple Disabilities] was very upset the first few weeks and, em, we got no notification of what type of support she was going to get and I thought that she would get an SNA, but she hasn't and that is a big problem for her. And she still has no resource or learning support yet. And I have been up to the school and one teacher told me that because of her behaviour she was holding the rest of the class back. I mean, they just don't seem to have any understanding of her needs at all. I mean, imagine a teacher telling me that X is responsible for the rest of the class not learning. So, she started putting her out. That's the answer -- throw them out of the class!

Even when resource decisions had been made, some parents had not been informed. Consider comments by PA27 when asked if anyone had contacted her regarding applications for SEN supports:

Not at all, nothing. I got no notice at all, I had to ring up myself and they [school] said that she had not been allocated the SNA and that she was probably not entitled to one. Like that, they had tried to get one in for her, but they were told ‘no’.

Once again, some parents were reticent to pursue schools for information, in case this reflected negatively on their children.

PA25: No I haven't heard anything either, but the parent teacher meeting is coming up so I will ask then. You don't want to be asking them already. Like I know that I should but I thought I would leave it till then. I don't want to cause problems for her either.

### *Prevention is better than cure*

Of parents who seemed the most satisfied with their children's transition, all had been involved in extensive transition planning and had secure tangible supports for their children before, or very early in, post-primary school.

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PA35: I can't believe how well he [child with Multiple Disabilities] is getting on. He really is doing very well here and they have been wonderful with him. Mrs X [resource teacher] is very reassuring with him and is very positive about him as well and he has settled in very well. Much better than I had even imagined...I think it's because of all the planning that went into it. Do you remember I was telling you about the programme he was doing... Well he did that all over the Summer. It was part of his July hours and he went to the centre in X [place name] and they did a lot of social skills with him and getting himself around, and that. And then he was in the school for a couple of the days as well getting to know the staff. The programme itself, I think, has been what has made the whole thing work. Definitely, I think the programme, but, also em you know, we have been planning this since X [child] was in fifth class".

In contrast, of those parents who seemed most dissatisfied and distressed, SEN supports were not in place early on (some had to wait as much as three months).

PA39: Don't talk to me about when he started. The first day he goes up and there is no chair for him [specialised to address a severe physical disability] and his wheelchair wouldn't fit through some of the doors, so he had to come home. He was right upset. They told him and told me that it would be there, but no, it wasn't, and then the wheelchair couldn't get in. His is not in a regular one, like, it is very big, so that's why he uses his chair in the school..., the school rang me and told me what had happened and so I came and picked him up...He was right upset...It wasn't there until the following week, so he couldn't really attend, like.

Unfortunately, reassurances from schools did little to quash these anxieties.

PA38...he is finding it difficult to manage and I would have liked all of that sorted out before he came here...The primary school sent over all of his reports, and that. So, I'm not happy with the fact that it takes so long to get him what he needs, like, its takes too long. And I know they [school] are looking into it now, but that should have happened before now...

PA27: I think the whole system is a sham and that things happen too late or not at all even...I've been through it once and its happening again and again and nothing changes. My child will still need support all through her school life, that's what the reports say and that's what the doctors say. I think they just want her to go a special school and not have to deal with her or kids like her in the mainstream systems at all... and yet she could stay here if they only provided the support that she needs.

Once again, parents believed that the lack of resources was exacerbated by the absence of one person co-ordinating transition and SEN provision. PA39 noted this when essential equipment for her child's physical disability was not available:

..., one was blaming the other. I rang the primary school because they were supposed to organise it, but they said it was the secondary school and nobody had come to collect it and they thought that they must have got another one... Sure, they were all giving out, but that's no good to me. I mean I'm running around all of the time and then even when you do it's still not enough. I was right annoyed I can tell you and I told them too.

In contrast, parents felt highly validated when schools involved them in matters regarding their children's SEN, and this proactive approach was strongly believed to have also benefited the children directly.

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PA43: The school certainly does not leave him out of anything just because he has Asperger's. It's quite the opposite. A couple of weeks ago they were going on a field trip for geography and his geography teacher rang me and told me that they were going and had told X [child] about it, but did I have any questions or was there anything he could do to make sure X would be ok?...I was gobsmacked, but very impressed that he would do that, you know, take the time to ring...But, it took the anxiety out of it for him because they told him a lot about it beforehand and that's what he needs. And if he said that he didn't want to go, I think they would have pushed him you know to include him.

### **Discussion**

A number of key issues emerged from the post-transition data. 'Settling in' reflected pupils' negative impression of their first days in the new school, and some difficulties in negotiating new rules and relationships with teachers and peers. Both barriers and facilitators to receiving help were observed in the theme 'asking questions, provoking questions'. This not only highlighted pupil reluctance to approach teachers, but also the benefits of peer-mentoring. This form of mediation early on may serve to circumvent the perceived chasm between primary and post-primary teachers, before social relations with teachers have been formed. The positive features of transition, especially new subjects and more independence, were reflected in 'its' not as bad as you think it's going to be'.

For parents, social experiences with peers and teachers remained central to successful transition, as reflected in 'social support is key to settling in'. Similar to their children, parents believed that social and academic issues were inseparable, and academic attainment was facilitated by a secure social environment in which teachers play a key role. Indeed, 'communication problems' highlighted parental frustrations in securing supports for, or resolve difficulties with, their children's SEN. Similarly, 'prevention is better than cure' reflected their views on the adequacy and benefits of these supports.

### **Conclusions**

This study sought to gain insight into the experiences of pupils with SEN and their parents in the transition from primary to post-primary education. The results highlighted the mix of tension and

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anticipation often seen in the literature with pupils without SEN and suggest that the experiences of pupils with SEN do not differ significantly overall from those without SEN. However, the data here also suggest that these children's experiences, and those of their parents, are affected by the SEN, in both social and academic domains. And, the struggle for resources plays a strong role in this.

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