Transition from Primary to Secondary School in the Dublin 1 Area
An Inclusive Educational Approach

Authors: Dr (s): Geraldine Scanlon: Paula Flynn: Alison Doyle: Neil Kenny and Maeve Dupont

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Table of Tables

Table of Appendices

Glossary of Terms

ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland
CAMHS	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service
GDIL	Gender, Choice, Retention and Disability
GDPR	General Data Protection regulations
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Irish Schools
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EWO	Educational Welfare Officer
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
HSE	Health Service Executive
HSLCC	Home School Liaison Community Coordinator
HSCLO	Home School Community Liaison Officer
IEP	Individualised Education Plan
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Service
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
SET	Special Education Teacher
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
TULSA	Child and Family Agency

Executive Summary

Background

Theories of child and adolescent development recognize the multiple transitions of a personal, social, psychological, physiological, and environmental nature, which are also lifelong (Erikson, 1975; Vygotsky, 1978). Lateral transitions describe a movement between two historically related activities in a single direction, for example, the move from primary to secondary school. School transitions result in a change in knowledge, skills, performance, and identity, and consequently are closely tied to the growth and progression of the individual. However, whilst they are a normative part of development and share a temporal commonality, the emotional and practical impact attached to that transitional moment, will not be experienced by all pupils or all parents, in the same way (Lohaus, Elben, Ball, & Klein-Hessling, 2004; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005).

The broader school transition experience is "a process which, at its best, research suggests causes slight apprehension, while at its worst provokes deeply felt anxiety" (Galton & Hargreaves, 2002, p. 1). Such apprehensions and anxieties may be magnified by a range of factors including individual differences, family resources, peer relationships, school ethos and culture, teacher attitudes, curriculum access, and socio-economic / socio-geographic variables (e.g. Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Daly, McCoy, Byrne, O'Connell, Kelly, & Doherty, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Unwin, LeMesurier, Bathia, & Deb, 2008; Wray, 2013). The move from primary

to post-primary school is a critical event in the geographies of young people, and models of transition planning that assume such transitions follow highly structured and linear pathways, and have a significant impact on opportunities and outcomes.

International research has demonstrated the potential for improved student engagement, learning and agency when young people are consulted on their experiences of school and given opportunities to contribute to important decisions that are made with respect to their education (Bragg 2001; Cook-Sather 2006 & 2014; Cooper 2008; Cruddas 2007; Fielding 2004; Flynn 2014 & 2017; Lundy 2007; Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Sebba and Robinson 2011). However, for young people with additional needs who may experience low self esteem and motivation it is particularly important to facilitate opportunities to listen to their experiences especially as there is evidence of the link between student voice, positive relationships and a sense of belonging and attachment to school (Anderson and Ronson 2004; Flynn, 2014; Simmons, Graham and Thomas 2015).

Recent evidence from an Irish study suggests that student voice engagement to supporting young people is fundamental to the development of an inclusive learning environment for the benefit of all students and has the potential to impact on school retention as a consequence of the positive effect on attachment and connectedness to school (Flynn 2015). Facilitating the voice of parents has also been recognised as critical in facilitating a partnership approach to transition and it is recognised that parents can have a valuable and constructive input to the transition process (Scanlon et al. 2015). Many children have high support requirements in primary school and form strong relationships with their teachers and peers. The transition to second level education can be

a challenging and demanding experience for both parents and children. Thus, the aims of the research were to explore the experiences of a number of stakeholders in primary and post primary schools in the Dublin 1 area to identify a model of support that is required for students with and without disabilities to make a seamless and sustainable transition from primary to post-primary school. Specifically, as follows:

1. To examine what constitutes good practice at both formal and informal levels to facilitate the transition process from primary to post primary school.
2. To establish the current practice in feeder schools in planning for transition from primary to post primary education.
3. To explore the relationship between the transition from primary to post primary school and school retention.
4. To investigate pupil choice of secondary school.

Proposed Outcomes:

1. To inform the development of a three-year pilot programme by examining the outcomes from the feasibility project.
2. To identify the challenges that pupils with and without disabilities encounter moving from primary to post primary school
3. To identify what enables a seamless and sustainable transition from primary to post primary school
4. To explore the relationship between the concept of transition and school retention

For the purposes of clarity the terms pupil and student are used interchangeably throughout the text and reflects terms used in the Irish context.

Method and Data Collection

The study employed a qualitative approach and generated data through two primary mechanisms. Firstly, a literature review was conducted. The search strategy adopted for the literature review for this report focussed on relevant policy documents and on peer reviewed articles from 1990-2018. This search was conducted via the Dublin City University online library drawing from the following databases included ERIC, Proquest, JSTOR, Sage Journals PsychInfo, and PsycNet. Google Scholar was also utilized to locate open access articles and to locate policy documents. The following search terms were used to locate articles specific to this study: *Primary Education, Secondary Education, Educational disadvantage, transition, Special Education Needs, Inclusion,* and *Student voice*. Variations of these terms were used to ensure exhaustive search results.

The second method was qualitative and comprised of semi-structured interviews and focus groups at two time points, Pre and Post Transition. The Pre- Transition data was gathered in March / April 2018 with 18 male and female pupils who were currently in 6th class from two single-sex primary schools - one boys' and one girls'. Ten parents of these pupils participated simultaneously in either focus group or individual interviews in each of the schools and 1-1 interviews were conducted with education professionals including principals, 6th class teachers, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinators and one Special Needs Assistant (SNA). The Post Transition data was gathered in January 2019: participants were interviewed again in their schools along with post primary education professionals including 1st year teachers, Year Heads, HSCL

Coordinators, SNAs and Principals. There was notable attrition in the parents' participant group at this time point.

.

Key Findings

The findings of this study indicate that there is no formal transition planning in place between the primary or post primary schools who participated. This was seen to impact on pupils, their parents and the wider school community and is specifically concerned with the absence of formal pre and post transition activities and the timely exchange of pupil information. The study has identified a number of inter-related factors that have been identified in previous research studies (Scanlon and Doyle, 2018; Smyth, 2017;Barnes-Holmes et al. 2013; Scanlon et al. 2015; Whitby et al. 2006; Galton & McLellan, 206; Galton & Hargraves, 2002) but which are also unique to the Dublin 1 area and concludes that an interagency and community approach is required to enable pupils make a successful and sustainable transition if they are to complete their post- primary education.

This would be best facilitated through the development of a formal transition programme for students and their parents which could be specifically embedded into the school completion programme supported by the NBSS, HSCL's and key staff from the primary feeder schools and post primary schools. The findings from this study clearly indicate that a positive transition is the key to promoting school retention especially for pupils who experience additional challenges during their educational trajectory. The framework for the development of an inclusive approach for transition from primary to post primary school in the Dublin 1 area must consider including all the relevant stakeholders most notably parents to ensure a seamless transition for all pupils.

A longitudinal study is required to examine the specific and interrelated factors concerned with transition from primary to post primary school and school retention.

contributes to school

Conclusions

Transition Activities

The findings of this study indicate that there is no formal transition planning in place between the primary or post primary schools who participated. This was seen to impact on pupils, their parents and the wider school community and is specifically concerned with the absence of formal pre and post transition activities and the timely exchange of pupil information.

A variety of informal pre-transition activities were observed across the schools and included open evenings, tours of the school, and information about school policies. In some cases, schools provided an induction programme but were aware that not enough time was dedicated to this activity in lieu of the amount of information that need to be discussed. In general, the pupils who participated in the study were looking forward to the "move" and their new subjects, but understandably had some apprehension about the changes in the curriculum and their workloads. Parents were also acutely aware of these issues especially in relation to their child's personal characteristics [i.e. SEN or behavioural difficulties] and the potential impact on their well-being in their new environment. However, there was a general consensus that transitioning with friends and going to school in the local community could help buffer these concerns.

Settling In

Despite the lack of a prescribed pre- transition programme, pupils were found to be happy in their new schools at the post transition phase and these positive experiences were attributed to a number of structured activities which had been provided in the first few days and weeks in secondary school. These included a variety of clubs which were centred around Maths, English and homework as well as extracurricular activities like P.E. games and bonding opportunities. These activities helped them to make friends and get to know their new school as well as establishing the expectations from their new teachers and peers. Forming friendships were critically important for all pupils and allowed them to reflect on their pre-transition concerns in relation to bullying and their own behaviour. Other programmes to support pupils were also in evidence and included the *Friends for Life programme* and *Belong Plus*. Other practical supports were provided by the NBSS and topics such as bullying were explored during SPHE.

Parents

However, it is worth noting that parents expressed their concerns about the lack of access to information and were genuinely unaware of what information was transferred from school to school but were acutely aware that the entrance test could determine if their child received a place or not in their school of choice. They were also found to be dependent upon the HSCL and the principal to help them navigate the transition landscape, especially those parents from an ethnic background. It is worth noting that there was a high level of attrition from parents in this study and they became significantly "invisible" at the post – transition phase when collecting data. This may imply that parents themselves require support during the transition phase if they are to become active and embedded in their child new school community. Given that positive

transitions have been associated with school retention for pupils, this research would suggest that this is equally important for parents who have been identified as one of the key variables associated with their children's sustainability in education. A co-ordinated transition programme in the Dublin 1 area could help support both parents and pupils and could form part of the school completion programme.

Curriculum

The expectations about curriculum changes were found to be different between the boys and the girls in the study. For example, the girls seemed to have participated in sample lessons and a community project, *One Book One Community*, where they were encouraged to read and discuss a particular book as an inter-school activity. In contrast, the boys' perception of the curriculum appeared to be informed by older siblings and other family members. This vagueness about the curriculum was echoed by their parents who felt that their children {boys} had little or no understanding of what was ahead for them. In addition, the study found that pupils and parents from a minority background were at a distinct disadvantage given that they were sometimes still "catching up" on learning English in the face of managing a broader and more complex curriculum. This was particularly noted by educational professionals who expressed their concerns for pupils who arrived in Ireland to begin their education at 5^{th} or 6^{th} class levels. They also agreed that little or no academic preparedness took place between the schools and this was found in part to be rooted in the priorities in primary schools in promoting and sustaining fluency in Maths and English for all their pupils.

The *One Book One Community* initiative could be extended through project-based work mediated through technology, and which is cross-curricular in focus, providing an opportunity to create familiarity with and understanding of links between post-primary subjects. For example: visits to primary schools during Transition Year where pupils present Science and Business projects or slide presentations on school trips and extra-curricular activities; sharing whole school activities such as music and drama productions through additional matinee performances for local primary schools.

Pedagogy

This lack of curriculum bridging work puts a lot of pressure on pupils and staff at the beginning of the academic year despite the provision of homework clubs. In particular pupils referred to the increased workload as a consequence of the frequency of more formal assessments in all of the curricular areas and getting to know and understand individual teaching styles. Again, it was noted that pupils from a minority background and those with SEN were at a particular disadvantage in this regard. In particular, pedagogical matters were found to be of critical importance for pupils with SEN especially where individual characteristics [social and emotional problems] impacted upon learning. The support from SNA's was seen to be significant especially supporting pupils to develop social as opposed to academic skills. However, staff worked with pupils with SEN in isolation rather than schools adopting a whole school approach to support inclusive practices. It could be argued that given most of the schools in this study were part of the DEIS programme, schools make very valiant efforts to support all pupils.

Relationships

Autonomy and management of the new learning environment was also noted as a key concern for staff who supported pupils with SEND but again schools provided a multitude of activities to support all students to enable them to move to a more autonomous learning environment. Despite this, educational participants were acutely aware that achieving independence became more complex if pupils had specific needs particularly in the area of social behaviour, and commented that psycho-educational reports and IEP's do not always capture these complexities. Some teachers felt the relationships that these pupils had built up with their teachers would become lost during the transition especially in the larger school environment with a multitude of teachers. School attachment has been identified as a key variable to sustain pupil interest especially those with social and emotional behavioural difficulties. Having a negative experience of social relationships post transition may impact on their ability to be remain in school. This study noted that significant and special preparatory work is required to prepare pupils for managing and learning behaviours which are intrinsically linked to post primary outcomes i.e. school completion. SNA's have a key role to play in this work which could be accommodated by both the primary and post primary feeder school in conjunction with the NBSS and the HSCL especially given that pupils at post primary level do not want the perceived stigma of having an SNA (NCSE, 2018). Preparatory activities (i.e. bridges) in learning and behaviour could support them in their new environment.

Community Supports

Educational professionals spoke about the need for more communication between the schools particularly in relation to the assessment of needs but were very grateful for the support provided by external agencies and local community groups such as youth clubs. These groups provided

support to some of the student participants in this study through mentoring and providing practical advice about "the move". These were seen as important in supporting and sustaining the transition for those pupils who may be experiencing difficulties during this time. Where this local support was not available it was noted that schools must implement skills activities to enable all pupils to develop social awareness and competence. These types of activities would promote a more inclusive approach for transition from primary to post primary school for all pupils and could again form part of a regional transition programme for the Dublin 1 area.

Recommendations

This study was conducted within a framework of *The Five Bridges of Transition* (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999), which was chosen because of its specific relevance to the transition of pupils from primary to secondary education. Consequently, the recommendations are summarised below as they are relevant to each of those five *Bridges.*

Bridge 1 – Administration

- Parents should be provided with timely access to information which should include but not be limited to: admission procedures, financial costs, booklists, uniform requirements, proposed meetings, and responsibilities
- All admission policies and practices to post primary schools should be visible and transparent in order to enable pupils and their parents to make an informed choice about which school best suits their needs.

- The transfer of information from primary to post primary schools should be conducted prior to transition to assist in planning for and the provision of individual supports for pupils and parents where required.
- The compulsory use of Education passports needs to be implemented as outlined by the Department of Education and Skills.
- A formal transition programme needs to be developed in the Dublin 1 area, building on interagency and community links already established.

Bridge 2 – Social and Emotional

- Post-primary schools should provide formal and informal activities and structures in the early stages of 1st year to enable all pupils develop sustainable relationships with peers and staff.
- A range of curricular initiatives, such as *Friends for Life* can be used to support 1st year pupils' social and emotional needs during transition and across the year.
- Approaches to preparing pupils for the transition to post-primary school should commence earlier in primary school and should focus on engaging the pupils with the transition process.
- There should be a greater focus on supporting pupils' emotional and behavioural needs across the transition process so that they are prepared for the challenges in their new environment.
- Parents are key stakeholders in supporting pupils within the transition process and need to be included in the transition planning process.

Bridge 3 – Curriculum

- Pupils should be provided with the opportunity to participate in sample lessons prior to transition
- School handbooks and websites should provide detailed information on subject choices available in their school. Such resources should also include information in relation to the utility of subjects for further study and/or employment. This could facilitate pupils in making choices that will allow them to fulfil their aspirations.
- Although the NCCA website provides comprehensive and detailed information about each subject including course overview, student expectations, learning outcomes and assessment, perhaps this could be made available in a more accessible and pupil- friendly and parent-friendly format.
- Pupils should have the opportunity to try out subjects prior to making a selection post-transition.
- Educators might benefit from an online resource with respect to supporting incoming pupils to develop organisational and study skills.

Bridge 4 –Pedagogy

- Primary and post-primary staff who are engaged in planning transition programmes might usefully investigate the feasibility of an annual, localised transition fair which enables students and parents to connect with post-primary school staff, and ask questions about the curriculum, subject choices, and extra-curricular activities.
- Both primary and post primary schools should explore initiatives such as the *One Book One Community,* to promote shared activities between 6th class and 1st year cohorts

- Live taster lessons could be delivered by post-primary schools to a large number of feeder schools by using virtual classroom technologies such as Adobe Connect or streaming recorded sample lessons via a school learning portal such as Edmodo.
- Virtual school tours might also be offered and would be of particular support to students who would benefit from familiarising themselves with the physical environment, before starting secondary school.
- Prior to the transition, parents and student should be introduced and assisted to understand the core aspects of the junior cycle curriculum: the key skills framework, subject choices and short courses, and assessment for the new Junior Cycle Student Award.
- The NCCA section for junior cycle does not provide a resources section for parents, and this complex information is not offered in a plain language version. The ASTI publication *Introducing Your Second Level School* has not been updated since 2005, and currently, there are no student-centred resources which answer the questions: What will I learn in secondary school? How will I learn in secondary school?

Bridge 5 – Managing Learning

- Students with Special Education/Additional needs should have access to external and community supports to assist them in the transition from primary to post primary school.
- Primary and Post Primary schools should consider developing Individual Education Plans, Transition or Behavioural Plans as required to support the specific needs of students

- Primary schools with the support of Post-Primary schools should provide activities for pupils and their parents to develop self-determination skills and build capacity for autonomous and independent learning

Transition programme

- A formal transition programme should be developed in the Dublin 1 in line with the key recommendations above in the Dublin 1 area between primary and post-primary feeder schools.
- The programme should include all stakeholders including community groups

Chapter: 1 Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

In recent decades the Irish Education system has moved toward a model of Inclusive education within mainstream school settings such that schools adapt to meet the needs of the diverse demographic reality of the contemporary pupil population. The Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) specifically affirmed the constitutional rights of all individuals within the education system to access inclusive education and established the supports needed to fulfil this objective. This aligns with policy directions that have also come to dominate education provision internationally, with documents such as the Salamanca Statement (UNSECO, 1994) emphasising a rights-based lens on education. However, in the increasingly diverse and complex social reality that constitutes the contemporary reality of Irish society, there may be pressure on the education system to flex and adapt to the needs of individual pupils during times or change or pressure. The transition from primary school to a new school at post-primary level is just such a situation.

Transition from primary to post-primary school is a significant life event, coinciding with the physiological and emotional changes that accompany adolescence. It is a period of both loss and discovery, as young people encounter and must negotiate new friendship groups, teaching environments, teaching staff and academic material. Dockett, Griebel and Perry (2017) suggest that the term ‘transition’ implies a “one-way, sequential movement from one stage or setting to another, often accompanied by expectations that children must adapt to the new educational

environment" (p. 2), and draw attention to the more nuanced description from the Swedish 'övergång' which refers to "a zone or overlapping arena" (p. 2). Arguably, this is a more useful description which acknowledges that transition is a process, and that as a 'zone' it is a space within which many actions may take place through engagement between many actors or agents of change. This perspective engages with the notion of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) whereby the trajectory of human life is conducted through increasingly complex interactions with elements within the environment, over time (p. 797).

1.2 The Five Bridges of Transition

In the late 1990s, the concept of 'building bridges' became central to the UK approach to transition from primary to post-primary school. Specifically, 'The Five Bridges of Transition' comprised of: Administration; Social and Personal Issues; Curriculum; Pedagogy; and Autonomy and Managing Learning (see Table 4; Appendix 1 contains a more detailed overview of each bridge). However, it is important to emphasise that the five bridges were designed to have shared content that could be conceptualised under two core emphases: (a) bridges of social and organisational change and (b) bridges of academic change. The building bridges approach gave rise to the concept of the 'bridging unit', a term used to describe any set of curriculum materials which begins in the last few weeks of sixth class and continues for several weeks in first year (i.e. pupils take their books or folders of work with them). The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, 1997) proposed the first official bridging units in an attempt to facilitate better use of National Curriculum assessment data for pupils transferring from Key Stages 2 to 3. To date there has been no further framework proposed. Evaluations of bridging units. Galton, et al. (1999) advocated strongly for systematic evaluations of transition programmes and practices, including their

applicability to all school contexts. In their own research, Galton, et al. (2003) reported that bridging units received mixed feelings from teachers at both primary and post-primary schools. That is, primary teachers were generally positive, but appeared to be covering bridging units in their own manner and time, usually after the pressure from national tests had ended. Post-primary teachers were more negative when they had many feeder primary schools to deal with, not all of which had covered the relevant bridging units. On the whole, teachers at both levels appeared uncertain of the purpose of bridging units and did not perceive them as an aid to continuity. On balance, there were favourable reports, particularly when they were jointly constructed by schools and took account of local factors (e.g. Suffolk, 2001). Consider the following example of 'solving a murder mystery based on a famous local hotel'. Pupils in sixth class used microscopes to investigate material found at the scene and then conducted further investigations in first year. Bridging units such as this were strongly recommended by both Davis and McMahon (2004) and Braund and Driver (2005). Overall, Galton, et al. (2003) and Evangelou, et al. (2008) reported that transition programmes which included bridging units were among those evaluated as the most effective, often because they promoted dialogue between schools on both pedagogy and assessment matters. In a large-scale study of 33 London boroughs, Fuller and Thomas (2005) concluded that many schools were using bridging units to address curriculum and pedagogical issues, but many of these were one-off events which focused only on the immediate period of transition, rather than offering mechanisms to ensure consistency. This current study explores the transition from primary to post-primary education as experienced by pupils living in the Dublin 1 area, and is framed within the Five Bridges of Transition model (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999) with the purpose of examining the overlap between zones of transition and the extent to which they underpin and facilitate good transitions.

1.3 International research on transition

Internationally, there is a significant body of research suggesting the transition from primary to post-primary education can impact on the quality of a pupil's educational attainment, with research suggesting negative experiences of the transition possibly leading to a cycle of disengagement and underperformance (Whitby et al., 2006; Topping, 2011). Galton & Hargreaves (2002) proposed there is a continuum of transition, which at its best, research suggests, causes slight apprehension, and at its worst, can provoke deeply felt anxiety (O'Brien, 2004). Past research has reported that the majority of first year pupils adapt quickly to their new school and stopped being concerned almost immediately (Graham & Hill, 2002). Evangelou et al (2008) reported that 75 per cent of pupils in their study reported adjusting well at an early point in their transition. Conversely, however, there is also a consistent body of research evidence that some pupil struggle with the transition to secondary school (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Galton & Hargreaves, 2002). This foregrounds the importance of an active administrative link between the primary and post-primary school involved in a pupil's transition, with ongoing communication or transfer of information prior to the move (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999). This is particularly important in the case of students with SEN (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Galton & McLellan, 2016) or students identified as having lower self-esteem in primary school (Smyth, 2017).

There is a significant body of literature reporting that many pupils in primary school settings experience anxiety while preparing for the post-primary transition regarding both academic and social issues (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Darmody, 2008; Naughton, 2998; Smyth et al, 2004; Smyth, 2017). This pre-transition anxiety is more pronounced in June of sixth year in primary

school (Barnes-Holmes, et al., 2013). This emphasises the importance of the social and emotional aspects of the school transfer and the demands on young people to adjust and cope with the spectrum of changes that face them in their new school setting (Galton, Grey & Ruddock, 1999). Pupils are faced with a range of changes in educational setting, from new approaches to learning, new peer groups, and differing relationships with teachers (Hargreaves and Galton, 2002; Rudduck, 1996; Lucey and Reay, 2000). The most common challenges encountered by pupils are often centred on the new school environment, academic adjustment involving curriculum change or higher expectations and social change. Hargreaves et al. (1996) suggested it was a triple transition for pupils comprising, firstly, a move from a familiar school culture to a new one, secondly, moving from established friendships and peer groups to new peer groupings and, finally, moving from childhood to adolescence. Visits to the secondary school across the final year of their primary schooling has been shown to support students across the social and emotional bridge of the school transfer, to help students manage their anxieties, and allow a level of familiarity to develop ahead of starting school (Galton & McLellan, 2016). Schools in the UK have also used "buddy systems" between post-primary students and the transitioning pupil along with "bonding exercises" to support students (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999).

Concerns regarding academic workload relate to a range of issues pupils expect to face in post-primary school such as perceived increases in workload or teacher expectation, increased testing, more homework or a longer school day (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Smyth, 2017). Others relate to curriculum discontinuity between primary and post primary school (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Smyth, 2017) with more subjects being introduced, being taught by a greater number of teachers,

and academic differentiation (Barnes-Holmes et al, 2013). The third bridge within the five bridges of transition model, curriculum, emphasises the importance of promoting better continuity between primary and post-primary schools involved in transitions (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999). However, research has often pointed toward a perceived discontinuity between the primary and secondary curriculum, with divergences in how major subjects such as Maths are taught in second level relative to pupil's primary experience (Hargreaves and Galton, 1992; Smyth et al., 2004).

A range of studies have explored how pupils adapt to the new social ecology they find in secondary school or learn within their new learning environment (see, for example, Hargreaves and Galton, 2002; Eccles et al., 1993; Gutman and Midgley, 2000). Eccles et al., (1993) reported research showing a pupil's perceived deterioration in relations between teachers and pupils during the transition to post-primary. Pupils reported anxieties managing the increased number of teachers or teaching styles they would encounter in the post-primary school (West et al., 2008). More positive interactions with teachers and greater numbers of peer relationships that were high in trustworthiness was also associated with more positive transitions from primary to post primary school (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Smyth, 2017). However, past research found pupils also reported a decline in social support having a negative impact on pupils' transition experiences (Martinez et al., 2011). Making new friends in a new school was reported as being a significant concern for 21.4 percent of pupils (West et al., 2008), while other research reported worries among pupils regarding changes to existing friendships (Delamont & Galton, 1986). Research reported by Zeedyk et al., (2003) reported anxiety among pupils regarding transitioning into a school with older pupils while 31 per cent worried about aggression and bullying in their new setting. West et al., (2008) reported that higher parental care was associated with reduced academic and social

concerns among pupils. 41 per cent of pupils in a study reported by Evangelou et al., (2008) indicated that 'family alone' helped them most in preparing for transition. However, a range of studies have shown that parental involvement in their children's education can tend to reduce over the course of adolescence (Smyth, 2017).

The final aspect of the transition relates to the point in the young person's life that traverses the developmental move from childhood to adolescence (Hargreaves et al., 1996). The change in the physical environment also has been reported as having an impact, with Zeedyk et al., (2003) reporting that approximately 13 per cent of primary school pupils shared concerns about getting lost in the new larger post-primary school buildings. This can be seen within the context of a perceived loss of security entailed in moving from a familiar setting, with associated relationships or supports, to an unfamiliar and changed environment (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013). This aspect of the transition aligns with the final and fifth bridge within the framework, which involves the development of pupils' self-management skills and capacity to cope with the more complex organisational reality of post-primary schools (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999). Students must learn to move to the correct classrooms between lessons, arriving at the correct times while also learning to acquire new ways of learning (Galton & McLellan, 2016). Many pupils experience a drop in academic self-image and confidence between the ages of nine and 13 (Smyth, 2017), with the impact of the transition from primary to post-primary having an importance influence on how pupils adapt to their new school environment and levels of confidence later in their education (Lord et al., 1994).

Girls have been shown to experience greater levels of pre-transition anxiety compared to boys (Hargreaves and Galton, 2002; O'Brien, 2001; Smyth et al., 2004) and to experience a greater drop in their academic self-image over the course of the transition (Smyth, 2017). West et al., (2008) reported that parents indicated concerns for pupils that were often based on prior performance or experiences during primary school, with pupils who had shown lower ability relative to peers, lower self-esteem or a history of victimisation attracting greater parent concern during transition. Parents also reported concern for children judged to be more anxious by primary teachers, West et al, 2008). Topping (2011) conducted a systematic review of the literature on the transition from primary to secondary education and found that pupils from poor households or ethnic-minority backgrounds were more likely to experience challenge during this transition.

1.4 National research on transition in Irish education system

In Ireland, the majority of pupils enter post-primary school at the age of 12 following eight years of primary education. While participation in post-primary education is compulsory until the age of 16, approximately 1,000 children do not move from primary to post-primary education each year (Foley, Foley & Curtin, 2016). The majority of pupils in post-primary complete a minimum of three years and the State-set Junior Certificate Programme (JCP) examinations. The majority of pupils in Ireland also continue their education, via a Transition Year in fourth year, to the senior cycle and preparation for the Leaving Certificate Programme (LCP) examinations in fifth and sixth years.

There was a lacuna of research exploring the primary to post-primary transition in Ireland before the late 1990s. There have, however, been a number of studies in more recent years investigating pupil transition experiences in the Irish context (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Darmody, 2008; Downes *et al* 2007; Maunsell *et al* 2007; Naughton, 1998; O'Brien, 2004; Smyth *et al* 2004, Smyth, 2017). The findings from this body of research aligns with that of many international studies, showing that pupils in primary school often experience pre-transition concerns relating to both academic and social issues (Naughton, 1998; O'Brien, 2004; Smyth, 2017). Experiences during primary school emerged as having a significant influence on pupil perceptions of the transition to post-primary school. Pupils who had difficulty with literacy or numeracy in primary school also reported more negative attitudes toward school later in their post-primary experience, with Maths being particularly influential (Smyth, 2017). Many pupils had pre-transition anxiety regarding their academic abilities to achieve within post-primary education and to not get lost (Smyth, 2017). In addition, O'Brien (2004) reported that many pupils were anxious about the differences in academic workload, expectations and increased levels of testing they perceived in post-primary schools. Changes in learning context, learning approaches and an increased number of different teachers in Irish post-primary schools were also a factor reported by many pupils (Smyth, 2017).

There were also a range of social issues reported in Irish research, with at least a fifth of young people who were reported to be anxious about making new friends and who were missing their friends from primary school (Barnes-Holmes, et al., 2013). However, a nuanced picture emerged whereby many pupils reported having an equal mix of worry and expectation regarding starting in a new school (Naughton, 1998) and most pupils reported settling quickly in their new school

following the transition (Smyth, 2017). Social relationships were found to play a protective role over the transition period; more positive experiences were found among those who have larger friendship networks (Smyth, 2017). Pupils were aware that their social status would be inverted in post-primary school and were anxious about being bullied or isolated (O'Brien, 2004, Smyth, 2017). Many pupils found the new codes of discipline they encountered in post-primary school more difficult to follow than those at primary school (O'Brien, 2004) and reported more negative appraisals of teachers in post-primary settings, often due to perceived harsh disciplinary reactions or more distant pupil-teacher relationships (Smyth, 2017). However, school staff did appear to have a big impact on many pupils' transition experiences, with 61% of pupils in a study by Smyth et al., (2004) reporting that teachers/ staff were important in supporting their transition to their new school. Later research also found that positive interactions with teachers was associated with more successful transitions and more positive attitudes toward post-primary school (Smyth, 2017). Greater involvement in school by parents and informal parental support was also associated with more positive transition outcomes for pupils (Smyth, 2017).

1.5 Transition and pupil retention

The move from primary to post-primary school is a critical event in the geographies of young people's lives and the emotional and practical impact will not be experienced by all pupils (or parents) in the same way (Lohaus, Elben, Ball, & Klein-Hessling, 2004; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). Past research has suggested that models of transition planning that emphasise linear and highly structured pathways are supportive for many pupils and their families (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Evangelou et al., 2008; Galton et al., 1999). However, whilst they are a normative part of development and share a temporal commonality, Anderson et al.

(2000, p.325) has suggested that "the process of disengagement from school too often follows unsuccessful transitions", with the transition from primary to secondary school being identified as having a large impact on future education progression for many pupils (see, for example, Hargreaves and Galton, 2002; Rudduck, 1996; Lucey and Reay, 2000). In other words, a negative transition experience can have lasting impacts on a pupil's educational attainment in later school life, or may lead to early disengagement from school and non-completion (Smyth, 2017).

The transition process and its outcomes have particular relevance to vulnerable and marginalised populations. Research show disparities exist between different pupil cohorts within the Irish education system in terms of educational attainment or school completion (Smyth, 2017). For example, pupils from socially disadvantaged settings or pupils with special educational needs (SEN) have been shown to have lower levels of educational attainment (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Smyth, 2004, 2017) and to leave school earlier (Smyth, 2017). Indeed, figures show that while 58,00 children made the transition from Ireland's primary schools in 2014 (Department of Education and Skills, 2015), in excess of 1,500 pupils only are progressing as far as first or second year before dropping out of education (Dept. of Education, 2010).

The 2016 census tells us that there were 535,475 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland with highest levels of nationality (over 10,000) being from USA, UK, France, Germany, India, Italy, Latvia, Poland and Romania, with 17.1% living in Dublin city. Immigrant families inhabit specific microsystems with interactions at local community level premised upon several factors such as linguistic skill and cultural understandings. De Giaio (2017) discusses the social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) of immigrant families from a systems perspective

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), suggesting that the most significant of these is the interaction between the family and the school system, and that the quality of these interactions will inform the nature and quality of transition. It is noteworthy that the methodology employed by immigrant mothers when choosing post-primary destinations was to browse the 'educational market', but they were frequently hampered by language skills, lack of local knowledge and understanding of systems and procedures, meaning that "the presence of an education market does not mean that choice is open to all" (Dockett and Perry, 2017, p. 6). Recent research has shown that young people in Ireland from immigrant families also showed greater difficulties during the transition period but showed relatively stable levels of academic self-image (Smyth, 2017; Topping, 2011).

Pupils from social or economically marginalised families, who were not employed or had lower levels of education, have been shown to have a more difficult transition relative to pupils from more economically advantageous families or families with greater parental levels of education (Smyth et al., 2004; Smyth, 2017). There is a consistent literature that shows discrepancies in attitudes toward school and positive transition experiences among pupils from more social disadvantaged populations (Smyth, 2017). The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Irish Schools (DEIS) scheme targets additional funding towards schools serving more disadvantaged populations. At primary level, there are three types of schools: DEIS Urban Band 1 (the most disadvantaged), DEIS Urban Band 2 and Rural DEIS. Even controlling for a range of social-background measures, there is a significant achievement gap between urban DEIS and non-DEIS schools (McCoy et al., 2014b). Specifically, research has shown that pupils attending Urban Band 1 DEIS school showed lower overall verbal and numerical test scores than pupils in other school

designation, however, pupils in Urban Band 2 schools also showed lower numeric scores (see McCoy et al., 2014). Perhaps unsurprisingly, pupils transitioning from Urban Band 1 DEIS primary schools to a DEIS second-level school showed greater transition difficulties than other groups and reported more negative attitudes to school (Smyth, 2017). Importantly, recent data also showed that the majority of pupils who attended DEIS primary schools also progressed to attend DEIS band post-primary schools (Smyth, 2017), suggesting a cycle of educational disadvantage and disengagement within the Irish educational system. Relative to other cohorts of pupils within the Irish education system, these pupils experienced greater disadvantage in terms of maternal education, social class and household income (Smyth, 2017), with these educational disadvantages being compartmentalised within specific categories of schools within the Irish education system. These are all markers for negative transition experiences, poorer teacher-pupil relationships or interactions, and lower levels of educational attainment in the long-term (Smyth et al., 2004; Smyth, 2017).

1.6 Transition and pupil with special educational needs

Pupils with special educational needs have been identified as being particularly vulnerable during the transition from primary to post primary school. Research has found that pupils with SEN may have lower academic self-image and confidence due to often lower levels of educational attainment than peers during primary school. Lower educational attainment and academic self-image have additionally been associated with greater levels of pupil disengagement during post primary school, particularly in second year (Maras & Aveling, 2006; Maunsell et al., 2007). Recent research has reported that pupils with a SEN show a larger drop in academic self-image and confidence compared to other pupils, showing overall lower self-esteem (Maras & Aveling 2006;

Smyth, 2017). Some pupils with SEN have also been reported as having smaller social networks/ groups of friends, greater social challenges (Smyth, 2017). Smyth (2017) reported that pupils with SEN showed higher levels of absenteeism during primary school when compared to their peers, a pattern that continued into post-primary school. In addition, incidences of problem behaviour and more negative interactions with teachers are more prevalent among pupils with SEN, all of which are risk factors for poor transition outcomes (Anderson et al 2000; Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013; Smyth, 2017; West et al 2008). Indeed, Eccles et al. (1993) has argued that many transition difficulties can be attributed to a mismatch between young people's development stage (puberty/ cognitive profile) and the rigid unfamiliar school structures with which they are faced on arrival in post-primary school.

An investigation of pre and post transition experiences of pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Hannah & Topping, 2013) also drew attention to microsystem interaction, finding that there was a perceived advantage to sharing the transition process with ASD peers, particularly given the 'generally negative' expectations of transition. Pupils and parents emphasised the importance of receiving preparatory information and participating in transition activities, but described gaps and delays in receiving information about post-primary pathways and supports, emphasising the importance of timely and individualised transition planning. Hannah and Topping argue that viewing risk and protective factors within each of the ecosystem levels can inform potential transition challenges for this group. Examining the association between transition and mental health, Neal et al (2016) also highlight the need for a personalized approach, but also emphasise that: "systemic interventions, in particular bridging units, were associated with lower levels of school anxiety across the transition period" (p. 20). These units might include cross-

school projects such *One Book One Community*, strategies that are acknowledged as good practice (e.g. Evangelou et al., 2008; Galton et al., 1999). Findings support the argument that young people with SEN require a differentiated transition and that a 'one size fits all' approach may not be conducive to successful transition.

This mirrors the overarching areas of difference emerging from research exploring the transition needs of pupils with SEN compared to the transition needs of their neuro-typical peers (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2013). Emerging evidence suggest factors such as continuity of resources, accessing of support (Maras and Aveling, 2006); Individual Education Plans (Rose and Shevlin 2010); curricular continuity (McCauley 2009); bullying (Evangelou et al. 2008); and peer rejection (Tur-Kaspa 2002) are of major concerns for pupils with an SEN or their parents. The presence of a coherent pre-transition system of communication between primary and post-primary school is also important to establish trust, communication and a sense of security, (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2016). Focussing on academic attainment in advance of transition may only serve to increase anxiety regarding academic workload and difficulty among these pupils or their families (Scanlon, Barnes-Holmes, McEnteggart, Desmond, & Vahey, 2016).

Given the evidence suggesting an important role for individualised or structured transition support programmes, it is perhaps unfortunate that such programmes may not always be available. Galton & McLellan (2018) reviewed changes to transition practices and policies over the past 50 years, concluding that: "current transfer practice has regressed so that it now more closely resembles that which took place in the 1970s" (p. 272), and specifically, that with respect to the final two bridges – pedagogy and management of learning – "there was, as in 1975–1980, no activity. In particular,

we found no instances of subject teachers from transfer schools liaising or exchanging with primary colleagues" (p. 272). Of particular importance and relevance to this current study, Galton and McLellan observe that schools must pay more attention to pupil voice as: "They are the ones who have first-hand relevant knowledge of what it is like to make the transition from primary to secondary school, as many of their comments demonstrate. They are thus in the best position to offer relevant and useful suggestions in helping to reduce some of the tensions associated with the move to the new school" (p. 274).

1.7 Transition and pupil voice

Children's voice initiatives and research provide opportunities for children to have a say in decisions that affect them, and by extension, to participate as active citizens in varied community contexts including schools (Harris & Manatakis, 2013). Listening to the perspectives of children on their transition preparation and experience, is of important significance to this study both with respect to their insights and expertise in conveying their lived experience (Flynn, 2017), as well as their rights to be consulted within an appropriate children's participatory framework (Lundy & Welty, 2013). In Ireland and internationally, there has been a growing significance in the importance of children's rights especially influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989, which includes, Article 12 - the right to express their views in matters effecting them and have their opinions given due weight commensurate with age and maturity.

Pupil voice work is acknowledged in the literature as an opportunity to empower pupils to participate meaningfully and collaboratively in improving their experience of school (Fielding 2004: Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Robinson and Taylor 2007). Indeed, such consultative practice in schools has been shown to encourage pupil engagement in learning (Sebba & Robinson 2010) and improve teacher-pupil relationships (Tangen 2009). A prevailing argument for the pursuit of pupil perspectives recognises their expert role with respect to the knowledge and understanding of what it is to be a pupil (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Leitch, Lundy, Clough, Galanouli, & Garner, 2005). However, there is also a body of literature which argues that pupil voice work should go beyond ascertaining perspectives from young people towards a process of collective responsibility for developing solutions in education environments (Bovill, Cook-Sather & Felton, 2011; Fielding 2015; Shirley 2015). Indeed, Shirley (2015) contends that,

> *...it is not simply greater voice that may be needed in educational change today, but rather greater skills in listening to our pupils and attending to our colleagues. The ability to open one's mind and heart to diverse perspectives, including those that could challenge one's own expertise and status, appears to be badly needed in the uncertain profession that is education* (2015, p. 127).

This challenge with respect to "greater skills in listening" echoes Lundy's (2007) caution that a common and cogent criticism levelled at Article 12 of the UNCRC 1989 is, that it is easy for adults to comply with outward signs of consultation and ultimately ignore children's views. She explains that tokenistic or decorative participation is not only in breach of Article 12 but can be counter-

productive. An essential element within the process of pupil voice in practice and research must involve a commitment to "authentic listening" which is realised only through 'acknowledgement and response to the views expressed and suggestions made by pupil participants' (Flynn, 2014, p 166). This is integral to Lundy's (2007) children's rights based framework for participation which emphasises four essential elements: space, voice, audience and influence.

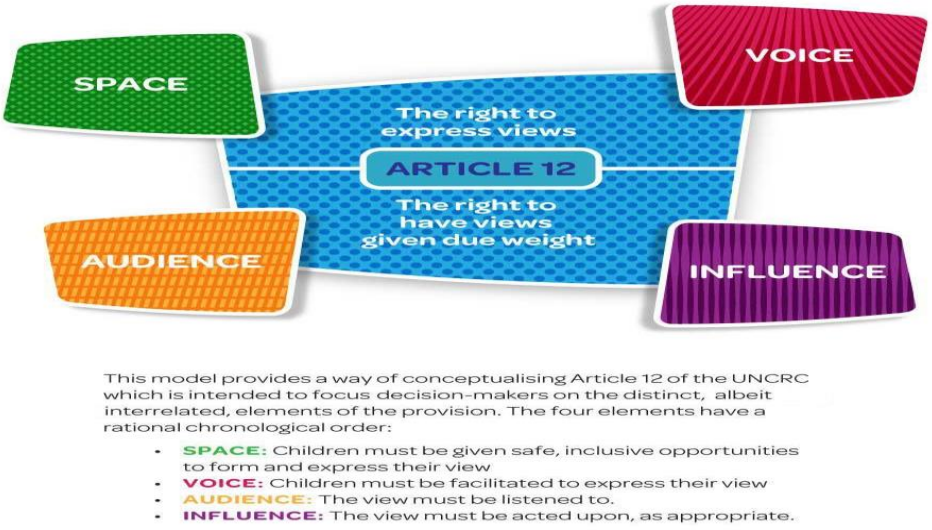

FIGURE. 1. LUNDY, 2007; WELTY & LUNDY, 2013

Irish research has demonstrated a number of potential benefits for pupils when their opinions are taken into account and they encounter an authentic response to their views and research input (Flynn 2014). These benefits include a significant improvement in the quality of their relationships with teachers and their sense of belonging and connectedness to school, and, as a consequence, an improvement in self-reported levels of confidence and wellbeing; a heightened sense of being "cared for"; as well as a general experience of comfort in their education environment (Flynn

2014). It has been demonstrated that the development of caring relations and eliciting dialogue between and with pupils, is important for the engagement of personal intelligences and to develop empathy and awareness of their rights and the rights of others (Lynch and Baker 2005; Noddings 2005; Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2010). In their study which elicited perspectives from pupils on high stakes testing at post primary level in Ireland, Smyth and Banks (2012) explain that their data concur with international findings in highlighting the importance of pupils' experience of care, respect, trust and confidence in their relationships with teachers. Smyth (2015) draws on data from the longitudinal Growing up in Ireland study which clearly indicates the centrality of pupil-teacher relationships and the classroom climate as crucial influences on children's self image and wellbeing. This is further corroborated in evidence from international research, which includes the United States, Britain and Australia, indicating a strong association between the quality of pupil-teacher relationships and 'a number of outcomes, including socio-emotional wellbeing, engagement in schoolwork, feeling a sense of belonging in the school, levels of disciplinary problems and academic achievement' (Smyth, 2015, p. 3).

The potential significance of pupil voice work and its impact on both pupil-teacher relationships and wellbeing is substantially supported in evidence from international research (ERO 2015; Glover, Burns, Butler and Patton, 1998; Sulkowski. Demaray and Lazzarus 2012). For example, O'Brien (2008) similarly acknowledges the correlation between connectedness (sense of belonging), having a voice in school and respectful relationships as shown from research evidence in Canada (Anderson and Ronson, 2004) to enhance wellbeing. The results of an Australian large scale study with 606 pupils between the ages of 6 and 17, which investigated how wellbeing is understood and facilitated in schools, discovered that pupils placed particular emphasis on the

importance of opportunities to 'have a say' in relation to these matters (Simmons, Graham and Thomas, 2015). The pupils also indicated the significance to their wellbeing of 'improved, caring, dispute-free relationships with teachers, the principal and friends (with a) strong focus on the emotional support provided through relationships at school, as feeling loved, safe, happy and cared for' (Simmons et al., 2015, pp 137-138).

Tangen (2009) contends that with the engagement of pupil voice, comes the potential to improve teacher-pupil alliances and the quality of school life which may empower marginalised pupils. She suggests that an emphasis on the importance of "quality of school life" together with appropriate methodologies can contribute to a greater understanding of pupils' experiences, all of which is necessary in the development of inclusive practice, (2009, p.841). However, she acknowledges that it is evident from the literature (Clark et al, 2003; Tangen, 2008), that some groups of children and young people are seldom given a voice; specifically, children under the age of five, children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities, (2009, p.830). Children who present with additional needs in education are at greater risk of experiencing low motivation and reduced self-esteem (Smyth, 2015; ValÅs, 1999) and therefore it is imperative that opportunities to be heard which may positively impact on confidence levels are facilitated within an inclusive model (Flynn, 2017). Recent Irish studies have indicated potential for positive change in experience for children who may be at risk of disaffection or early school leaving, or who rarely experience academic success in school, when they are given opportunities to have a say and contribute meaningful ideas for change in their education environment (Flynn, 2014). It is integral to this study that pupil voice consultation is conducted within an inclusive framework such that any child within the target age

group attending a participating school will be afforded the opportunity to be consulted and contribute their perspectives.

Galton's previous investigation of pupil voice (2010) identified six overarching concerns expressed by pupils making the transition to secondary school: personal adaptability (being the youngest and smallest), coping with more subjects and workload, physical environment (getting lost), teacher interactions (strictness and expectations), friendships (making new friends and retaining old friends), and autonomy (managing the learning environment including personal belongings and academic materials).

Chapter: 2 Methodology

2.1 Qualitative Methods

Cohort studies are observational in their purpose, as this is the most practical method for studying the incidence, causes, and outcomes of specific events, and can be used to determine cause and effect if the investigation takes place chronologically. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to identify the variables associated with successful primary to post primary transition outcomes. Exploring these factors across three different cohorts i.e. pupils' parents and educational professionals facilitates the generation of hypotheses that can be further investigated with a larger population sample. This research adopted a qualitative approach at two key time points: Pre and Post transition across two primary and six post primary schools in one Dublin region.

The search strategy conducted for the literature review focussed on relevant policy documents and on peer reviewed articles from 1990-2018. This search was conducted via the Dublin City University online library drawing from the following databases included ERIC, Proquest, JSTOR, Sage Journals PsychInfo, and PsycNet. Google Scholar was also utilized to locate open access articles and to locate policy documents. The following search terms were used to locate articles specific to this study: *Primary Education, Secondary Education, Educational disadvantage, transition, Special Education Needs, Inclusion,* and *Student voice*. Variations of these terms were used to ensure exhaustive search results.

Interviews and Focus Groups

The study involved a number of stakeholders who were involved at some level with the transition for pupils from primary to post primary school. In order to capture all of the relevant experience a series of 1-1 interview and focus group schedules were developed (See appendices xxxxx). These schedules covered a number of inter- related themes: Administration; Social and Personal Issues; Curriculum; Pedagogy; Autonomy and Managing Learning; Gender; Choice; Retention; Disability; and factors associated with a seamless transition.

2.2 Recruitment

A total number of 6 primary schools were contacted to determine their interest in the project. As a result of several phone calls made by the research team -two schools, one all boys school, (School 1) and one all-girls school (School 2) agreed to participate. All of the relevant information was distributed to both schools. The Home School Community Liaison officer in each of the participating primary schools agreed to support the project by contacting parents. All interviews and focus groups were arranged through the schools with the support of the HSCL, the principal and the special needs department where appropriate

Participant group profiles

Group 1: Pupils

Pupils with and without Special Educational Needs (SEN) who were currently in 6th class in March / April 2018 and who were making the transition from primary to post primary school in September 2018.

Group 2: Parents

The Parents of the children who were recruited for group 1.

Group 3:

Educational professionals from the primary schools where the children were attending (i.e group 1) primary {i.e. pre-transition} and post –primary schools {i.e. post-transition}.

Table x provides an overview of the participant groups at pre and post transition stages of the study.

2.3 Data Collection

Phase 1

The pre-transition data collection took place in March / April 2018. Four focus group interviews were conducted in two schools for approximately 40 minutes across 18 male and female pupils who were currently in 6th class from each of the primary schools. Ten parents of these pupils participated in individual interviews conducted at each of the schools, having been offered the option of group or individual interview with a member of the research team at each school. Individual interviews were conducted with educational professionals including 6th class teacher (N=2); HSCL (N=2); SNAs (N=1) and Principal (N=2) for approximately 40 minutes. Focus groups and interviews were all conducted on the school premises and recorded.

Phase 2

The post-transition data collection took place in January 2019: Pupil participants were re-interviewed in their post-primary school each interview lasting approximately 30 – 40 minutes. Parents of this cohort were invited to an individual or focus group interview lasting approximately 40 - 60 minutes. Educational professionals (1st year teachers, Year Heads, HSLCC, SNAs and Principals) were also invited to interview individually or as a focus group for approximately 40 minutes.

TABLE 1: ID CODES FOR SCHOOLS

Child ID	SEN identified	Pre-transition Interview	Primary School ID	Post-transition interview	Post-primary school ID	Parent ID	Pre-transition interview	Post-transition interview
1C	Undiagnosed/suspected anxiety disorder (sources: parent)	1	PA	1	PPB	1P	1	0
2C	EAL	1	PA	1	PPC	2P	1	0
3C	No	1	PA	1	PPA	3P	0	0
4C	No	1	PA	1	PPA	4P	1	0
5C	No	1	PA	1	PPB	5P	0	0
6C	No	1	PA	1	PPA	6P	0	0
7C	Autism Spectrum Disorder	1	PA	1	PPA	7P	1	0
8C	EAL	1	PA	0	PPA	8P	1	0
9C	EAL	1	PA	1	PPC	9P	0	0
10C	EAL	1	PB	1	PPE	10P	1	0
11C	Undiagnosed/suspected anxiety disorder (sources: principal and parent)	1	PB	1	PPE	11P	1	0
12C	EAL	1	PB	1	PPE	12P	0	0
13C	No HSL indicated health issue related that has necessitated hospitalisation.	1	PB	0	PPF	13P	1	0
14C	Dyspraxia and dyslexia – undergoing formal assessment at end of 6th class	1	PB	1	PPF	14P	1	0
15C	No	1	PB	0	PPG	15P		0
16C	EAL	1	PB	1	PPH	16P		0
17C	No	1	PB	1	PPI	17P		0
18C	EBD		PB		PPI	18P	1	0

2.4 Note on Attrition

Pre-transition: Boys

Child participants (1C – 9C) and parent participants (1P – 9P) were invited to an interview in writing. Parents 3P, 6P and 9P did not respond and were subsequently contacted by telephone on two occasions via the HSCL officer. These participants did not attend for interview and for ethical reasons, no further attempt was made to contact them.

Pre transition meetings in girls' primary school, ID PB

An information meeting was organised for parents on the morning of 18th May, 2019 in consultation with HSCL Officer and School principal. No parents attended this meeting.

Post Transition

Post-transition: Boys

Child participants (1C – 9C) were interviewed with the exception of child 8C, who did not transition to the post-primary school identified by the primary school Principal. Parent participants 3P, 4P, 6P and 7P were sent a written invitation to interview via their child and this was followed up with a telephone call and voice message. These parents did not respond or subsequently engage in interview, and for ethical reasons, no further attempt was made to contact them. Parents 1P, 2P, 5P and 9P were contacted by telephone; parents 1P and 9P declined the invitation, parents 2P and 5P consented to be interviewed individually and a date, time and venue was agreed, however,

neither parent arrived for interview. A follow up call was made but not answered. For ethical reasons, no further attempt was made to contact them.

Post transition girls

Contact with school principals for schools PPE and PPI was initiated by phone call and followed up by email. Contact was made with parents (IDs: 10P 11P 12P 13P 14P 15P 16P and 17P) by phone call to inform that follow up interviews would be scheduled with their daughters. Wherever possible, interview dates were confirmed with parents once agreed with the post primary schools. Parents (10P;14P: 15P and 17P) indicated interest in taking part in follow up interviews but were not available.

Three attempts were made to visit pupil 13C but this pupil was absent on each occasion. Pupil 15 C was also absent on the day organised for a school visit. Given the time constraints of the project it was not possible to revisit.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to and was underpinned by the principles of the University Ethics Committee in Dublin City University. Full ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee to conduct the research. Each member of the research team was committed to including the voice of all stakeholders who were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and they were afforded to withdraw from the research at any time. All information pertaining to the study

was presented both orally and in a written format that was fully accessible for each individual participant.

Given the context of the research all of the researchers were garda vetted and fully informed about their obligations under child protection procedures in schools.

2.6 Data analyses

Qualitative analysis of interview transcripts was undertaken using QDA Miner Lite, a computer assisted qualitative analysis software, which can be used for the analysis of textual data such as interview transcripts. Data collection and interpretation was based upon a phenomenological perspective, and both content and thematic analysis were selected as methods of measurement. Thematic analysis is a sub-set of content analysis and is a common approach to data analysis where a flexible theoretical approach is required as the research is question-driven, rather than theory-driven. This structure is used in many phenomenological studies (e.g. Growing Up in Ireland) and is a useful method for: a) capturing real experiences, meanings and understandings expressed by participants, and b) examining how these discourses are observed, interpreted and manipulated within near and far social contexts.

Prior to the initial analysis of data, the research team constructed a principal codebook containing definitions, inclusion and exclusion criteria and a priori codes identified from the theoretical framework adopted for this study (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1990), and prior transition research (Barnes-Holmes, et al, 2013; Mc Guckin et al, 2013; Scanlon and Doyle, 2018), together with themes extracted from the stated research aims of the study (Figure 2). The first coding analysis was conducted in June 2018 at the conclusion of Phase 1 data collection using interview transcripts

from students attending one primary school for boys and one primary school for girls, their parents, and education professionals working within the schools.

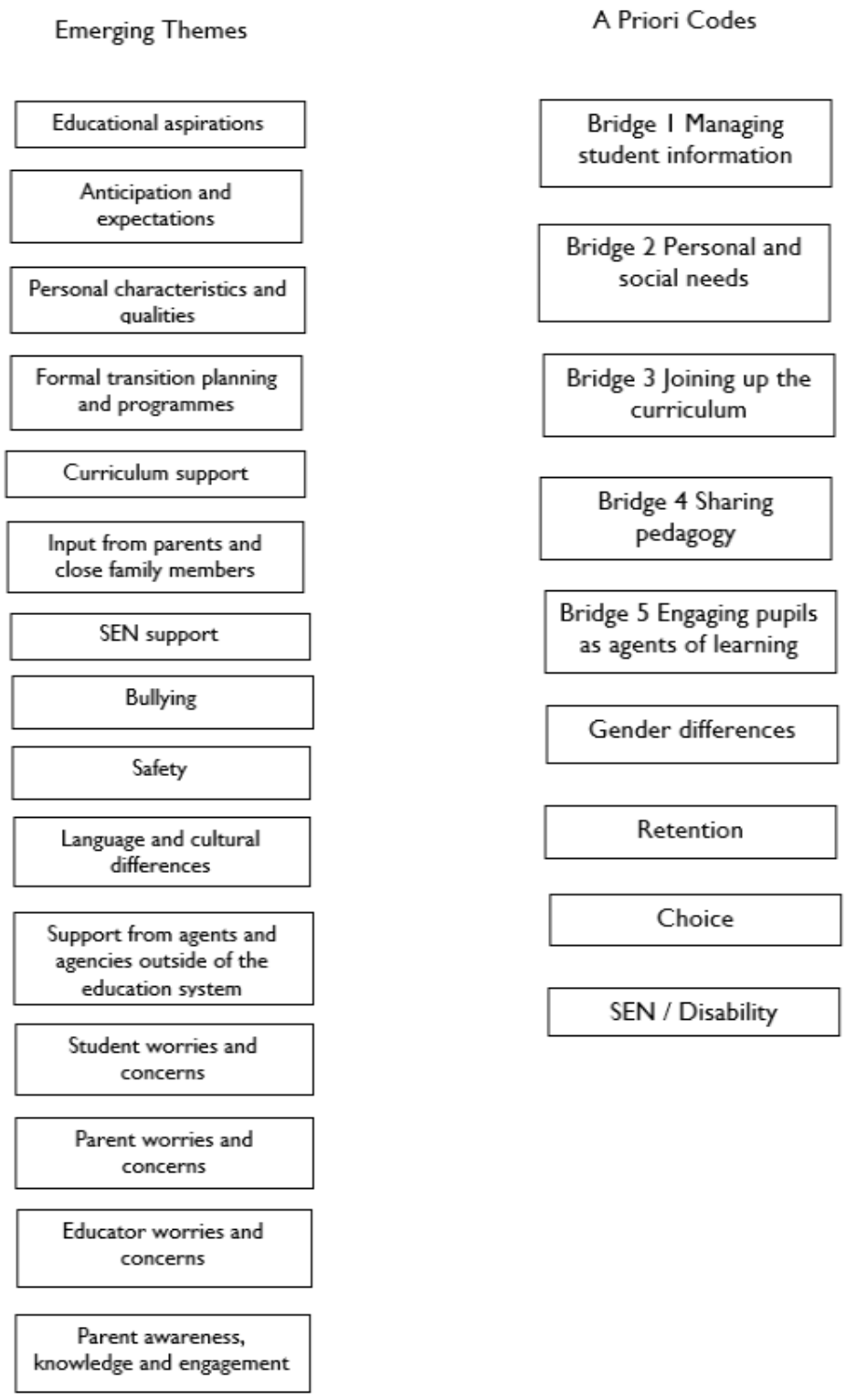

FIGURE 2. PHASE 1 FIRST ANALYSIS: A PRIORI AND EMERGING THEMES

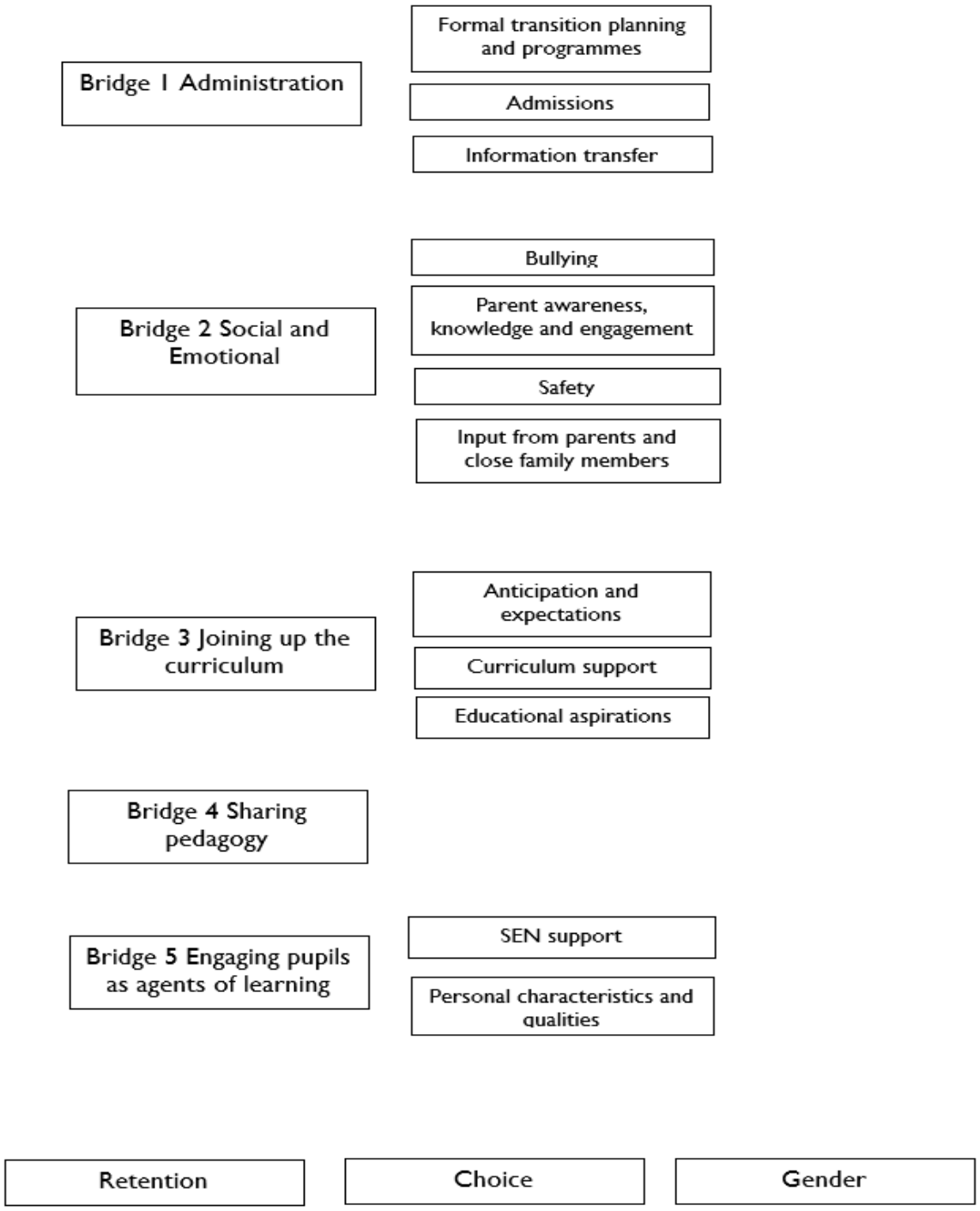

FIGURE 3. PHASE 1 SECOND ANALYSIS: RE-ASSIGNMENT OF A PRIORI AND EMERGING THEMES

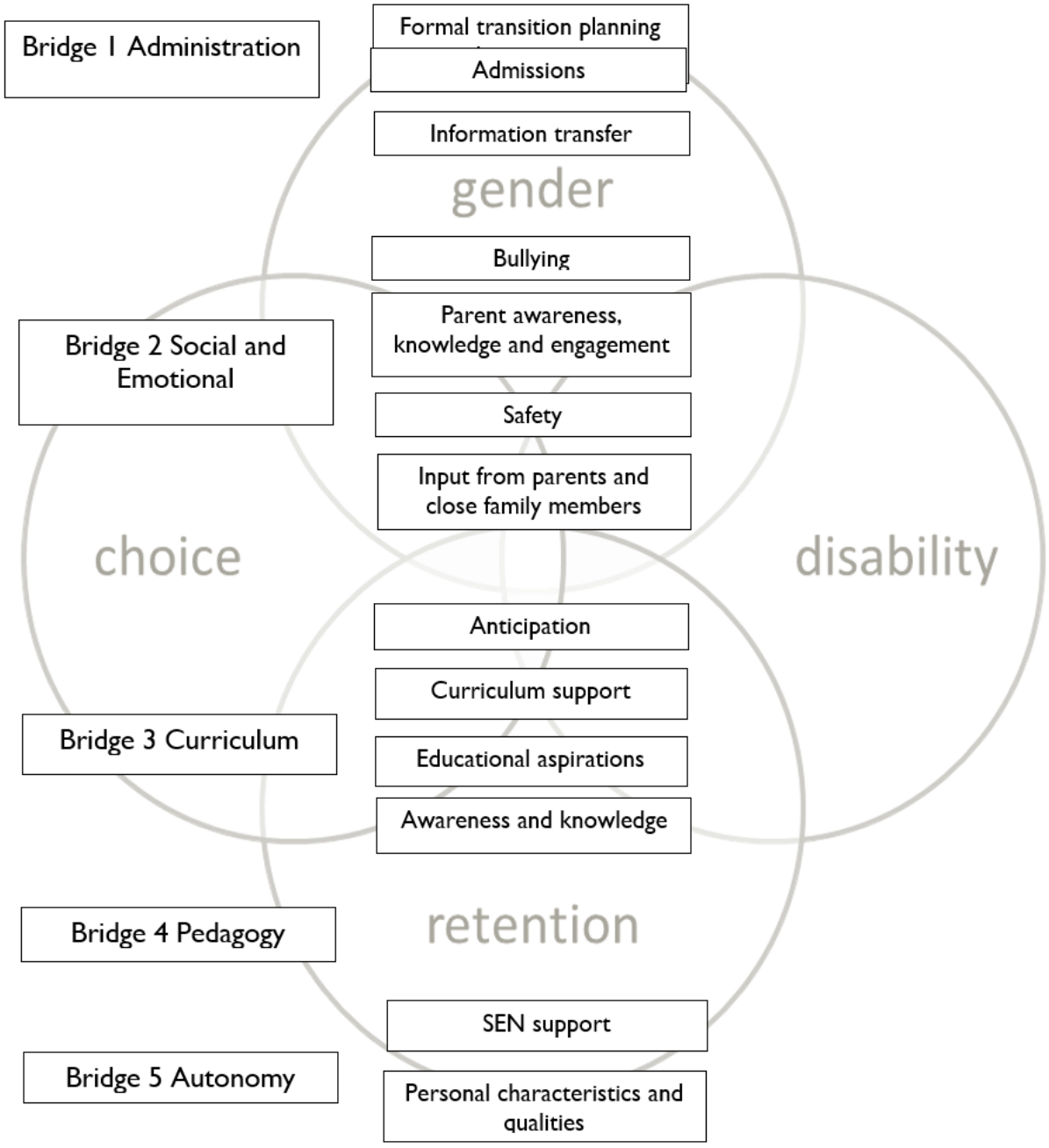

FIGURE 4. PHASE 1 FINAL ANALYSIS: THEMATIC CATEGORIES

Analysis of Phase 2 data collated from interviews in eight post-primary schools was initially coded and analysed using the final thematic codes, however, these were subsequently adapted to

reflect the shift in perspective from primary to post-primary. For example, less emphasis on pre-transition concerns such as ‘bullying’ and ‘safety’ and a greater focus on ‘autonomy’ and ‘SEN support’ (Figure 5).

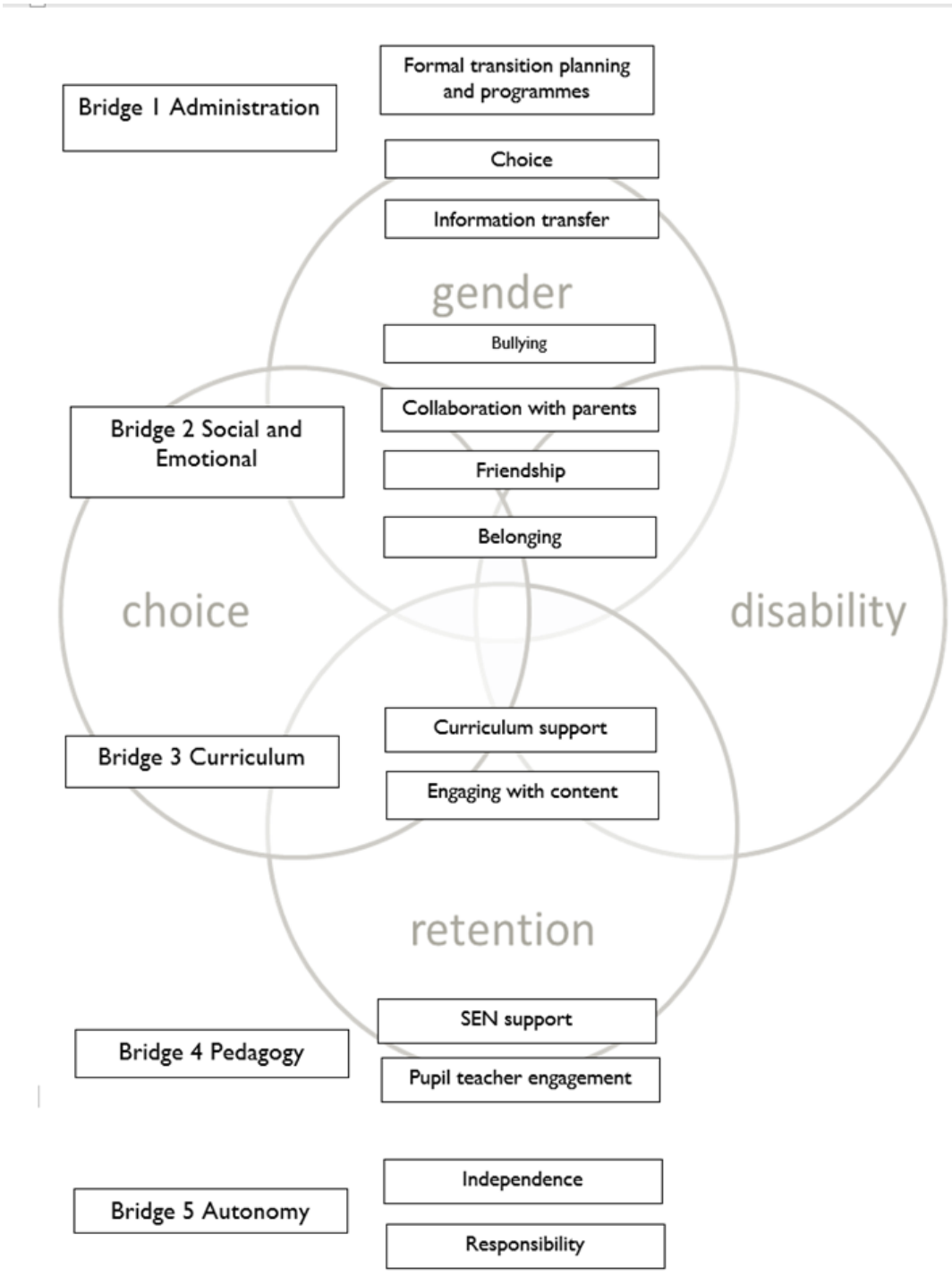

FIGURE 5. PHASE 2 FINAL ANALYSIS: THEMATIC CATEGORIES

Quantitative content analysis was undertaken simultaneously, in which a prior and emergent themes were quantified, providing broad frequencies on the incidence of particular themes. Whilst this is a useful tool with which to explore the strength of nuances in the data, it does not provide a robust portrayal of the importance of factors or variables, as differences may be attributable to differences in sample size between cohorts of students, parents and educators. In the final analysis, statements from students and parents are used to illustrate themes and connections between student and parent experiences, and viewpoints of educational professionals. Key commentary is highlighted in the Findings. Possible explanations of findings, expected and unexpected, were also explored by comparing and contrasting statements within and between student, parent and educator cohorts at each of the phases of investigation, as described in the following section.

Chapter: 3 Findings

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the qualitative data from individual interviews and focus group interviews with: students at two time points in their transition from primary to post-primary school; their parents; and educational professionals in primary and post-primary schools supporting this transition. Findings are discussed within the framework of the research aims as stipulated by GDIL, which are:

To explore the experiences of a number of stakeholders in primary and post primary schools in the Dublin 1 area in order to identify a model of support that is required for students with and without disabilities to make a seamless and sustainable transition from primary to post-primary school.

To examine what constitutes good practice at both formal and informal levels to facilitate the transition process from primary to post primary school.

To establish the current practice in feeder schools in planning for transition from primary to post primary education.

To explore the relationship between the transition from primary to post primary school and school retention.

To investigate pupil choice of secondary school.

Common themes arising from this data are discussed within the Theoretical Framework; The Five Bridges of Transition: Administration; Social and Personal Issues; Curriculum; Pedagogy; and Autonomy and Managing Learning. In order to provide a clear comparison of

the pre and post transition experience of all participants, the analysis is presented in two sections Pre – Transition and Post Transition under each successive Bridge.

3.1 Bridge 1: Administration

The Administrative Bridge focuses on the sharing and transfer of pupil information, amongst parents, primary, and post-primary school professionals, and external agents and agencies (e.g. psychologists, social workers, community initiatives and youth services) providing transition support. It is also concerned with: the admissions' policies and procedures that connect to choices and availability of school places; and formal transition planning, programmes, activities and engagement.

3.1.1 Transition Themes

Pre- and Post-transition themes are portrayed through illustrative examples of key commentary from each of the three cohorts of participants, illustrating student and parent experiences of pre-transition preparation as they approach the end of primary education, and viewpoints of educational professionals supporting this pivotal life transition.

3.1.2 Pre-transition Themes

Students

Preparation

The student experience is mainly confined to engagement in school activities, support from external agencies and admissions procedures such as entrance tests. It is of note that, in the

absence of a common entrance test, or at least a single test where results are shared amongst schools, boys reported the need to take multiple tests: for example, one student reported that:

> "It was like a hundred sums, easier than the [School] test because it took like three and a half hours for [that] test but for that like you had it done in an hour and you could just like sit down eating an apple."

Primary girls did not make any reference to entrance exams, but described a questionnaire designed to gather information on attributes and viewpoints on transition, although this document was not mentioned by school staff, one girl observed:

> "The secondary schools sent in, they're like these forms, and every day, it was like for 4 weeks, and every day you had to write what you enjoyed what you found hard and what you rate. You rate yourself out of 10. And then you have to rate your behaviour out of 10, your attitude out of 10 …. and then they get sent back to your school."

Only primary girls noted support or activities from youth services such as Swan Youth Services and NYP 'open access' clubs, where these had provided advice on transition: This was highlighted by one of the participants who said:

> "There's this woman called Aoife she told me about secondary school she said that it's not scary at all, it's like primary school except you just move around, you make new friends, and then, you still, you will still have your friends from primary school to talk

> to and that you don't always have to like, carry on and make new friends, you can still talk to the people that you still know in primary school."

Parents

Access to information

Parents of primary boys were unaware of any transfer of paperwork or information about their child and associated needs, other than the results of entrance tests. Communication with parents appears to brief and to be focused around confirming places and fees, one parent noted:

> "No, we've heard nothing. It was basically, as I said, it was, you know, 'He's been successful. You have a place. Your fee is due.' And that was it."

Another parent said:

> "I was with him and they gave him a test, something like that but I didn't receive any answer from them really."

The general feeling is that although entrance tests inform support needs and purport to inform ability grouping or streaming, they might also determine who receives a place in school: As one parent put it:

> "Now, it can be very unfair. It's a pressured thing, I feel, because it's very much deciding. Well, you know, if we can give your child a place they have to be at a certain level or they have to know this, that or the other."

Another parent explained how she explained this process to her son:

> "I had to probably explain to him that the entrance exam wasn't, you know, as my impression is, the entrance exam doesn't determine whether you get a place or not. That's the way I explained it to him. I had to lie to him a little bit. I just said, it's to determine what class to put you into".

Admission Practices

This lack of clarity is very problematic for parents who have emigrated to Ireland, and whose understanding of English and grasp of procedures may be poor, but admissions practices most significantly impacted upon parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), some of whom were left with no clear pathway to post-primary school in the last few months of 6th class. A parent of an autistic child explained:

> "[He] is autistic so we applied for a few schools and we were getting refusal letters and that so ... I just kept on applying to all the schools around the area. Now the post primary over here [school] they were willing to take him, but they were saying that they didn't know whether they would be able to cater for his needs and that. So, there is no point in sending him over there if they are not going be able to cater for him."

In this case, the full weight and support of primary school staff was necessary to secure a post-primary place for September, but the stress and anxiety caused to both student and parent was evident. This parent continued:

> "Yeah, we were involved in a few meetings because [he] is autistic so, we applied for a few schools and we were getting refusal letters and that so... [she] came down to a few of the schools with me, and her being the liaison officer she was saying that she never seen, anything like this before."

Parents of primary girls began their search for a school from as early as 3rd class, and had similar experiences with entrance tests and offers, one parent noted:

> "He was explaining me what I have to do and, that I need to register my child from time, to get a place, and they are kind of fighting for the places, and he did explain to me that they will look on it, even on the profile they have from school, what is the level in school, how good they are".

They also reported the need to source significant levels of support and guidance in navigating the admissions procedure: for example, one parent reported that:

> "It was quite difficult because I wouldn't know where to go, what I have to do, what forms I need to get, to fill in, so they gave me everything, all the information I

needed, even the Principal, she was very helpful with me, like she was always in touch, she was always giving me details."

However, parents appeared to be better equipped with information about practical information such as: "what she needs and when she'll be starting . . . how much it costs, and what her uniform will be and where to get it and when day she starts, and about the book rental". In addition, they demonstrated knowledge about the organisation of the target secondary schools, e.g., one parent noted that;

"When the kids come in there's 3, there's 75 kids, and there's 3 different classrooms, but there's no such classroom as, the, Headmaster said, there's no such classroom as when you're in classroom A, because, you're the brightest and you're in B, because you're not very bright, and you're in C because, you're sh***."

Educators

Provision of Information

The HSCL Officer and School Principal have a significant role to play in advising parents about school choices, providing useful information on paperwork, contact numbers, open days, and entrance tests. The School Principal has an in-depth knowledge of the children and their families, and is ideally placed to recommend application to specific schools, and to ensure that parents are aware of doing so at the earliest opportunity: One principal noted

> "It's very important, we would tell them quite early on . . . I'd even be asking 3rd class, 4th class children, particularly if I knew children that were very able academically, I'd be saying, you know, and I'd say you need to go today, go up put her name down."

However, this is dependent upon timely investigation by parents and timely confirmation of allocation of places, and in one particular case, the HSCL officer was obliged to accompany parents on a tour of all of the schools in the local area – a task which should have been completed in fourth or fifth class to avoid the uncertainty of securing a place just weeks prior to the end of primary school.

Transfer of Information

Academic and diagnostic reports are provided through online systems after consent to release information is obtained from parents. However, there is evidence that management of information about specific needs is not always timely. One 6th class teacher observed:

A couple of years ago I had a child that had severe behavioural problems and it wasn't until September, a week in, that they contacted the school looking for reports and things like that, which was probably too late on the point practically.

One Principal suggested that knowing individual children and families over a long period of time, means that schools can have a crucial input into admissions and placement:

> ". . . she did do the entrance exam, now she was a late applicant, but sometimes if you ring up, you know, you might be able to kind of get a word in for a child and just say, look she's very good, and . . . you know she's not going to be a problem or so on, she'd be an asset."

Transition programmes and links

Both boys' and girls' primary schools acknowledged the absence of a formal transition planning programme to prepare students, and neither referred to the Education Passport materials provided by the NCCA to support the transfer of pupil information from primary to post-primary school, a policy that was introduced in 2014:

One principal stated that no such programme existed currently:

"No there isn't. Not at the moment, we would have had it previously."

Despite the fact that there are dedicated transition resources available to schools from government departments and agencies, one member of staff used a UK transition publication provided through TUSLA.

There was a general feeling from one principal that as: "there's no actual formal link really between the primary and secondary schools" a planned and structured programme would be of benefit to all: they went on to explain

> "If there was like a resource pack about, going to secondary school, how to get ready about it like, like some info that you could, you probably would need to link it"

The HSCL officer supported this idea and said

> "I think there should be more communication with the schools. Second of all, I think more paperwork, you know, so that you'd have a profile to look, for them to look at if there was problems, and third, I think if the kids spent more time in the school, like having a run through of a day"

However, one principal made reference to the initiation of a linked schools programme currently under discussion between school clusters

> "I suppose it'll be something similar, maybe somebody come from the secondary school, they will visit, and it'll be something like we had before I suppose, but to kind of dig it out from the ashes."

Support from external agencies

The HSCL officer in the boys 'primary school referred frequently to support from external agents and agencies, as contributors to positive transitions. These included NEPS psychologists and Speech and Language / Occupational Therapists through multi-disciplinary processes such as Meitheal meetings:

> "We had his parents in, his social worker, the girls from the clubs, his after-school clubs and then there was the principal here and the home school liaison teacher and myself so we all sat down with his parents."

However, the substance of this support in terms of knowledge of the child is directly associated with continuity. The notion of continuity was also noted by a principal who stated that:

> "[He] has had four different social workers in the four years … and then the new one comes in and then they start all over again and then by the time you get to the point where you think maybe you can get something done, then there's another one has come in. They just keep changing and I just think it's awful because it's just, it's just time wasted on getting to know them again."

Continuity is a very real advantage of interaction with local NYP clubs, an essential part of supporting children and as such a meaningful contribution to Meitheal as noted by one Special Needs Assistant:

> "The clubs outside, they're all dealing with the schools to make sure that they're off the streets."

This relationship spans primary to post-primary transition and fulfils a rounded mentoring role as noted by one Principal:

> If children are having difficulties in school, they would help them and then they talk to them, they counsel them, they advise them. And the children can go to their afterschool and do their work. And it's all about socialising them and getting them used to rules and appropriate behaviour and so on.

Similar supports are accessed in the girls' primary school although there was a lack of clarity around role and input: one teacher said:

> "I'm not sure they're obviously involved, NEPS with the school, but I'm not sure what the actual connection would be with the transitioning and stuff like that."

One Principal stated that NYP clubs such as the Swan Centre were also mentioned as having been a significant support to pupils:

> "There would be workers there, youth workers, and they would have come in and done 5 or 6 weeks with the girls about transitioning from primary to secondary school."

However, they also drew attention to a disruption to this vital resource: the principal continued:

> "You know it was a good idea I remember at the time . . . they would come to us you know . . . but was it manpower or just people change, or someone hadn't got trained that's there, now I'm not sure now why the reason that it stopped."

3.1.3 Post-transition Themes

Educators

Recruitment / Enrolment

A mixed approach to the recruitment of students from primary feeder schools was demonstrated in educator commentary, from identification of specific students or from specific classes:

> "Boys would apply in 5th class, of primary school, they'd be, currently in the way it works, it would be about 17 link schools, and either, you know, home schools and those primary schools would, encourage certain applicants or they just open up to the whole 5th class, different schools do it in different ways."

Students might sit entrance examinations as early as February in the preceding year, and the importance of support for candidates with SEN was highlighted in the girls' primary school, such as provision of radio aids, separate rooms and seating arrangements. For example, one Principal stated that linking in with parents in relation to specific learning difficulties and anxiety meant that:

> "On the day of the assessment, we made sure we had an SNA for her, even though we don't know if she'll qualify, if she hasn't got one yet, but her mother was quite anxious she'd have someone, so we asked one of our SNAs to come in on the Saturday, and she just sat in the distance, if she needed help, but that child got on really, really well."

Transfer of Information

School staff were very clear about the need to maximise the amount of information collated on individual student profiles, and that this was directly related to allocation of students to class groupings, provision of additional support in terms of special educational need or challenging behaviour. Typically, this data was collated from staff in feeder primary schools and is crucial in relation to resourcing supports: A member of the Behaviour for Learning team stated:

> "Information is key, if we, if we're made aware of a student who has particular needs or specific needs, we can plan for it, but … if a child arrives in September and we're told then, it delays if we need to apply for an SNA, they won't have one [for] the whole 1st year."

In addition to informing administrative processes, background information is an important part of profiling incoming students. It was noted by one first year head there is a general feeling that particular feeder schools are:

> "Selective in what they might send you or, they might neglect to send it to you at all" resulting in "serious, behavioural issues" such as "kicking off in classes and obviously that was an impact on the other kids as well" meaning that "when you're not given some forewarning, we were kind of, caught out a bit"

In some cases, a system of 'red flagging' individual pupils initiated SET or care team meetings generating the writing of an IEP, however, the importance of getting to know the student in tandem with consulting documentation, was also recognised.

Availability and use of Pupil Passports varied from school to school, where these might be filed for individual staff to consult, or not received at all. This is particularly important where Principals feel the need to justify allocation of school places dependent upon academic performance and personal needs. Background information that highlights poor attendance and punctuality, alerts school staff to pupils for whom this might impact on school retention, and the value of receiving this information in good time was highlighted by a Guidance Counsellor:

"I find they come in quite late, I'd love to be able to get them, I suppose in an ideal world, in May and be able to have them all at that stage, but realistically, teachers are giving them, their Drumcondra Tests at the end of the year and compiling all of that together. So by the time it filters through, it's really September before, we get those. But, in an ideal world, I'd love to get them earlier on and have them all, to go through, cos they're fantastic as well, they give you an awful lot of information too about each individual student".

Assessment of needs

Early access to this data means that staff can work as a team to assess the needs of every individual pupil, identifying strengths and weaknesses and potential interventions arising from those needs before their arrival and that this is an ongoing process "it wouldn't just be a static document." Additionally, the needs of pupils who have enhanced academic ability are also flagged, especially in schools who offer a 'high achievement programme.' Notably in one girls school, the Principal visits primary schools and meets with the class teacher and parents of each student prior to transition, subsequently providing a written report on each pupil for post-primary staff. Similarly, in support of students with SEN the Principal and an SNA may visit the post-primary school "to kind of tell us, what might be, good, to have in place beforehand,"

A particularly contested area is availability of psychoeducational assessments and specifically in relation to the study of Irish and other languages, where a pupil may have been exempted in primary school without supporting documentation to evidence the need for such exemption. This is problematic for post-primary schools as they are not in a position to fund assessments, and those that are submitted are often "too old, or they're kind of a bit fluffy, where they're a bit fake." This is a particular problem in identification of SEN in terms of allocation of resources where one Principal explained that:

> "We've already done the Drumcondra test, we know there's one or two kids coming in that are on the 1st and 2nd percentile, and we're very worried about them coming into

> mainstream school. There could be mild general learning difficulties, and we're already saying, ok we need to put them on a list for a psychological report, but we know, if the primary schools have the option, they're not going to choose the kid in 6th class … if they only have three assessments [allocated through NEPS] they're not going to pick the kid in 6th class for it, but it means then we are getting this backlog of people that we have to assess."

A significant issue – and one that has only emerged since the introduction of new EU General Data Protection regulations (GDPR) in May 2018 - is the sharing of pupil data. Schools reported great difficulty in obtaining detail on learning support, assessments, and EAL, for example, as primary schools need permission from parents "my Principal's a bit fussy about that", and this may not be received in a timely manner, if at all. Levels of data sharing vary considerably from annotated or coded files, to full pupil profiles and ongoing information is routinely accessed via online platforms such as VSWare although it was acknowledged by a Form Tutor that this primarily functioned as a tool for monitoring attendance and behaviour:

> "it's never good, you're never like, oh brilliant! … it's always negative, but unfortunately, like with anything, you forget the good, usually, and remember the bad" and that this is a necessary step in managing incidents in school "it's important to have a record, specially now, when, you know, people are very, you know when they need evidence for things happening."

The role of external agencies

Finally, the important role of external agencies and bodies was acknowledged by all schools, as an integral part of understanding the unique challenges of individual pupils. This was particularly noted in commentary from staff in the boys' schools. This interaction was illustrated in a range of activities which encompassed close and regular contact with youth clubs and community agencies accessed via primary schools:

> "We would have an external care team which comprises of myself - the Behaviour for Learning teacher - and [redacted] the Home School Community Liaison teacher and we would meet the local youth clubs, MYP2, Swan, sometimes Brown Oak … we meet them monthly to discuss the current students, but also towards the end of the year, they give us the heads-up on students that are coming."

Teachers were acutely aware of the strong network of support provided through a historical relationship with youth clubs and sports clubs in the local area in which boys lived, but also that this might act as a barrier to full integration into school life. The Meitheal programme was also identified as an opportunity to engage with external supports, acting as a conduit for developing links between the community and school. In some cases, it is a necessary intervention requested by the school where they may feel that – for some individual pupils - problems exist outside of school within the local community, or within a particular family. Every relevant agency involved with the pupil is invited to a meeting at which they: "take ownership for who's going to do what" which may include the cooperation of the Gardai,

representation from the school, the parent or guardian, social workers, and sometimes the student.

Several schools also mentioned links with Jigsaw, a National Centre for Youth Mental Health that provide supports to young people with their mental health by working closely with communities across Ireland, one form tutor noted:

> "They can go over there for, I think it's a 6 weeks programme, and it just, calming them down, giving them other steps, so they'd be for very extreme cases … But it's there as a resource"

However, the Behaviour for Learning teacher expressed frustration with restricted access to HSE supports via CAMHS, whereby a referral request may only be activated via a parent, meaning that in some cases:

> "we've had to physically get the Home School Liaison Officer to physically, bring a parent, just because you follow up, you follow up, you follow up."

By contrast, teaching staff in some girls' schools described a closer engagement with those providing interventions such as NEPS psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists who provided:

> "the opportunity to sit in and see what went on, and then we were able to carry that through here, when the students started."

Engagement with CAMHS was also reported in a more positive manner, where information on past experiences and current functioning might be shared, together with a close working relationship with EWOs, Tusla and Social Workers. However, one first year head reported that this is not the case in every school, where access to key workers may be limited by part-time schedules split across several schools, and feelings of abandonment: "I feel we do an awful lot on our own, you know. Rather than, than bringing in very many people to assist us. And sometimes we ask for assistance and we don't get it"

3.1.4 Summary

In general, Educators reported that post primary schools were variable in their approach to recruitment and enrolment applications, entrance exams and provision of support for SEN pupils where required (for example in entrance exams). Transferring information in a timely manner, the use of Pupil Passports and early access to this information was seen as critical in enabling post primary schools to assess pupils' needs and establish the levels of support that would be required before during and after the transition. The introduction of the General Data Protection regulations (GDPR) was seen as an impediment in this regard.

The role of external agencies including youth clubs and other community agencies were particularly valued by Educators in the transition process and this was more evident with boys than girls. In contrast, there appeared to be stronger links with NEPS psychologists and Speech and Language therapists in some girls' schools.

Despite these links all educators expressed their frustration in accessing support from CAMHS via the HSE for pupils with mental health issues given that a referral can only be requested by a parent. This frustration was also echoed with regard to the turnover of social workers for individual pupils which impacted on the provision of supports at post primary level.

3.2 Bridge 2 Social and Emotional

The Social and Emotional Bridge focuses on the personal needs of pupils and parents in preparing for the challenge of transitioning to a new school. It is concerned with variables that might affect positive transitions such as maintaining friendships and making new friends, and activities which provide reassurance and confidence, and that are acquired through Engagement and participation in transition programme activities. Connected to this are *concerns* around safety, bullying, and the challenges of maturity and preparedness.

3.2.1 Pre-transition Themes

Students

Engagement and participation in transition programme activities

In advance of transitions to post-primary school, a range of differences in attitudes and approach to engaging with the upcoming transition emerged. There was also evidence of a gendered divergence in approach to transition. Many of the boys who were interviewed expressed certainty and confidence about their expectations of post-primary school, principally through local knowledge and family connections: “Because I went there and visited okay and my brother is there as well.” Some students may have attended more than one school visit on Open Day where

they were considering a choice of several schools, others opted not to attend as: “I'm good about going to the school because my cousins went there and my uncle.” Most boys described such visits as a simple walk through of classrooms and buildings, and no reference was made to engaging in sample lessons or meeting current post-primary students. Consequently, their questions encompassed some fundamental aspects of how things work in secondary school:

> How many subjects is there? How long is the homework? What time is the yard on at?
>
> What are the teachers like? Obviously. How long does it take for you to finish the homework?
>
> Because I want to know is there going to be a yard because they're building a new school and I don't know if there's going to be a yard or not. So you can play at break time really. Socialise.
>
> I want to know do you learn everything about the tests because in primary you didn't learn most things and I didn't know what half of them meant.
>
> Would it still be a bit like primary like where there's a few like teachers like that everyone doesn't like and like there's teachers that everyone loves?

Girls described a richer introduction to post-primary school in terms of variety of activities and engagement with students and staff:

> "You had this big open day where you bring in all the 1st years, and you bring them in and then you just give, give you a tour of the school, and you can meet the, the teachers and the Student Counsellor,"

Some also reported participation in sample lessons and music activities. Talking with parents about differences as preparation for change evolved from key moments. One student noted: "I tried on my uniform, that's how we brought it up," but they also noted weekly classroom discussions and visits from teachers in several of the local post-primary schools. As a result, they appeared to be more knowledgeable about the mechanics of school, such as subject choices, the function of the School Council, the Guidance Counsellor, and support through buddy systems; queries centred around making and maintaining friendships and knowing who to turn to for advice. Worries and concerns highlighted fears about getting lost and managing the environment and timetable: "Nervous about the teachers. Nervous about getting lost. My school is kind of big," "Probably the work and making friends and like, finding all the classes," and many of the comments expressed a generalised anticipatory anxiety:

> "I'm the kind of person that, if you say, oh my gosh it's the best food, and then I eat, I'm just like, it wasn't as good as you said, so like, I'm just like, don't make it seem scarier than it actually is cos then I'm just gonna be like, I'm just worried from that basically."

Girls drew on the experiences of close family members for advice and reassurance about differences between primary and secondary school, and their description of these discussions had more depth and focus than similar conversations with boys, for example:

> "Me cousin. She said like you do make new friends, like I asked her if she made new friends on the first day and she said yeah, and she said it's not really scary, like the work is harder, but like it is really fun, and you have more independence in secondary school, she said loads of really interesting things."

> "Me brother. He told me that like a lot of Junior Cert and he said that, because I like music a lot and I play guitar, he said that if I do music that would count a lot in my Junior Cert."

Parents were the main providers of information about what to expect for boys also, although the boys provided scant detail on the subject matter of these conversations, according to one boy:

> "My mam asked me about subjects and like 'Are you going to do this? Are you going to do that? Are you going to do the two?" "My uncle said that it's quite hard and you have to work," "I'm good about going to the school because my cousins went there and my uncle."

Maintaining friendships and making new friends

For both boys and girls, worries regarding transition were focused on being liked, making friends, meeting new people, teacher attitudes, and the transition from major to minor, as one student explains:

> "I think like here we're being treated like the eldest but when we get into our new schools we're going to be like babies nearly."

For some boys, these viewpoints were closely connected to worries about bullying in quite physical terms: "Like what if kids pick on me because I'm too small or stuff like that," and pre-conceptions that whilst bullying was closely monitored in primary school where students were encouraged to draw attention to such incidents, there was a different code of behaviour in post-primary as noted by a number of participants;

> "If bullies are in primary school the teacher is obviously going to know but like if you get bullied in [post-primary] and if you tell you're just going to keep getting bullied because they really don't care about the teachers anymore.

> "Yeah. It would make it worse for you being a rat."

> "Me Godmother came down and she was talking to me for a good two hours about bullying . . ."

For girls, concerns about bullying focused less on potential physical confrontations and more on individual personality and group dynamics, worries about the perceptions of other people and fitting in.

> "Like if you're shy and you don't like, like don't like reading in front of anyone like. If you're quiet. I'm afraid if you're quiet and you're afraid to say like, say anything. Stand up for yourself. Like say anything to them like, they're just going to keep bullying you so that's what I'm afraid of."

> "Because basically there was, there has been like, bullying going on before in some schools and like, it's not just one person it's like a big group, but like, there's like one person that is in charge, so like whatever she says, like whatever she or he says like goes."

Parents

Engagement and participation in transition programme activities

Parents expressed a range of concerns relevant to the transition of their children to post-primary school, with an overarching concern regarding levels of support prior to the change. The financial burden associated with post-primary costs was also a concern and parents felt that being sure of a school a year in advance, would allow them to begin saving towards the cost of books and uniforms.

Delays in confirming allocation of a school place add to existing stresses and anxieties, and this is principally the case for parents of students with SEND. Greater awareness of the impact of uncertainty on the student is required, according to one parent:

> "All the boys are saying, we are going to this school and we are going to that school and we couldn't tell the child. You might be going here, or you might be going there, and then it even affected us at home and all. He was saying, 'Oh, I don't know where I am going' and then my mother . . . it went to the stage that me and her were snapping at each other and all because the two of us were stressed."

The most frequently used phrase in this interview were the words: "As far as I know . . ." Parents in the boys' school expressed the need for a more longitudinal and engaging introduction to secondary education as a means of addressing the social and emotional challenges of moving from primary to post-primary school:

> "The primary school has done their job in teaching them while they're there, but I think now, wherever the new school be, I think it's up to them to kind of get the student involved, build up a little relationship with them even before they start".

Commentary suggested that the one off, one-time approach currently in place is providing insufficient background detail on what young people can expect to encounter and may be the most likely reason for questions about fundamental workings of school in terms of subjects, homework, breaks, punishment, and activities. Parents in the girls' school stated that open

evenings provided students with the opportunity to talk to subject teachers: “she was very happy to go from a teacher to another one and start meeting teachers one by one and see the classes and see what she can do,” and reassurance about making new friends “she went to the open day like, she loved it, loved it, and met a few girls that she didn't know and she was all excited.” Such positive responses to transition activities demonstrates the important role of prior knowledge and experience.

Activities which provide reassurance and confidence

Concerns around well-being were expressed by parents in both schools, and two examples illustrate different aspects of managing the social and emotional bridge. The links between managing social relationships and their role in supporting coping and resilience for the young people transitioning to post-primary school were emphasised. Specifically, parents also worried about friendships and mental health, and in particular that boys were less likely to discuss any social difficulties; the academic pressures of the Leaving Certificate points race loomed large in the minds of parents, before transition had even taken place, according to one parent:

“I think there's a lot of pressure and I think my attitude towards not putting pressure on them came from, you know, my friend's cousin who did his Leaving Cert and all his peer, his brother and sister previous to him, did the Leaving Cert and got great points and he actually didn't get great points and he was actually afraid to tell his mother and father . . . and he actually went and hung himself.”

In one case worries centred around individual coping and resilience strategies, and access to appropriate resources to manage difficulties:

"I suppose, anger management is too strong, sometimes he's hurt, he's easily hurt I suppose or he finds it hard if something is said to him to ignore it. He would react. So I kind of wanted to know what do they do in that instance. So they do have kind of a Counsellor and, you know, Career Guidance and a calming room as well . . . and they would bring them for a walk and I just thought that was a lovely idea as opposed to giving out to them 'You shouldn't have done that."

In the second case, significant anxiety was expressed by the parent in connection to the emotional safety of their young person, and how this could be managed:

> "She's a very quiet in herself child, and I'm nervous for her, I'm really nervous for her, but I can't bring her to school, if I could bring her to school I'd bring her to school, but it's secondary school, I have to give her a bit of independence . . . but for me, as a parent, I was just, I'm nervous to let her go cos she's so soft . . . Probably follow her to school. Just to make sure she's alright."

Again, language barriers make it difficult to alleviate worries and concerns, and those parents with limited English relied upon friends or the parents of other immigrant children:

> "His English is not very good, he didn't understand very well," "One mother of [his] friend, he explained to him. She is Romanian and she explained to him."

Educators

Engagement and participation in transition programme activities

Staff in the boys' primary school felt that transition-related worries and concerns of their students were masked, and that a modicum of bravado was expected according to one 6th class teacher:

"I think the kind of attitude that you would have most fellas in my experience is that they're too cool to be apprehensive,"

This was also echoed in statements made by the boys who were interviewed. Discussing the social and emotional aspects of transition prompted school staff to think more deeply about questions that students might have, and the reasons for asking those questions proposed by one 6th class teacher:

> "you could tell by the way he asked it, one, he asked it very quietly so he was probably maybe worried that other fellas would hear him but two, that because it was such a different thing . . . now that you say, I think it was something actually to do with lockers with whether or not his lockers were going to be near fellas from fourth and fifth and sixth year . . . but you could tell that he was concerned about that but you know in front of all the other fellas he'd be throwing shapes."

Arguably, this is an example of quite basic information that can be provided in visits and talks, which would do much to alleviate anxieties that may grow into more substantial worries, described by one SNA:

> "I was in 6th class before and you would have boys actually crying because they don't want to leave. I don't like seeing them, because if they're anxious in June they're going to be more anxious in September."

Staff in both schools believed that it was more difficult to engage parents in conversations about transition in general, principally as there is reduced contact with parents by 6th class: by this time, students have started to come into school unaccompanied, and parents are less likely to drop in, or participate in reading activities or school trips.

Activities which provide reassurance and confidence

School staff are aware of potential issues with bullying, and that although students are aware and prepared to some extent through the anti-bullying programme, in post-primary school, there are factors at play which go beyond the control of teaching staff, as described by one 6th class teacher: "I know there was one boy who was, he didn't want to go to the school across here because he suffers difficulty walking and things like that, but he was getting bullied in his flats from the boys in this Secondary School." They also alluded to the change from being the

oldest and ‘biggest’ in the school, to the youngest and smallest students and that this might be intimidating.

Staff were of the opinion that boys require a great deal of support – perhaps more than they actually receive – as they are very immature at the time of transition to secondary school, and generally presented as being ‘too young.’ Teachers felt that transition places the onus on the student to suddenly become a more responsible and accountable young adult which is a significant change from the more intimate and familial atmosphere of primary school. In this respect one SNA felt that students were “expected to do stuff that really they can't do.”

Additionally, a large environment and significantly more student numbers means that it is more difficult to ‘look out for’ students, and that this is a potential factor in ‘being forgotten’ or getting into the ‘wrong crowd’. In terms of managing differences in post-primary, educators felt that moving from a single teacher to seven or eight teachers can be disconcerting, and that the year head is ‘absolutely crucial’ in providing pastoral care, according to one Principal:

> “somebody who's checking all the time, who's aware of their backgrounds, who's aware of any problem they may have and it's constantly checking in with them.”

Again, the role of outside agencies such as clubs and youth programmes and their collaboration with schools and parents is vitally important, as “whatever difficulties the child has in school, you'd generally find it would be the same in club or the same on the street,” as observed by the same Principal.

The knowledge and support of experienced staff is invaluable and they play an important part in advising parents about suitable schools for their children, in particular where parents might lack the skills to determine this themselves, or may feel insecure about approaching schools, as noted by one SNA:

"One of the boys I had like, his mammy had passed away, he lived with his dad, but his dad was illiterate, so I went through like we told him about [the school]. I went up with him, we had a look around the school and we met the principal and then he was happy enough, he felt that would be good for him, I filled out all his forms and that kind of thing for him. We went through it all and then we went back up for the open day with him. And he got his place in there which was great, and the daddy was delighted."

Maintaining friendships and making new friends

In the girls' school friendship and socialisation was identified as being instrumental in positive transitions, with good friendship groups providing confidence and security and a good foundation for 'fitting in'. Transitioning with friends from primary school and knowing that there will be one or two familiar faces is essential: "children I think fear that, you know, they fear the new, all the new girls, separated from their friends" according to one Principal. However, it was also noted that personal histories also transition to new environments and can result in bullying, according to the same Principal: "Because people live very close together, on top of each other, and everybody knows everybody's business, and that can be an issue for children."

3.2.2 Post-transition Themes

Students

Engagement and participation in transition programme activities

Across the range of participating post-primary schools both male and female pupils reported positive feelings about transition, and were happy in their new school. In some cases, however, the initial experience brought back memories of beginning primary school, one student describes:

> "At the start I found it a bit weird … I missed me primary school, cos we were just like, the babies again, and I got so used to my little sister being in the same school as me, and it was real weird, and I didn't like it, and then, now I like it."

These positive experiences were attributed to highly structured programmes of activities in the first few days / weeks of beginning secondary school: "it really helped that I went to the rugby camp because I got to meet people before" in addition to ongoing access to advice and support from school staff (Guidance Counsellors, Form Tutors, 1st Year Heads), one student noted:

> "I like my form tutor a lot, she's really nice … she understands every single person in the class, and she knows how you might be feeling and things, she'll ask you questions like, if you're ok and things."

Practical support is also provided through peer mentoring programmes provided through the Prefect system, one student reported:

> "The 6th years, we have the prefects, and, there's some assigned to each like, to a classroom for the 1st year, and they bring us around and they show us the canteen and the library and all like that, and then the teachers, are just like, the teachers are real nice when we came in, they were like real soft and then they just helped us settle down."

Activities which provide reassurance and confidence

Students who had the opportunity to engage in transition activities benefitted from early opportunities to make friends and to become familiar with the school environment, but late admissions: "I think there was an open day, but at that point I wasn't coming here, so I didn't go, so I never fully got to see it before I came." Students were appreciative of the gentle introduction to school for incoming 1st years such as reduced classes, games and PE, and other 'bonding' opportunities: "We have a lot of clubs, we have like, homework clubs, we have like maths clubs … English clubs and all. Basically, support clubs for1st years, like, to get us like, settled in."

However, for some, more activities, a longer day and homework requirements created additional tension: "Very stressed … you get homework on the weekend in, in secondary. And then there's like, you need to do more activities after school, so like you're mostly coming around 6, to your home." Weekend homework was an irritant for most pupils: as one first year

head noted “It's not a huge amount, but I think to them, it's a huge amount, you know, it's a huge change, because … that time is taken away from them now.”

Friendships and a sense of belonging

The importance of making friends and forming friendship groups was the focus of commentary and those students who had access to wider support networks, were advantaged by this: “I know like, most of me cousins are older than me … they have already been in secondary school, or are in secondary school,” and “There's a few girls I know, and then like, I know like me ma's friends, her eh, cousins are in this school, and then, me next door neighbour, her son is in this school, so they were all helping me and all.” However, friendship groups form quite quickly and there was a sense that this was an important aspect of settling in and finding your place: “and then, in school now, everyone has their groups, so like, no one's friends with everyone … so, I'm in a group of like, five … it's a big change.” Positive experiences were contrasted with pre-transitions worries and concerns: “I used to feel like it was gonna be like, a lot of bullying and I'll just get mixed up around this school, and I'll be late to classes and get detention and stuff.” For some, those fears were realised but friendships helped to forge a new resilience:

> “Same for me, cos I was worried that I was gonna get bullied, and, I did. And then, I was worried about not knowing where the class is, and people not liking me and all, but people don't really like me, but I don't care because I do have my friends. And I don't care what

people say, because, my friend has taught me to be more confident and not care about people, because people are just, people, and they're so annoying".

Fear of bullying was frequently mentioned in pre-transition testimony from students, and school staff are aware of this as 'an issue' in 1st year: One first year head said "And the one thing I always say is that, you know with 400 teenage girls, girls can be nasty with each other, but the one thing we don't tolerate is bullying." The locker area was frequently described as a magnet for this type of behaviour: "One big fear that's coming across is the lockers, that's a huge fear for students … We've already changed it for some students, we have kind of, what we call 'safe lockers', which are at back of the staff room, they're out of the canteen, you know."

Educators

Engagement and participation in transition programme activities

Testimony from school staff provided rich detail on pre-entry and point of entry programmes and practices, but these varied widely across all schools from engagement with parents in 4th, 5th and 6th class, as exemplified by one Guidance Gounsellor:

> "In March is an information night for parents about subject choice and the whole running of the school. That meeting would be specifically for students who have a place in [post-primary]. So the information with regard to coming to the school would be at an open night, maybe in 4th or 5th class … and is very, tailored to the parents and students that are coming to the school."

Generally, open evenings and school tours furnish students and parents with detail on learning support, guidance, the timetable, school rules and policies, the homework journal, subject choices, and the role of the tutor and year head. Induction programmes might involve bringing students into school two days prior to the beginning of the school year, at which time they would receive their timetable and journal and additionally, according to one education professional:

> "Meet the people in their class, meet their tutor and their year head, the Deputy Principal and Principal, and then the following day, they come in, and they are with their tutor, they're with prefects that will be attached to their class, and they will see their year head at some point, as well, and we would go through a lot of the information that would be relevant for them to know, and really have them set up to start school, the following day."

Staff are acutely aware of the need to transmit dense amounts of information to large groups of pupils in a very defined time period as noted by one Guidance Counsellor: "during the induction programme … you nearly don't have enough time sometimes to go through everything with them. We'll spend an awful lot of time going through their homework journal, you know, and just explaining to them, and, even the map of the school" but their principal concern is "a sense of belonging." In one school, the 1st Year Head ensures that assemblies focus on familiarization: "In the first term, I held 14 assemblies … I would literally cover from when they arrive in school in the morning, where they will go, what they will do, how they would arrange themselves," in addition to making daily visits to inspect lockers.

There is a commitment to pastoral care and a nurturing environment which extends beyond the first few weeks of initiation into post-primary school, including information and discussion on the nature of bullying, friendships, and how to stay safe; daily or weekly engagement with Form Tutors and Year Heads is invaluable, as expressed by one Form Tutor:

> "I got to know my class so well because of that tutor time, and sometimes, it's not that you're going in with the most important information sometimes, you're actually just asking about the weekend or, checking in, you're just, you're just having a chat with them and they get much more familiar with you, and, it's nearly better for them because they have that familiar face to come to if they want to talk to you."

One school offers a scholarship programme each year to sixteen pupils recruited from local feeder schools, with a focus on promoting diversity within the school. Whilst a great deal of importance is placed on identifying individual strengths and interests, once these pupils transition into the school they are considered to be the same as any other pupil. However, within that framework, it is necessary to acknowledge prior experience of education and family background, and therefore to differentiate transition support to meet the needs of individual pupils. This might include support around acquiring school materials, provision of school lunches, and managing the demands of the curriculum, but also to handle such differentiation sensitively and to avoid stigmatization.

Activities which provide reassurance and confidence

Practical supports might also include a social skills programme and Breakfast Club, and the introduction of programmes such as *Friends for Life* offer positive approaches to allaying these fears as stated by one Principal: "A number of kids are self-diagnosing themselves as having anxiety … I think, the kids are comfortable enough to say that, and then own up to it, and say, I need extra help, I think that's what a successful transition looks like as well." Staff took great pride in efforts to ensure that theirs was 'a happy school' implementing strategies to combat loneliness or exclusion, as explained by one Guidance Counsellor:

> "We'll create groups, or we'll create, a job at lunchtimes to bring groups together to try and, you know, integrate a girl into a certain group, or we, sometimes, adjust the classes, to try and move around people we feel might, like, be a better fit for her, or, you know, we're always kind of watching out for that, as part of the care team really."

This could potentially be a specific difficulty for children with SEN or disabilities, especially where they are supported by an SNA, and staff are aware of negative aspects to this support in terms of developing friendships as described by one SNA: "secondary school is hard enough as it is without somebody not to be there to talk to, and it's great and all having an SNA to talk to, but you need somebody your own age as well, you know, to talk about the little things and stuff."

Other strategies include programmes such as *Belonging Plus* - a suite of worksheets and activities designed by the NBSS, topic focus during SPHE classes such as bullying or 'what's expected of me', and for one class a week for 6 or 7 weeks up until the mid-term break in

October, 1st year groups working with a mentor to engage in projects or play games. Schools which offer extensive extra-curricular activities - for example drama, music, art, debating, sports, and science clubs - increase the number of opportunities that pupils have to integrate and mix with peers but are dependent upon staffing and resourcing.

3.2.3 Summary

The conversation about transition does not really gain momentum until May or June of 6th class, and school staff acknowledge that this may be six months or more after post-primary school entrance tests or visits. Parents felt that in order for them to manage the transition, their children needed to be interested and engaged and that this is best achieved by schools communicating to students that they care about needs and individual capabilities, and that humanizing transition is fundamental to a positive experience. It was noted that a greater sensitivity is required to the emotional and behavioural needs of some children, and to be mindful of individual circumstances and characteristics which may be escalated or exacerbated by lack of information and engagement.

At the post transition phase, both pupils and educators emphasized the role of detailed and comprehensive transition programmes for pupils entering post-primary schools. Importantly, these practices were seen to be variable widely across the schools in this study. While these programmes transmitted "dense" amounts of information regarding the practice aspects of negotiating post-primary school settings, both pupils and educators recognised the importance of such transition programmes in supporting the social and emotional needs of pupils. Programmes to support pupils' transitions were often very detailed and involved large

levels of time and work commitment from some school staff involved, as well as detailed prior planning and coordination.

Overall, pupils were positive regarding managing and maintaining friendships across the transition to post-primary school. A range of activities, clubs and curriculum-based programmes in the early stages of the new school year aimed to provide incoming pupils with opportunities to meet staff and other pupils. Both pupils and educators recognized the value of these opportunities for incoming pupils. Educators also recognized the value of a range of ongoing curricular based programmes in supporting 1st year pupils across the whole year. Activities to support transition were recognized by both staff and pupils as being valuable in supporting the social and emotional needs of pupils and managing anxieties regarding maintaining friendships and potential bullying.

3.3 Bridge 3 Curriculum

The Curriculum Bridge examines the importance of making links between feeder primary and post-primary schools, by providing opportunities to experience and understand differences in teaching approaches, learning outcomes, curriculum structure and content, as well as norms and practices connected to the everyday life of the school. This awareness and understanding underpins educational choices that may impact on academic achievement and retention.

3.3.1 Pre-transition Themes

Students

Curriculum structure and content

In the boys' school, knowledge about the post-primary curriculum was largely sourced from older siblings or extended family and received wisdom from family conversations: "Yeah but if you go from third year to fifth year it's a bigger step, you need to learn a bit more." In general, understanding of curriculum content was quite inaccurate – 10 to 20 subjects, nine or ten classes a day, teachers and not students travelling to classrooms – but knowledgeable enough about practicalities: "You've to hand up €250 for three years for all the books. That's very expensive."

Pupils are aware of the concept of streaming and the possibility of progression through performance, but also seemed to have an impression of school that perhaps was acquired through film and television rather than real life experience: "Everybody is just shouting and then you can shout back and it's just kind of back and forward. It's like a chain you know." Although describing a mixture of nerves and excitement, boys stated that they were looking forward to the challenge of learning from a range of new subjects and making new friends. They are aware that a greater maturity and responsibility is expected, and that there is a greater workload with an increased level of academic difficulty, and also noted the need for curriculum support in core subjects of English, Maths and Irish. There are early signs of linking education to future lives, with a broad range of aspirations from attending college to becoming a skilled worker.

By contrast, girls seemed to have a more substantial grasp of curriculum content and recalled more detail from conversations with post-primary staff. They made detailed commentary about participation in sample lessons which contributed to this knowledge, suggesting a robust knowledge of the way in which classes and the use of technology was organised. Whilst it is not possible to know whether they received more experiential opportunities than the boys, these experiences clearly provided a vivid example of secondary learning in the classroom. Importantly, several of the girls referenced an example of joined curriculum through the *One Book One Community Project*, in which students are encouraged to read and discuss a particular book as an inter-school activity, as is explained by one girl:

"[You] pick a book each year and you read it with your class and then you go back over and talk about it and you have to do loads of things for it. We done it this year with this school and we got an idea about, and we read it, we got it like in January and then we went back over it in March when we were finished and then we had to do book reviews and book covers and all for it."

This is a collaborative project between 6th class and 1st year students, within 18 primary and post-primary schools in the local area. Although the boys' school participated in this activity, it was not mentioned by any of the boys, nor by school staff.

Both girls and boys anticipated that the move to post-primary would be interesting and exciting in terms of more teachers and subjects, and a larger peer group. Workload and content might be harder but probably more enjoyable, and there was recognition that this

move represented the gateway to a new developmental period: “I feel like I'm gonna be more mature in a way, and I'm gonna be happy, like, to organise and like, know everything myself, cos when here, my mum organises everything, even though I don't let her, she does, but then I'll try to do my own stuff.” Only one of the girls interviewed mentioned educational aspirations, specifically to become a doctor, and concern around areas of the curriculum which might be required, were again focused around core subjects and literacy skills.

Parents

Curriculum structure and content

Parents in the boys’ school felt that their child did not sufficiently understand curriculum differences: “He said he doesn't think there is any difference . . . there is a big difference when you go to secondary school, I said there is harder work … he said, I'll be grand.” Advice from parents was mainly concerned with homework and getting into school on time, and parents described frustration with ever changing text books and workbooks, meaning that it was not possible to hand these down to following siblings, and felt that the use of technology was preferable. The only aspect of the curriculum where support was anticipated was in the study of Irish, and: “I think just, you know, the handling of the more subjects would be my main worry. The pressure of it, you know?” Parents also alluded to transition as a rite of passage in growing up, and in general felt that their child was prepared and excited, if a little nervous.

These viewpoints were echoed by parents in the girls’ school, and additional commentary from minority ethnic families illustrated the difficulty of managing a broader and more

complex curriculum, in tandem with progressing levels of spoken and written English, and this aspect of curriculum support, is critical, according to one parent:

"So, they still need to catch, even my big daughter she still asks me sometimes and she still uses the dictionary and everything to try to catch up with her English, because it wasn't easy, they wouldn't know nothing, and they was coming home crying, and [saying] 'I don't understand, I don't want to go to school', ".

These parents also made links between the need for increased effort and determination in order to manage differences in post-primary school: "We'll all get where we want to be in life, if, we knuckle down."

There was less emphasis on this bridge than might have been anticipated, given the proximity of some feeder primary schools to post-primary schools. Whether this is a function of lack of shared activities between schools, or lack of awareness of parents, is not clear.

Educators

Curriculum structure and content

Primary school teachers made comments in relation to subject availability and choice that seemed to imply a gap in knowledge; on several occasions teachers expressed the opinion that neither students, parents or primary teachers themselves: "don't even know what subjects are offered in every school." However, this was not in evidence in the girls' school, where reference was made to whole day visits to several of the post-primary schools as early as 4th

and 5th classes. These visits incorporated taster lessons in Science, Geography and French, with the result that: “they all want to go then to the school, of course once they leave” (School Principal). That said, educators in the girls’ school felt that this familiarisation still did not bridge the jump in curriculum content and workload, compared to historical approaches whereby in 6th class, efforts were made to pre-teach the first chapters of subjects such as Maths, Irish, Geography and History: “so we were extremely confident going in” (School Principal).

In terms of curriculum support, school staff noted the high numbers of minority ethnic and minority language pupils who might experience difficulties with English, particularly those children arriving into Ireland in 5th and 6th class, and who will inevitably require additional support to access the curriculum in post-primary school.

In terms of bridging the curriculum, school staff felt that a lack of communication between primary and secondary school around academic expectations and preparedness, is perhaps rooted in a poor understanding of curriculum pressures in primary school, as noted by one Principal:

“In our school in particular, you know that, we struggle with the English and the Maths so I suppose our focus would be getting them as well able to read and literate as we can and as good at the Maths as they can for going in.”

This gap in expectations is problematic where the academic profile of students does not fit with the 'standard' post-primary curriculum: "they're that good with their hands, but, you know, it's always the head stuff that is the focus," and there was a strong feeling that other talents and abilities are less valued, according to one Principal:

"That's what some children are facing, every day and they know themselves, they have problems, especially with the bright child with dyslexia. She cannot read, we are pushing it into them, but she gets frustrated, she gets annoyed, she gets in trouble . . . But that child can sing, she has an amazing ear for oral, she can learn every song from the radio, she knows every word of every pop song, but no she can't read very well."

In the absence of curriculum bridging work, the academic learning curve at the beginning of post-primary school can be steep: "I would find, by 1st year if you haven't got it, you know, a kind of a foundation, the work is very hard" (School Principal), and curriculum support is vital. Some help is available through homework clubs, but solutions such as 'grinds' are beyond the means of most families and represents a disadvantage in accessing the curriculum, noted by one Principal: "you have to bump it up if you're to sit that exam, which is a standard exam across the whole country, and there is no more forgiveness that you're from a DEIS school or whatever your background is, that's tough."

Norms and practices connected to the everyday life of the school

Students

Female pupils were fully aware of how post-primary school works in terms of timing of the school day, subject choice and timetabling, and behavioural sanctions.

Educators

Teachers expressed concerns around the increased homework load and general organisation of academic materials, and that the pastoral team and year head in post-primary have an important role here. Staff in primary school also take time to emphasise these key factors as, generally speaking, homework is: "the first thing to cause a problem." School staff in the boys' school indicated that they covered some of the basic differences in post-primary school such as multiple teachers, changing classrooms, and sample timetables.

There was an oblique reference to differences in behaviour; parents had already noted that a structured discipline and behaviour management programme operated in the primary school, so it is interesting that staff felt the need to advise the boys that in secondary school: "there will be people, you know, like you know, misbehaving." One 6th class teacher emphasised the importance of expectations in terms of behaviour and the general impression that this would communicate:

> "I spoke to them at length about the impression that they were going to give to the teachers when they went over and did their entrance test because they were over there for two hours and in that two hours they have a lunch and the teachers would be

observing them and seeing who they want . . . maybe you know not intentionally but you're bound to get an opinion on a child."

This is a part of the 'hidden curriculum' that should perhaps be more fully or overtly explained as suggested by one 6th class teacher: "assumptions you know can mess up everything." There are differences in understanding and accommodation which are more easily implemented in primary school, but difficult to work around within automated detention systems of secondary school, for lateness, for example.

3.3.2 Post- transition Themes

Curriculum structure and content

Students

In the girls' schools, pupils referenced taster sessions and introductions to subjects, but were critical of the gap between how these were presented initially, to the reality of studying specific subjects: "Music actually really surprised me … I didn't think that you'd be learning to play an instrument, I thought it was going to be like, singing," and "I wanted to pick Business cos I thought we gonna do like, a lot of money … but like when you actually do business, it's really boring" refining this to explain that: "I started hating it because it used to be like big words, and I had to learn a lot." Other issues were incomplete understanding of how the subject is delivered: "And the same for Home Ec, like, whenever we cook, we have to do whatever the teacher does, and, it's just like, we can't do anything we want" and whilst pupils are facilitated in changing subjects, this brings additional difficulties: "then I moved in

to Home Ec and then I had to like, revise everything what they done since the start of the year, and then, we had like, exams coming up."

Boys echoed unexpected differences in specific subjects such as Maths: "cos you're doing it with all x's and all that" and expressed genuine surprise at curriculum differences**,** as one boy noted:

"Probably the workload, like, I felt there was like a really big gap from the amount of work you did in primary to secondary. You have to study for tests now, because back then you were just like, oh yeah, here's a Sigma-T test… every Friday we used to do like, a spelling test and it wasn't that hard. I was expecting it to be like, more work, but I was quite shocked because it was like, a lot more work."

These more frequent and more formal assessments were also disconcerting, which also means a more rapid mode of delivery: "In Maths, when you move on from different things all the time, and like Irish and all, it's hard to remember everything, and the Christmas tests, they were kind of hard studying for and everything." The difference in timeframe for learning material was alluded to quite often: "it's only 40 minutes, really for one class, so you can't go over, like in primary if you did Maths you could be doing it for like half the day." There are additional difficulties for minority language pupils who may not have recognised the importance placed on Irish in post-primary school: "I mostly didn't like, pay attention in Irish too much in primary, because I thought it's not gonna be not helpful for me in life because I was planning on moving out of Ireland when I grow up … now it's hard."

Educators

In some schools, efforts are made to introduce the post-primary curriculum, principally through Science or Maths Days where students visit the secondary school whilst in 6th class, and teachers also referenced visits between schools organised between BFL and HSL staff which entail bringing individual classes of children around the school "while the school is in motion, like, kind of just give them a tour and they can see other students walk around and then, get in to some of the rooms, and stuff like that, (Behaviour for Learning teacher), however "Not all primary school teachers will release a class, to participate in these opportunities. Taster or sample lessons that might usefully introduce a different type of curriculum, generally speaking did not feature as an option, particularly where: "You're probably asking teachers who are up to their eyeballs" as stated by one 1st Year Head.

Other successful initiatives include inviting primary classes to school productions such as the play or musical, although one Principal explained that: "we've 14 feeder schools, so we can't, we usually pick our 3 closest ones." 'Home schools' are also encouraged to participate in maths reform and paired reading activities, but again, this is not feasible to school that are further away, meaning that some children have a very different experience of what their future is school is like.

One of the most significant differences in curriculum is the increase in subjects between primary and post-primary school, however, subject selection is often completed prior to transition and without real awareness that additional subjects such as SPHE or Religion noted

by one 1st Year Head, means that: “it's 12 or 14 subjects they're actually studying in 1st year, and the poor little things, they can barely, you know, survive. It's a lot to take on, you know, coming from 3 or 4, maybe 5 subjects in the primary school,” and for some subjects, class sizes may be much larger than some children have been used to in primary school. There are benefits to allowing students to try out subjects in September for a few weeks before making a selection, however, as noted above, this was not always a successful strategy.

Where staff fill multiple roles, finding time to monitor pupil well-being and management of the curriculum, is compromised. A teacher who is 1st Year Head, Co-ordinator for School Self-evaluation, and teaching four subjects at Leaving Certificate level observed that: “I do none of the teaching work, that all has to be done at home … it seems to have gotten more cumbersome over the years,” and there is acknowledgement that this overload is also experienced by students: “Personally, I feel they've too many subjects, and that they are bamboozled by the amount that comes at them, you know, because I get confused myself, whether it's 12 or 14 subjects, they're actually studying in 1st year.”

Norms and practices connected to the everyday life of the school

Students

Pupils’ concerns centred largely around the mechanics of managing school such as multiple teachers: “It was weird, at the start … I always knew that there's gonna be one teacher, that I have to talk to, and then one Principal, but like there's multi teachers,” changing classrooms, broader curriculum, but also managing public spaces as smaller and younger members of the school community: “For lunch … you get your ticket in the morning, or in, during the lunch

break … the canteen is not that big, and everyone just gets, crushed and pushes into each other, especially like the, our bigger 6th year groups and 5th year." The increase in school population was noted by several students: "my old school was relatively small, it was only about 200 people, and this one's like, a thousand people."

Discipline and adhering to rules were factors noted more frequently in the boys' schools where: "if you're being bold you get detention, and you have to stay back a half an hour after school, to write down rules" and advice to primary pupils mainly focused on ensuring that they were clear on the consequences of non-compliance: "If ya get five detentions then you're suspended for a day … Don't mess … Don't forget yous diaries because you need that to go toilet, or you won't be allowed go … Don't forget yous iPads cos you get sent home … and wear yous right uniform cos yous get sent home."

Pupils were very aware of the change from: "transitioning into like, a child to adult" but also that they were suspended in "kinda like the in between, and you have to kind of settle in to, grow up." For this reason, some pupils suggested a slower and more gradual transition into post-primary education in terms of managing workload and knowing how to study.

3.3.3 Summary

While primary schools implement some basic transition preparation around practical aspects of managing differences in post-primary school, the quality and frequency of bridging activities (school visits and taster classes), was found to be disparate. This has resulted in an uncertainty for some students around, homework, subjects, timetables, discipline and

workload. In the absence of a standardised transition programme, some students experience an unequal pre-transition experience, which may ultimately lead to a poor transition which can result in a poor opinion of school and potentially impact on retention.

In general, pupils had an awareness that more responsibility and maturity was expected from them in secondary school. They also referred to the greater workload and the perceived increased level of academic difficulty. In many cases (particularly for boys) their understanding of curriculum content was inaccurate. Pre-transition, girls in contrast to boys appeared to have a greater grasp of the timing of the school day, subject choice, timetabling and behavioural sanctions. It is possible that participation in sample lessons contributed to this knowledge.

Parents anticipated that greater curriculum support would be required in Irish and minority ethnic parents highlighted the difficulty in managing a broader and more complex curriculum whilst still grappling with English language proficiency. From the school perspective, typical transition preparation included emphasising differences in the amount of homework, the changes in the level of coursework i.e. perceived to be more difficult) and the greater numbers of pupils in post-primary school. Time was also spent highlighting common behavioural expectations in secondary school.

At the post transition stage, pupils noted more frequent and formal assessment in post-primary school along with a more rapid mode of subject delivery. Hence, many suggested a slower and more gradual transition into post-primary with specific reference to managing

their workload and getting support with developing study skills. Girls, in particular, commented on the difference between their expectations of studying a subject and the reality of studying same. Although students had the option of changing subjects this created time pressure in relation to preparing for Christmas exams.

3.4 Bridge 4 Pedagogy

The Pedagogical Bridge is concerned with equipping pupils with specific knowledge and skills which support successful transfer to post-primary education, and which are facilitated through joint teaching activities or projects between primary and post-primary staff. They provide students with experiences that illustrate differences in teaching and learning approaches, for example, teaching collaborative learning and critical thinking approaches frequently used in the post-primary classroom such as Think Pair Share (Lyman, 1981), or introducing new subjects and ways of learning (e.g. foreign languages) through remote / virtual learning technologies. This bridge also considers methods of providing curriculum support in specific subjects through differentiation, for example, and also ensures that specialist teaching support is provided to pupils with SEN.

3.4.1 Pre-transition Themes

There was no reference to pedagogical matters from 6th class students or their parents prior to transition, which might arguably indicate a lack of awareness of the importance of this knowledge, and relatively little commentary was offered by educators on this aspect of transition.

Educators

Illustrating differences in teaching and learning approaches

In the pre-transition phase, it was notable that there was limited reference to teaching pedagogical differences in primary school, other than making occasional reference to ad hoc practices rather than planned strategies, as mentioned by one SNA:

> "Like when the teacher is doing science he might say, 'Now, when you're in secondary you're going to be doing science', even though they have been doing science since 2nd class, they probably don't realise they're doing science. So, we kind of start trying to use language like, 'When you're in secondary' and you'll be doing this in 'a lab' and, even though we're doing it here you'll have a lab."

Arguably, increasing the use of these language and reference points would lay the foundation for understanding classroom practice in post-primary school, increase pupil confidence, and allay some of the fears around teachers and classroom expectations expressed in student interviews. In terms of reciprocal visits, only one 6th class teacher suggested that it might be possible to: "go over there, even if it is for something simple like a science lesson or something like that." The concept of sharing methodologies across the curriculum, introducing material, and replicating lesson formats via taster lessons in primary schools, was acknowledged by one primary school Principal who stated that fear of the 'unknown' was a significant factor in positive transitions. Reflecting on historical practices, this Principal described how bridging the gap in curriculum knowledge was facilitated by skilled and

knowledgeable teachers: “We started doing Maths for secondary school … we used to have that done, so we were extremely confident going in. We were very good at Irish, that gave us great confidence because we had a teacher who loved Irish … we were all able to read and write …”

3.4.2 Post-transition Themes

Students

Understanding differences in teaching and learning approaches

The absence of such preparation in 6th class was brought more sharply into focus by pupils interviewed during the post-transition period, and comments highlighted the increase in homework load and formal assessment: “When I came into school, I was like, argh, so many tests I had to do.” Students drew attention to delivery of lesson content and how this connects to understanding material: “… some of the teachers, they don't explain it properly, they just move on really fast. And they just make you write down stuff without knowing if you understand,” sometimes leading to complete disengagement with the subject, one student noted:

“I thought like in Music that we're gonna learn about, like all the notes, and like how to read a scale and all. Nobody can do that, we just take down PowerPoints every single time we're there … and for 80 minutes on the Tuesday, we take down a PowerPoint, and then if you're not finished, you have to get someone to copy and finish it for homework.”

These are significant and rather obvious differences between primary and post-primary education which could easily be addressed prior to transition via school visits, shadowing days, and taster lessons.

In post-primary school, access to a Student Council enables pupils to discuss teaching and learning practices, for example the use of iPad technology, a methodology which was not available in all of the study schools. The use of iPads in place of textbooks may be beyond the experience of many pupils in primary school, and there was some evidence that post-primary pupils lacked an understanding of how these could enhance learning. Given that the efficacy of such technology as a pedagogical tool is increasingly under scrutiny (Haßler, Major, & Hennessy, 2016; Jahnke, Bergström, Mårell-Olsson, Häll, & Kumar, 2017), it would make sense to address these differences prior to transition. Assistive Technology is particularly important for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities who benefit significantly from using technology to access to the curriculum, but there are real advantages to introducing these - from screen magnification to read aloud software – to all 6th class students.

Educators

Curriculum support through differentiation

Teachers were conscious of the need to develop differentiated teaching approaches, and this is particularly relevant to cohorts of students who are transitioning into the new junior cycle curriculum, as noted by one 1st Year Head:

> "It does happen where a problem occurs within a subject area, so a child, would arrive at my door and would say: 'Sir, I'm really struggling with this, I can't cope', so I would listen, I would take on board what they're saying to me, and I would visit the teacher involved."

However, concern was expressed by one 1st Year Head in terms of support for managing these recent curriculum developments, and the requirement for new ways of teaching and assessment particularly in relation to classroom based assessments: "Personally as teachers we're not getting enough out of it, so we're at sea, because nobody knows what's going on." There was also evidence of frustration with marrying the principles and practice of differentiation noted by one Behaviour for Learning teacher:

> "There's a huge push for team teaching and not withdrawing these students one to one … I just kind of seem to get the feeling that in educational kind of academia, it's nearly frowned upon to be pulling students out, and yet, even though I'm working on behaviour, sometimes that behaviour is because those students are lost."

Specialist teaching support for pupils with SEN

Pedagogical matters are of critical importance for students with SEN, especially where particular challenges require highly individualistic approaches. Aspects of classroom management were highlighted by SEN staff, and one Guidance Counsellor described how these might be experienced differently by pupils with SEN: "How a classroom works, like,

put up your hand, or don't shout out … the basic kind of classroom things that teachers will expect. So they're not nervous about those kind of things, like, how do I act in the class?" Understanding how the post-primary classroom and wider school environment works, is critical to managing change. However, this requires professional knowledge and understanding of the challenges associated with specific disabilities, an aspect that one SNA felt required greater focus and attention:

> "A lot of them just do not understand, really and truly. Like the amount of times I've been told, his behaviour is this, this and this, but it's not, it really isn't, it really is not, and it's seen as defiance that he won't take his coat off, when he needs a minute, you know. Because if you say to him … take your coat off, he will do it, he might not do it straight away, sometimes he does, sometimes he doesn't. He just needs to process it … and I have tried, so many times I have said it to the teachers, you know, you just need to give him a minute.

Moreover, support programmes are often seen as the responsibility of the Special Education Team or SEN staff, and teacher involvement in many cases is reduced to approving withdrawal from subject classes, or completing observation forms and checkboxes. Whilst transition literature pertaining to pedagogical matters draws attention to the efficacy of familiarising pupils with changes to curriculum content and its delivery, evidence from this study also highlighted the need to inform pupils and parents about differences in curriculum

expectations, the purpose of assessment, and associated methods of determining pupil attainment – including homework and the practice of more frequent formal assessment.

3.4.3 Summary

At the pre-transition stage there was little or no reference made to how schools supported pupils in understanding the differences in pedagogy at post primary level and it was noted that where practice did occur it was somewhat ad-hoc. In other words, there little or no evidence of sharing methodologies across the curriculum, introducing material, or replicating lesson formats via taster lessons in primary. Post transition pupils were somewhat overwhelmed with familiarising and understanding themselves with the different teaching and learning approaches. It was also found that the technological advances in teaching and learning which have been found to be effective for all pupils could be beyond the experience of many pupils in primary school, and there was some evidence that post-primary pupils lacked an understanding of how these could enhance learning particularly for pupils with SEN. While there was some awareness of the need to develop differentiated teaching approaches, there were some concerns related to the provision of support for teaching staff to upskill in teaching and assessment in relation to the new junior cycle curriculum

3.5 Bridge 5 Managing Learning

The final bridge inspects factors associated with becoming autonomous learners, including an understanding of the relationship between achievement and effort, academic strengths and challenges, different approaches to learning and studying, being responsible for managing belongings, and personal characteristics of the learner.

3.5.1 Pre-transition Themes

Students

Autonomous Learning

Some reference was made to greater independence, responsibility "they treat you more like an adult", and learning; some students acknowledged the probability of increased homework, that school would be stricter, that students would be expected to work harder, and that ability streaming was connected to performance and attainment, as described by one student:

> "You just go into lower level Irish. And then you can learn from that and then you can ask can you get a higher up one and then you can learn from that, then you can go higher level, you know what I mean?"

One or two students were conscious of that current approaches to learning may not be adequate:

> "Do you know that stuff when you have to read the questions and all, it's your reading test, I'm terrible at that, I don't look over the questions."

Girls expressed more specific interest in subjects as they related to individual skills and abilities, and some of their preferences were directly related to their experience of transition activities, according to one girl:

> "The only subjects I don't want to do are science. And business, I hate business. No I'm going to do music and Home Ec because like I want to do Home Ec. I'm musical. I don't want to science, because when we were down there they cut and open a rat's head. Ew. And I was like, oh please get me out of this classroom!"

Academic Strengths and Challenges

They also demonstrated a more thoughtful approach to choosing subjects: "I'm happy that I'm doing my own thing and I want to do German, that, I think that's better for me," and the beginnings of an understanding that learning is experiential, one girl noted:

> "I feel like it's kinda like, cooking, like, first of all you don't know what you're doing and you don't know how it's gonna turn out, but then you just learn it off by heart. Cos I always think of my mum, and like, when she gets a new recipe, or my dad, they don't know anything, they don't know if it's gonna be good, but then they just know off by heart and they have so many so I don't know how they know, like, all of them by heart."

Overall, there was an understanding that educational achievement was connected to future lives, and college was noted as a pathway to opportunity, as one student explains:

> "I said like, are you sure this is the school you want to go to and she said, yes, because they will appreciate me for my true value. I can show them what I can do. They don't need to teach me, I will show them what I can learn."

Parents

Autonomous Learning

Awareness of increased levels of independence was expressed in parent testimony in the girls' school: "They starting getting their own small decisions, what they do, where they go," and these parents were also very engaged with the personal characteristics of their young people that could influence learning and achievement, in terms of effort**,** according to one parent:

> "The teacher says 'but she can do it', and I know she can do a little bit better but, sometimes she's lazy and sloppy," and a hunger to reach higher education goals: "the only way she can do that is if she knuckles down, takes it all in, concentrates . . . I can't send her to college, she needs to earn her place in college . . . We'll all get where we want to be in life, if, we knuckle down."

Personal Characteristics

There is evidence that parents believe self-determination is key to managing learning in post-primary school, but this can only be developed from a foundation of self-awareness – for example being 'strong-minded' and a 'strong character', and support from external agencies is helpful here, according to one parent:

> "She starts with Swan she's very quiet, and now when I'm collecting her she's playing sports with two of the main leaders and she's like, the way she's interacting with them it's great, she has come on - a lot."

Parents of boys described similar characteristics in their children such as 'independent', 'clued in', strong' and open-minded', and also made links between innate skills and future pathways, one parent noted:

> "He'll do something with his hands, I'm certain of that. You know, something mechanical? Something, he's always, since he was a baby, he was always Lego and Meccano."

However, whilst they described hope and ambitions for their children, they also pointed out that this was not always a feature of discussion at home as commented by another parent:

> "Well, he wouldn't really talk to you about anything like that."

Fears centred around students who were less mature and less confident, and who would consequently find it difficult to take ownership of a new learning environment, according to one parent:

> "I just think that [she] will be able for that aspect of it, the work, but I'm just hoping she doesn't kinda, go too into herself. I want her to make all new friends, cos she's a loner. I'm nervous to let her go cos she's so soft. She cries at the drop of a hat; you know what I mean?

Only parents from the boys' school reflected on the autonomy of students with special needs, confirming that some level of support is required to achieve inclusion and participation, but they were uncertain about the reality of actualising such support.

Educators

Autonomous learning

Autonomy and management of the learning environment was a key concern for staff supporting students with SEND, associated with individual characteristics of the student but also dictated by choice, or lack thereof, of post-primary destinations, as highlighted by one 6th class teacher:

> "One is fairly independent or well is probably more independent than the other and he is the one who got into [school] which from what I've heard is going to be a good fit for him but might not have been a good fit for the other boy."

> "He's going to a brand new school with nobody that he knows but he's the kind of fella that everybody will like him, so he'll fit in wherever he goes you know and especially the teachers, the teachers will love him because he's a great kid."

Personal characteristics

But independence is complex where very specific needs require very specific supports, and in such circumstances, it is difficult for students to take control, and to integrate into the life of the school, again described by a 6th class teacher:

> "So as you can imagine at any point in a day you know he had to be so careful that no one banged into him or anything like that . . . and as he kind of got older and as the condition became more serious he had to be kind of kept in so, in case he got hit with a ball or whatever."

Specific examples provided by practitioners illustrate the significance of self-awareness and self-determination, particularly within the arena of social behaviour. Psycho-educational reports and IEPs do not always provide a picture of day to day functioning or behaviour in context: "Probably because they don't realise what the kid is like, how that kid works, how that kid will react to the situation especially a child with special needs, with ADHD" (6th class teacher). Whilst primary staff have developed strategies over time, in a larger school and less intimate school environment, a lack of autonomy can be a dangerous thing according to one 6th class teacher:

> "The other problem is, he's very handsy and he doesn't know when to stop or when he's annoying people, he can't read cues from people and that will be a huge problem because he will need to be watched like a hawk in the first couple of weeks or probably for the whole time he's there because he does have difficulties with that. But you'd have a real concern that he would come up against a fella that wasn't in primary school with him, so doesn't know what he's like, coming from a different school and you'd worry what will happen to him".

Significant and specialist preparatory work is required in such situations to prepare the student for managing behaviour and learning. The SNAs in primary school approach this by gently scaffolding independence, a gradual withdrawal to providing distanced support, as students are unlikely to have an SNA sitting beside them throughout the school day in post-primary. However, they are also aware that students themselves do not want the stigma of SNA support as noted by SNAs:

> "Over there they don't want that, they want to be on their own. They don't need you and you are actually probably, you're making them out to be something, you know, like they would see it that I'm stupid because I have somebody following me around or helping me. It's different if it's physical needs and everybody can see well he needs help with this and that, but if we are there for his behaviour, they don't want you tagging along because they're starting to want to show off in front of the boys that are all bigger."

Given that there is an inevitable change to individual SNA support staff, greater collaboration and sharing of information on individual profiles of SEN students was recommended as: “the staff don’t really mix”, unless the student has very significant physical or medical needs.

Academic strengths and challenges

Local youth clubs have an important input in preparing students for transition from a social perspective as illustrated by one SNA:

“So he has a guy who comes in like a big brother programme who takes him and so he's trying to work on his social skills to help him so that he'll be sorted.”

In the absence of this local support, one Principal noted that primary schools must implement skills activities that can develop social awareness and competence:

“There would be children that wouldn't mix well, or can't bear to lose, would kind of really like lose it if they lose . . . the very withdrawn child, the very bright child, ADHD, you know any child that we would be aware of that kind of is struggling in that way, that those children would go out maybe once on their own and then in a group each week.”

Staff felt that these social differences were particularly noticeable in students with autism, who might be academically strong but lacked the social skills to make and manage friendships in post-primary school, an environment fraught with social norms. This is particularly difficult where: “they come in young, and they grow with a class” (Principal) in

primary school, a challenge that may have significant consequences for managing a new learning environment according to one HSCLO:

> "Especially for children with autism . . . change is huge, and like that's such a threshold for them they'd be so used to things, because they'd been with us for so long, and then that change, it can floor them."

In the girls' primary school there was absolute recognition for skills and talents that lay outside the academic arena, and some sadness that this may not help management of the learning environment in post-primary described by one Principal:

"They'd have them up in Santry, 4 nights a week, she'd be on every track and every event and she'd be running. But that child isn't going to get it, she's going to get it here, for 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th, she may continue in secondary school, I don't know . . . academically, she's always going to be very, very weak. But that child has a skill."

3.5.2 Post-transition Themes

Students

Self- management

Students worries and concerns were largely focused on the practicalities of managing lockers and the increase in workload homework, which was the most frequently observed difference by all students and does not appear to be a factor that is explained sufficiently in pre-

transition work. Using lockers, being responsible for books and belongings was rarely referred to in pre-transition preparation, and yet was a significant concern in the post-primary setting. Probably the workload, like, I felt there was like a really big gap from the amount of work you did in primary to secondary."

However, other students viewed this more as a problem that just required some thought, and responded to this new challenge strategically, as noted by one student:

"It's grand because like, say if I had Art today and then if I don't have it till Monday then, you have a few days to do a bit of homework, so like, it's not like, you have to do it straight away and bring it in the next day like primary school."

Where schools use technology such as iPads, students are aware that their homework is monitored, but see this as a positive in terms of understanding expectations.

Being late to school or to class is a cause of anxiety, bringing the correct books and remembering homework causes stress where this may result in detention. Students enjoyed the opportunity to get up and move between classes, and the increase in responsibility also has positive outcomes, one student commented:

"I learned that, I can be like more independent, by myself, I learned, that, like the work was a bit harder, but with help, you can really get through it."

Many students talked about fatigue associated with the longer school day, transporting books to and from home, and travelling to school, one student reported:

"It's so different because, when I was in primary school, I'd be only waking up at like, half eight cos I only live across the road, but here I have to wake up about half six and I had to leave my house at half seven to get here so I won't be late for school."

Educators

Self-management and management of belongings

Behaviour for Learning staff made reference to improvements in behaviour management as a function of the structure of the school day:

"There's some students who have come over to us, with massive warning signs around behaviour, and when they get to the secondary school, and are moving every 40 minutes … it actually settles them … it would suit them better, to be moved around."

However, they also noted that the homework load can be problematic as observed by one SNA:

> "A lot of them wouldn't have their homework done … I've heard that from an awful lot of them, just so much giving out about the homework."

A great deal of work goes into assisting students to manage their physical environment including lockers and travelling to and from classrooms independently, expectations that are radically different from primary school, according to one 1st Year Head:

"We nearly spend a morning with the tutors doing lockers with the kids … how to cope with new teachers, how to actually, how to begin to even integrate yourself into a class, how to get to one class, this is huge, these are huge problems I mean, like, the children going around the place, they don't know where they're going, they get lost particularly the first term."

Care is also taken to ensure that lockers are manageable for students with SEN, where sensory or physical issues may require a locker to be positioned in a specific place, or that they may simply need a second set of books. This emphasis is a response to the acknowledgement that knowing what to do, how to do, where to go, and how to get there, is fundamental to settling in quickly noted by one Guidance Counsellor:

"They're very anxious coming to school, they're worried about disappointing the teacher, they don't know these people very well, it takes a while to develop a relationship you know, they're forgetting things, they're not organised, you know, these kind of repeated things that keep going on, makes, makes life hard for everybody."

Acquiring Study Skills

All schools involved in the study make strenuous efforts to engage students in improving organisational and study skills through their own bespoke programmes, or resources such as

Getting it Together produced by the NCSE, as a response to not knowing "who's overwhelmed and who's genuinely disorganised" (Behaviour for Learning teacher). Difficulties with organisation in terms of remembering books and homework are generally attributed to parents not checking the homework journal, or pupils not recording this in their book, however, the use of VLEs like Edmodo was perceived to be helpful in this regard, especially for students who participated in extra-curricular activities.

Independent learning

Teaching students to become independent learners was perceived to be somewhat hampered by overly helpful parents, and one Form Tutor has adopted an approach that engages pupils in self-reflection and assessment activities:

> "So every month, they'll complete, or I get mine to anyway, complete a review of the month and then goals and, ideas for the next month of what they want to try and do, within that, they can set mini goals."

The same school introduces formal study skills sessions in six modules that run for eight weeks, and these are delivered by form tutors, and similar initiatives run in other schools where: "we would discuss, sort of levels, different kinds styles of learning, and everything and then they would be aware of the different intelligences" (1st Year Head). There is also an emphasis on student responsibility for monitoring progress, where academic targets are identified based on performance in tests in Christmas and Summer examinations. This

information is included in the journaling system as a reminder and students are encouraged to review these on a regular basis form tutors and 1st Year Heads.

3.5.3 Summary

Pre-transition, pupils were acutely aware and had some ideas of what would be required of them in relation to developing their autonomy in post primary school. Parents also acknowledged these changes but were seen to be more realistic about what it might involve for their own child as they were aware of their personal and individual characteristics. This was found to be specifically related to concerns expressed by educators on the challenges that individual pupils with SEND may experience in the areas of learning how to manage themselves with or without support from an SNA. In short, they perceived that pupils with SEND would experience a less seamless transition and maintained that preparation was critical.

At the post transition stage, pupils were unanimous with regards to the improvement in their self-management skills in their new environment. These were found to be related to the practicalities of managing lockers and homework, being late for class and remembering to bring the correct textbooks. to class with pupils finding innovative ways to manage this. However, the changes in school structure were noted by Educators which had resulted in improvements in some pupil's behaviour management. Additionally, schools were acutely aware of the demands on pupils in their new environment. and were seen to be extremely

proactive in providing support for pupils to assist them in the areas of acquiring study skills which would ultimately lead to the development of independent learning

Chapter: 4 Mapping Successful Transitions

This chapter extracts themes that were identified as a particular focus for the study: Gender; Choice; Retention; and Disability with the addition of Ethnicity, a theme that emerged during Phase 2.

4.1 Gender

Although there was no overt reference to gender differences in transition, more than one testimony from school staff in the boys' schools noted a tendency to take much longer to settle into their new school, describing them as being "out of sync" and perhaps requiring: "a different programme in primary school, you know, into, like, this is the closest you'll ever get to the real world." Conversely, there was a general sense from their commentary that girls were happier in this new environment, and had adapted more easily to the curriculum, workload and expectations. They appeared to have a greater sense of awareness about expectations and the benefits of independent learning: "Here's like, you can decide everything you do, which is more helpful, and I like it. It's like, you decide for your own good, and you follow that path, and it leads you to something. And if you make your own mistake, you have to make your own answer for it." Many were capable of reflecting on the personal changes that transition had brought; "When I look back to primary school, I was really immature and I was like, a weird person, and now like, the way I have more responsibilities, I'm like, more mature."

4.2 Choice

All of the pupils interviewed were happy in their (or their parents') choice of school, and advised that: "You don't have to pick the school that your friends are going to … Cos you can always make new friends." From an educator perspective, choice of school is very much associated with living in a closely defined geographical area, where there are historical familial links with specific schools, where: "That's often to do with even their own parents being past pupils or, maybe grandparents live in the community and so they know our school." In one case, a student for whom a specific transition programme was developed elected to move to a different post-primary school at the very last moment, and although the ostensible reason for this was travel distance, it is more likely that this is connected to remaining within the local area.

However, this profile is changing slowly as the catchment area for taking pupils expands through the opening of new (Educate Together) schools, but also through reputation. This is particularly the case for children with SEN: "We have another girl coming this year, who's coming all the way from [redacted] don't ask me how she's coming to us, but anyway, she's heard about our school, and thinks she'll get, good help." Parents who are very aware of the needs of their child would make choices: "specifically because we have a fantastic special education needs [staff], and they're going to be sure that their child gets the best out of their education." Sometimes, choice is determined by parental access to information from feeder schools: "Currently in the way it works, it would be about 17 link schools, and either, you know, home schools and those primary schools would, encourage certain applicants or they just open up to the whole 5th class, different schools do it in different ways."

4.3 Retention

School attendance is a significant factor in retention, and some students expressed that it was possible to be open about attendance issues with tutors. For others, school fatigue had already started to creep in, accompanied by the inevitable disciplinary measures such as detention: “I live there, and I just, still be late … didn't do some of me work cos it was loads, well not loads, cos you only get like, work in one class. [Detention] it wasn't so bad.”

School staff drew attention to the importance of feeling connected to school, and associated long term impacts on retention:

Somebody who might be lost, feel lost, feel lonely, maybe somebody who, starts to, not want to come to school maybe, a bit of school refusal as well, you know, which is really sad, if it ever comes to that situation. So you have to try and avoid that at all costs, that's why it goes back to really, even on those passports, you know, we can see, look at their attendance and that, and if it's low, why is it low?

For some children, the experience of the first few months in post-primary school can be overwhelming, and there is acknowledgement that with large numbers of pupils to monitor: “you can't catch all of them … And some of them are very good at hiding.” In terms of school retention, schools strive to identify problems affecting attendance if: “they're threatening to not be in school, like the school avoidance thing” and to identify underlying causes and to address these immediately. However, they also recognise that some students: “struggle straight away with the demands of secondary school … they come in, they pull into themselves, and, they go below the radar almost, you hardly, or else they start to become the

joker of the class, you know, or it's the school avoidance." There is an awareness of the benefits of initiatives that support both transition and retention, but there is a sense of frustration that this is not a resource available to all schools within the study: This was particularly noted in light of support by one principal:

"He's doing a transitional programme with the boys in [redacted] and I said, why aren't you here doing it with us? You know, and he said, oh we haven't got enough manpower and all that, but I keep putting it to him that every school should have a transition programme in September, helped with the school, School Completion programme".

School staff acknowledged that timely intervention for school attendance was reliant upon EWOs, but that prosecutions did not necessarily address chronic absenteeism meaning that some pupils "kind of fall through the cracks", despite the school's best efforts to alert the authorities: "We can phone, we can send letters, but all we can really do is refer, keep referring to the EWO … but they are, they're just, the backlog is so enormous."

4.4 Disability

Testimony recorded under this theme is principally concerned with experiences of students with SEN and support provided to them by the school team. Whilst SNAs are formally allocated to specific children, it is common practice for them to be utilised to support other children in the classroom, and several boys referred to the help they received from the SNA who "just look out for you". From the **perspective** of the SNA, it is important to support whilst also encouraging independence: "They'd kind of circulate the room, you know … So

you'd go over and you'd check on them, make sure they're OK, but not make it look like you're singling them out, you know, just to kind of, give them that bit of freedom to work in the class." SNA support must be applied for by the school within very defined timeframes in advance of the beginning of the school year. If admission of a pupil with SEN is not anticipated, this will usually mean that support is not provided for some considerable time. In the case of one autistic pupil, a last-minute change of school choice meant a delay in support:

> "It was very, very bad, I think he hadn't got access to an SNA at the time, and I was with somebody else … I was glad to be assigned to him, because, he really did need the help you know. I think that it was down to … there was a lot of people in the class, there's like, loud, other loud children … he was getting very distracted, and he wouldn't do work."

However, where individual support is provided, the practice of managing resources within particular schools can be counter-productive to the rationale which underpins the need for such supports:

> "The SNAs were put on a rotation, so, yeah, that didn't go down too well at all, so I had him for 2 weeks and another SNA had him for 2 weeks then we had a meeting about it. So I'm going to have him per term, so I'll have him for one term, and then the other SNA will have him for another term. It's just in the policy now … from the Department."

In the opinion of this SNA, an absolute requirement is time to get to know individual pupils "there could be anything on a piece of paper, you know, it's more beneficial, for me anyway, to get to know them myself, and I can see their kind of strengths and weaknesses and I can pinpoint what they need help wise." This would include multiple visits to the primary school to observe the student and to talk to current support staff, and an open channel of communication with parents.

The economics of resourcing support was alluded to in many schools, and is a source of frustration for staff who frequently referred to changes in the allocation of SNAs to specific disability categories, leaving pupils with and without disabilities in a vulnerable position:

> "Years ago, you would have been able to get access to an SNA for a student on behavioural, that's gone, now it's a case of, it's a health and safety, that student is a flight risk, and you have to prove it. So, where does that leave us with a student with a severe emotional behavioural disorder? We need SNAs to be able to track those students around the building, and lessen the impact to other students, and the disruption, and, sometimes really dangerous behaviour … The goalposts have been moved as recently as a year or two ago."

Identification of pupils with SEN is managed through consulting admissions documents and test results from primary school, and where necessary, completing additional assessments post-entry. These tasks are completed by SETs so problems with staffing interrupt this

process: “We currently have no-one, who's an SEN, who's a qualified SEN coordinator. We interviewed in November, couldn't get anybody.” Other practices include identification or ‘flagging’ by subject teachers, for example:

> “Every single teacher in the school has got a list of every single student in the school … and they're asked to tick 3 boxes … If you have any concerns that a child needs extra, additional academic support, or SEN, tick a, if you feel they need something around the area of behavioural support, tick b, or if you think they need something about emotional support and mental health, tick c.”

Ensuring that transition materials and activities are fully accessible is imperative from an inclusion perspective, but is often a token consideration and understanding of accessibility is vague: “Not really, I mean, I would obviously, you know, ensure the content is visual and I would ensure that different things are met as part of the whole programme, but, nothing that stands out to me,” however, there was little reference or evidence of input from SEN or Care Teams within schools in terms of potential transition difficulties or needs. The concept of transition planning was unfamiliar but an idea that some schools were prepared to think about:

> “I wouldn't say we have formal transition plans … you might have one this year, none next year, you know, we don't even do it for the more complex needs … Maybe that's an area we could work on.”

> "I wouldn't say we have formal transition year plans, we'd write down a few things, say yeah, we want to put the kid in, we want an SNA here, we want to do this, but it's not, written down, it's not an actual plan."

There is recognition for the increasing mental health needs of pupils, in particular for the transition period, and this is addressed in some schools through specific programmes such as *Friends for Life.* Where anxiety and mental health difficulties have been identified, social, emotional, resilience and coping mechanisms are taught using interventions like *MindOut.* Behaviour for Learning and SET staff administer anxiety tests, and allocate pupils to group programmes based on these results.

4.5 Ethnicity

As languages evolve into a formal aspect of learning in post-primary school, there is a growing awareness amongst students that this might be problematic for some of their peers: "Sometimes, like, other people come, and join the school, but they don't know English, so they have to do English, Irish and French, so it might be like, really hard for them." Language competence can be a particular difficulty when faced with homework, particularly if there is no English speaker at home to assist and support: One pupil said "Some of the questions would be difficult for me to understand because I speak loads of, like a couple of languages so it's harder for me … but even something that's very formal it's gonna be a bit harder because like, I'm used to a bit more informal sort of English."

Social disadvantage features strongly in the pupil profile of most schools in this study, both in terms of single parents and immigrant children. Very often, the transition of non-Irish students bypasses 1st year, leaving little time for preparation especially in relation to ascertaining academic and functional English skill levels; "they've just appeared, on our doorstep, we'll take them in because they're here to come to school, but … they come from a different country, and they just arrive, some of them can't even speak English, so we can't even assess them, we have to do the non-verbal thing." The absence of school reports or psychoeducational documentation or original language material – even when translated – makes it difficult to determine exact needs, with the result that: "it's only when they're developing, that's after 2 or 3 years, we realise this child has a learning difficulty … and it's nearly too late then. I don't know what we could do to improve that but it's an area we need to look at, in my opinion."

One school estimated that 50% of the pupil population consists of 'new Irish' and state that they are seeing increases in this population requiring 'level 3 support'. Teachers encourage parents to support their child in improving their level of English "I'm saying to the parent, you have to speak English to him … you have chosen to live in Ireland, you've got to speak English, to support them … and the dad is looking at me going, but English is very hard." Where communication is difficult from a parental perspective, this has a direct impact on understanding: "We would often have parents who have a child translating at the meetings, parents have no idea," and also on school attendance: "another child isn't coming

to school today because he's to go to a doctor's appointment with the dad cos the dad doesn't speak enough English.”

Chapter: 5 Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to explore and examine the factors that support a seamless transition for pupils with and without Special Educational Needs and Disabilities moving from primary to post primary school in the Dublin 1 area. Pupils, their parents and teachers, and educational professionals shared their experiences pre and post transition in order to inform and provide insights into how a model of inclusive transition could be developed in an effort to promote school retention and support pupils and their parents across this critical point in their educational trajectory.

The study aims were embedded and examined through the framework of the Five Bridges of Transition as proposed by Galton et al. (1999). The specific themes proposed by GDIL – Gender, Choice, Retention and Disability, in addition to a further theme Ethnicity, which emerged post transition, were examined in the context of the factors that enable or hinder a seamless transition. The study has identified a number of inter-related factors that have been identified in previous research studies (Scanlon and Doyle, 2018; Smyth, 2017; Barnes-Holmes et al. 2013; Scanlon et al. 2015; Whitby et al. 2006; Galton & McLellan, 206; Galton & Hargraves, 2002) but which are also unique to the Dublin 1 area.

5.1 Transition Activities

The findings of this study indicate that there is no formal transition planning in place between the primary or post primary schools who participated. This was seen to impact on pupils, their

parents and the wider school community and is specifically concerned with the absence of formal pre and post transition activities and the timely exchange of pupil information.

A variety of informal pre-transition activities were observed across the schools and included open evenings, tours of the school, and information about school policies. In some cases, schools provided an induction programme but were aware that not enough time was dedicated to this activity in lieu of the amount of information that needs to be discussed. In general, the pupils who participated in the study were looking forward to the "move" and their new subjects, but understandably had some apprehension about the changes in the curriculum and their workloads. Parents were also acutely aware of these issues especially in relation to their child's personal characteristics [i.e. SEN or behavioural difficulties] and the potential impact on their well-being in their new environment. However, there was a general consensus that transitioning with friends and going to school in the local community could help buffer these concerns.

5.2 Settling In

Despite the lack of a prescribed pre- transition programme, pupils were found to be happy in their new schools at the post transition phase and these positive experiences were attributed to a number of structured activities which had been provided in the first few days and weeks in secondary school. These included a variety of clubs which were centred around Maths, English and homework as well as extracurricular activities like P.E. games and bonding opportunities. These activities helped them to make friends and get to know their new school as well as establishing the expectations required of them from their new teachers and peers. Forming friendships were critically important for all pupils and allowed them to reflect on their pre-

transitions concerns in relation to bullying and their own behaviour Other programmes to support pupils were also in evidence and included the *Friends for Life* programme and *Belong Plus*- other practical supports were provided by the NBSS and topics such as bullying were explored during SPHE.

5.3 Parents

However, it is worth noting that parents expressed their concerns about the lack of access to information and were genuinely unaware of what information was transferred from school to school but were acutely aware that the entrance test could determine if their child received a place or not in their school of choice. They were also found to be dependent upon the HSCL officer and the principal to help them navigate the transition landscape – especially those parents from an ethnic background. It is worth noting that there was a high level of attrition from parents in this study and they became significantly "invisible" at the post – transition phase when collecting data. This may imply that parents themselves require support during the transition phase if they are to become active and embedded in their child new school community. Given that positive transitions have been associated with school retention for pupils, this research would suggest that this is equally important for parent's, who have been identified as one of the key variables associated with their children's sustainability in education. A co-ordinated transition programme in the Dublin 1 area could help support both parents and pupils and could form part of the school completion programme.

5.4 Curriculum

The expectations about curriculum changes were found to be different between the boys and the girls in the study. For example, the girls seemed to have participated in sample lessons and a community project, *One Book One Community*, where they were encouraged to read and discuss a particular book as an inter-school activity. In contrast, the boys' perception of the curriculum appeared to be informed by older siblings and other family members. This vagueness about the curriculum was echoed by their parents who felt that their children {boys} had little or no understanding of what was ahead for them. In addition, the study found that pupils and parents from a minority background were at a distinct advantage given that they were sometimes still "catching up" on learning English in the face of managing a broader and more complex curriculum. This was particularly noted by educational professionals who expressed their concerns for pupils who arrived in Ireland during or at the beginning of 5th or 6th class. They also agreed that little or no academic preparedness took place between the schools and this was found in part to be rooted in the priorities in primary schools, in promoting and sustaining fluency in Maths and English for all of their pupils.

The *One Book One Community* initiative could be extended through project-based work mediated through technology, and which is cross-curricular in focus, providing an opportunity to create familiarity with and understanding of links between post-primary subjects - For example: visits to primary schools during Transition Year where pupils present Science and Business projects, or slide presentations on school trips and extra-curricular activities; sharing whole school activities such as music and drama productions through additional matinee performances for local primary schools.

5.5 Pedagogy

This lack of curriculum bridging work puts a lot of pressure on pupils and staff at the beginning of the academic year despite the provision of homework clubs. In particular, pupils referred to their workload and the frequency of more formal assessments in all of the curricular areas, and getting to know and understand individual teaching styles. Again, it was noted that pupils from a minority background and those with SEN were at a particular disadvantage in this regard. In particular, pedagogical matters were found to be of critical importance for pupils with SEN especially where individual characteristics [social and emotional problems] impacted upon learning. The support from SNA's was seen to be significant especially supporting pupils to develop social as opposed to academic skills. However, staff worked with pupils with SEN in isolation as opposed to schools adopting a whole school approach to support inclusive practices. It could be argued that given most of the schools in this study were part of the DEIS programme, schools make very valiant efforts to support all pupils.

5.6 Relationships

Autonomy and management of the new learning environment was also noted as a key concern for staff who supported pupils with SEND but again schools provided a multitude of activities to support all students to enable them to move to a more autonomous learning environment. Despite this, educational participants were acutely aware that achieving independence became more complex if pupils had specific needs particularly in the area of social behaviour and commented that psycho-educational reports and IEP's do not always capture these complexities. Some teachers felt the relationships that these pupils had built up with their teachers would become lost

during the transition especially in the larger school environment with a multitude of teachers. School attachment has been identified as a key variable to sustain pupil interest especially those with social and emotional behavioural difficulties (Flynn, 2014). Having a negative experience of social relationships post transition may impact on their ability to remain in school. This study noted that significant and special preparatory work is required to prepare pupils for managing and learning behaviour which are intrinsically linked to post primary outcomes i.e. school completion. SNA's have a key role to play in this work which could be accommodated by both the primary and post primary feeder school in conjunction with the NBSS and the HSCL especially given that pupils at post primary level do not want the perceived stigma of having an SNA (NCSE, 2018). Preparatory activities (i.e. bridges) in learning and behaviour could support them in their new environment.

5.7 Community Supports

Educational professionals spoke about the need for more communication between the schools particularly in relation to the assessment of needs but were very grateful for the support provided by external agencies and local community groups such as youth clubs. These groups provided support to some of the student participants in this study through mentoring and providing practical advice about "the move". These were seen as important in supporting and sustaining the transition for those pupils who may be experiencing difficulties during this time. Where this local support was not available it was noted that schools must implement skills' activities to enable all pupils to develop social awareness and competence. These types of activities would promote a more inclusive approach for transition from primary to post primary school for all pupils and could again form part of a regional transition programme for the Dublin 1 area.

5.8 Developing an Inclusive model for Transition from primary to post primary school

The study concludes that an interagency and community approach is required to enable pupils make a successful and sustainable transition if they are to complete their post- primary education. This would be best facilitated through the development of a formal transition programme which could be specifically embedded into the school completion programme supported by the NBSS, HSCL's and key staff from the primary feeder schools and post primary schools. One HSCL officer interviewed in this study described a 'transition fair' in a neighbouring catchment area, whereby representatives from post-primary schools gathered in a single location central to the local area. This is an interesting idea and one that was clearly perceived to be exciting and innovative. Furthermore, this strategy is reflective of Higher Options, Better Options (for students with disabilities) and Open Day models that are proven to be effective in supporting transition from post-primary to third level education. They provide an opportunity for students and parents to meet with staff, to discuss course choices, and to attend and experience sample lectures. Replicating this model in a primary to post-primary context demonstrates connectivity and continuity through all levels of education for all pupils. This 'transition fair' should form part of a wider transition programme with activities for both parents and their children many of which have been highlighted in this study.

Finally, a longitudinal study is required to examine the specific and interrelated factors concerned with transition from primary to post primary school and school retention.

The following recommendations emerged from the findings of this study and are presented for clarity within the context of the research aims and the theoretical framework of this work. These

are followed by a specific set of indicators which this research has identified acts as facilitators and barriers to ustainable transitions

Chapter: 6 Recommendations

6.1 Bridge 1 – Administration

- Parents should be provided with timely access to information which should include but not be limited to: admission procedures, financial costs, booklists, uniform requirements, proposed meetings, and responsibilities
- All admission policies and practices to post primary schools should be visible and transparent in order to enable pupils and their parents to make an informed choice about what school best suits their needs.
- The transfer of information from primary to post primary schools should be conducted prior transition to assist in planning for and the provision of individual supports for pupils and parents where required.
- The compulsory use of Education passports needs to be implemented as outlined by the Department of Education and Skills.
- A formal transition programme needs to be developed in the Dublin 1 area building on interagency and community links already established.

6.2 Bridge 2 – Social and Emotional

- Post-primary schools should provide formal and informal activities and structures in the early stages of 1st year to enable all pupils develop sustainable relationships with peers and staff.

- A range of curricular initiatives, such as *Friends for Life* can be used to support 1st year pupils social and emotional needs during transition and across the year.
- Approaches to preparing pupils for the transition to post-primary school should commence earlier in primary school and should focus on engaging the pupils with the transition process.
- There should be a greater focus on supporting pupils' emotional and behavioural needs across the transition process so that they are prepared for the challenges in their new environment.
- Parents are key stakeholders in supporting pupils within the transition process and need to be included in the transition planning process.

6.3 Bridge 3 – Curriculum

- Pupils should be provided with the opportunity to participate in sample lessons prior to transition
- School handbooks and websites should provide detailed information on subject choices available in their school. Such resources should also include information in relation to the utility of subjects for further study and/or employment. This could facilitate pupils making choices that will allow them to fulfil their aspirations.
- Although the NCCA website provides comprehensive and detailed information about each subject including course overview, student expectations, learning outcomes and assessment, perhaps this could be made available in a more accessible and pupil- friendly and parent-friendly format.

- Pupils should have the opportunity to try out subjects prior to making a selection post-transition.
- Educators might benefit from an online resource with respect to supporting incoming pupils to develop organisational and study skills.

6.4 Bridge 4 –Pedagogy

- Primary and post-primary staff who are engaged in planning transition programmes might usefully investigate the feasibility of an annual, localised transition fair which enables students and parents to connect with post-primary school staff, and ask questions about the curriculum, subject choices, and extra-curricular activities.
- Both primary and pot primary schools should explore initiatives such as One Book One Community to promote shared activities between 6th class and 1st year cohorts
- Live taster lessons could be delivered by post-primary schools to a large number of feeder schools by using virtual classroom technologies such as Adobe Connect or streaming recorded sample lessons via a school learning portal such as Edmodo.
- Virtual school tours might also be offered and would be of particular support to students who would benefit from familiarising themselves with the physical environment, before starting secondary school.
- Prior to the transition, parents and student should be introduced and assisted to understand the core aspects of the junior cycle curriculum: the key skills framework, subject choices and short courses, and assessment for the new Junior Cycle Student Award.

- The NCCA section for junior cycle does not provide a resources section for parents, and this complex information is not offered in a plain language version. The ASTI publication *Introducing Your Second Level School* has not been updated since 2005, and currently, there are no student-centred resources which answer the questions What will I learn in secondary school? How will I learn in secondary school?

6.5 Bridge 5 – Managing Learning

- Students with Special Education/Additional needs should have access to external and community supports to assist them in the transition from primary to post primary school.
- Primary and Post Primary schools should consider developing Individual Education Plans Transition or Behavioural Plans as required to support the specific needs of students
- Primary schools with the support of Post-Primary schools should provide activities for pupils and their parents to develop self-determination skills and build capacity for autonomous and independent learning

Transition programme

- A formal transition programme should be developed in the Dublin 1 in line with the key recommendations in the Dublin 1 area between primary and post-primary feeder schools.
- The programme should include all stakeholders including community groups

6.6 Facilitators

- *Locality:* Familiarity with and proximity to the post-primary school is perceived to be an advantage, particularly where there is a strong family history of attending the school: "there's a lot of children from over there that would have, somebody over here … a lot of the boys in 1st year would have a couple of relatives in here, and, I think that's quite helpful for them. "The practice of blocking off the first few days of 1st year for 'transition transfer' permits a gentler induction into school, for example, spending time on *Belonging Plus* worksheets, covering and labelling books, sorting out lockers, and participating in games and PE activities.
- *Transfer of Information:* There is acknowledgement that whilst prior knowledge of pupil profiles is essential, particularly in terms of providing supports and avoiding delays in receiving those resources: "sometimes a clean slate is good, here you are, brand new, brand new school, whatever happened before doesn't matter." However, transfer of information is essential to meet individual needs: "I would like each student to have a passport … in an ideal world up-to-date psychological assessment so we're not on the back foot."
- *Teaching Staff*: Staff shortages, particularly in relation to supporting pupils with SEN, mean that students may be struggling to work independently for the crucial first weeks in post-primary school. This is equally the case where incoming students and their families make last minute decisions or changes to their choice of school; however, it is not apparent whether they are alerted to the potential difficulties that 'change of mind' might bring. Other suggestions include visits by post-primary SNAs to feeder schools to meet

prospective students and to gather information on individual strength and challenges, prior to transition: “obviously everybody has their own way of dealing with children like [redacted] but when there's somebody who's been dealing with him for so long, you can learn a lot from them.” Somewhat related, is a feeling that whilst subject teachers have a working understanding of specific disabilities or SEN profiles, additional training and development is required in working with particular profiles in the classroom, for example, challenging behaviour and autism

- *School and Community links*: Pupils in feeder schools directly linked with the ‘host’ secondary school are advantaged in early engagement and transition programmes. These are not necessarily provided to pupils from outlying schools due to managing numbers. Depending on the characteristics of student and parent, this might affect overall experience of transition and ease of settling into a new school environment.
  Links with local community initiatives such as youth clubs play a significant role in awareness and understanding of individual histories and challenges and can facilitate schools in planning supports and monitoring progress and to: “build a better form of support around their outside network that already exists, so be that the youth club, the primary school, that there's kind of, some kind of more formal structure in place.” Co-operation between SET and Care Teams, encouragement of multi-disciplinary input, are considered to be essential, and the practice of Meitheal meetings are instrumental in this.
- *Parental Engagement:* Parent engagement with the school at pre-entry level is important in ensuring that there is awareness and understanding of policies and practice, and the parental role in supporting the development of independent learning. This is also a

crucial factor in school retention, particularly where this is linked to attendance. Often, levels of parent participation are quite low – less than 50% in some cases, and one possible cause is EAL. Additional English language classes for both incoming students and their parents is a necessity: "or even set up a chat space for parents who have come from similar, countries, you know, even somewhere for them to come to, so they could have an understanding of what happens in school." Language barriers, therefore, may be a key factor in reluctance to engage with school.

- *Practical tips:* From a pupil perspective, facilitators of successful transitions were connected to knowledge of fundamental practical considerations prior to transition, such as: understanding: how lockers work; clarity on school rules; understanding the timing of the school day including concepts of 'lateness'; orientation into the physical environment; greater in depth knowledge on subject specific curriculum content; and clearer expectations around acceptable behaviour: "when you're in 6th class and all, and you think like you're all great and all, and like you can just tell the teacher, like you can just like say, no to the teachers and all like that, if you do that here, you get a detention straight away." A greater consistency in access to quality time with tutors and year heads is also noted by pupils: "I know some of me friends in their schools, they like get time with their tutor and stuff and they just like get to ask them questions, and he or she makes sure that they're all right and they're settling in, and if they have any problems they can talk to 'em."
- *Positive Experiences:* Making friendships, being accepted into a group, and participating in activities which foster a sense of belonging as a valued member of the school community contribute significantly to creating a happy pupil. Advice to prospective

students points to the importance of providing reassurance to 6th class pupils: “Don't be stressed out or scared, because I was really stressed out and scared that all my friends were gonna go, I mean, they did, but I found new friends.” Happiness and positive experiences are considered to be the overarching criteria for successful transitions: “somebody who is really happy in themselves, and kind of has a smile on their face, it's evident they're trying their best … they want to work, they get involved in the school.”

6.7 Barriers

- *Relationships:* School staff suggest that negative experiences of school can impact on the relationship with parents – especially if contact is centred around discipline issues - and that ‘positive interactions’ from the very beginning of this relationship, are crucial. Additionally, staff are conscious of the ‘long summer stretch’ between finishing primary school and beginning in secondary, a period which may increase feelings of worry or anxiety about the ‘unknown’ of secondary school.
- *Student Characteristics: In* terms of student characteristics, barriers to settling in school include, the general demeanour of students, misbehaviour and bullying, “one big clue to me would be students in 1st year getting into trouble over things that could be quite simply addressed like organisation skills”. Thus, an early introduction or organisation and time management, particularly with respect to use of lockers, negotiating the school environment, and becoming an autonomous learner, should be a cornerstone of transition transfer programmes.
- *Cultural Capital* A lack of ‘educational capital’ within families is a contributory factor: “so that's then an obstacle obviously to their, retention and, and how they're going to

perform in secondary school," requiring more intensive support from school staff. This is particularly important where school attendance is affected, a marker in successful transition, together with participation in extra-curricular activities.

Chapter: 7 References

Anderson, L. W., Jacobs, J., Schramm, S., & Splittgerber, F. (2000). School transitions: beginning of the end or a new beginning? *International Journal of Educational Research*, *33*(4), 325–339.

Anderson, A. and Ronson, B. (2004) *Democracy – The First Principle Of Health Promoting Schools*, The Electronic Journal of Health Education, 8, 24-35. Assembly, U. G. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. *United Nations, Treaty Series*, *1577*(3).

Barnes-Holmes, Y., Scanlon, G., Desmond, D., Shevlin, M., & Vahey, N. (2013). A study of transition from primary to post-primary school for pupils with special educational needs. *National Council for Special Education Research Report No*, *12*.

Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.) Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education (New York, Greenwood), 241-258.

Bovill, C., Cook-Sather, A., Felton, P. (2011) Students as co-creators of teaching approaches, course design, and curricula: implications for academic developers, *International Journal for Academic Development*, Volume 16, Issue 2.

Bragg. D. (2001). Community College Access, Mission, and Outcomes: Considering Intriguing Intersections and Challenges. *Peabody Journal of Education*. 76 (1), 96 – 116.

Braund, M. & Driver, M. (2005). Pupils' perceptions of practical science in primary and secondary school: implications for improving progression and continuity of learning. *Educational Research*. 47:77-91.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard university press.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. *Handbook of Child Psychology*.

Carr, M. (2011). Young children reflecting on their learning: teachers' conversation strategies. Early Years, 31(3), 257-270.

Carr, M. and Lee, W. (2012). Learning stories: Constructing learner identities in early education. London: Sage.

Clark, A., McQuail, S. & Moss, P. (2003) *Exploring the field of listening to and consultation with young children.* Nottingham, Department for Education and Skills.

Cooke-Sather, A. (2006). Sound, Presence, and Power: "Student Voice" *Educational Research and Reform.* 36 (4), pp 359-390.

Cooke- Sather, A. (2012). Student-faculty partnership in explorations of pedagogical practice: a threshold concept in academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development.* 19 (3), 186 -198.

Cooper, P. (2008). Nurturing attachment to school: contemporary perspectives on social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. *Pastoral Care in Education*. 26(1) pp. 13-22.

Cruddas, L. (2007).Engaged voices—dialogic interaction and the construction of shared social meanings. *Educational Action Research*. 15 (3), pp 479- 488.

Delamont, S. & Galton, M. (1986). *Inside the secondary classroom*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Darmody, M. (2008). Mapping barriers to successful school transitions in comparative perspective–Irish and Estonian experiences. *Trames*, *12*(1), 51–72.

Davies, D. & McMahon, K. (2004). A smooth trajectory: developing continuity and progression between primary and secondary science education through a planned projectiles project. *International Journal of Science Education*, 26: 1009-1021.

De Gioia, K. (2017). Giving voice to families from immigrant and refugee backgrounds during transition to school. In *Families and Transition to School* (pp. 37–49). Springer.

Dockett, S., Griebel, W., & Perry, B. (2017). Transition to school: A family affair. In *Families and Transition to School* (pp. 1–18). Springer.

Department of Education and Skills (2010) Annual Report for 2010. Dublin: Stationary Office.

Department of Education and Skills (2015). Action Plan for Education. Dublin: Stationary Office

Downes, P., Maunsell, C., & Ivers, J. (2007). The 'jolt in climate'between primary and post-primary. *P. Downes, & A. Gilligan, Ed*.

Eccles, J. S., Midgley, C., Wigfield, A., Buchanan, C. M., Reuman, D., Flanagan, C., & Mac Iver, D. (1993). Development during adolescence: The impact of stage-environment fit on young adolescents' experiences in schools and in families. *American Psychologist*, *48*(2), 90.

Education Review Office (2015) *Wellbeing for Young People's Success at Secondary School* ERO, New Zealand Government: Crown Copyright.

Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society*. (2nd ed.) New York: Norton.

Evangelou, M., Taggart, B., Sylva, K., Melhuish, M., Sammons, P., & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2008). *Effective pre-school, primary and post-primary education 3-14 project. What makes a successful transition from primary to post-primary school*.

Fielding, M. (2004) Transformative Approaches to Student Voice: Theoretical Underpinnings, Recalcitrant Realities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(2) 95-311.

Fuller, K. & Thomas, F. (2005). *Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 transition project: the London challenge for world class education*. London: HMSO .

Flynn, P. (2015) Empowerment and transformation for young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties engaged with student voice research' *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 49:2 162 – 175.

Flynn, P (2017). The Learner Voice Report. Embedding student voices in education discourse: Curricular co-construction and development, Dublin: NCCA.

Galton, M, & Delamont, S. (1986). *Inside the secondary classroom*. Teaching and Teacher Education. 3 :4 299-313.

Galton, M., Gray, J., & Ruddock, J. (1999). The impact of school transitions and transfers on pupil progress and attainment (A DfEE report). *Norwich: Her Majesty's Stationary Office*.

Galton, M, & Hargreaves, L. (2002). Transfer: a future agenda. *Transfer from the Primary Classroom, 20,* 185–202.

Galton, M., Gray, J. & Rudduck, J. (2003) *Transfer and transitions in the middle years of schooling (7-14): continuities and discontinuities in Learning. Research Report RR443.* London : HMSO.

Galton, Maurice, & McLellan, R. (2018). A transition Odyssey: Pupils' experiences of transfer to secondary school across five decades. *Research Papers in Education, 33*(2), 255–277.

Glover, S., Burns, J., Butler, H., and Patton, G. (1998) School environments and the emotional wellbeing of young people. *Family Matters.* 49.

Government of Ireland (1998) Education Act. Dublin: Government Publications

Graham, C., & Hill, M. (2002). The transition to secondary school. *Glasgow, Scotland: University of Glasgow*.

Gutman, L. M., & Midgley, C. (2000). The role of protective factors in supporting the academic achievement of poor African American students during the middle school transition. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 29*(2), 223–249.

Haßler, B., Major, L., and Hennessy, S. (2016). Tablet use in schools: a critical review of the evidence for learning outcomes. Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 32, 139– 156

Hannah, E. F., & Topping, K. J. (2013). The transition from primary to secondary school: Perspectives of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their parents. *International Journal of Special Education*, *28*(1).

Harris, P., & Manatakis, H. (2013). *Children as Citizens: Engaging with the child's voice in educational settings*. Routledge.

Hargreaves, A., Earl, L. & Ryan, J. (1996). *Schooling for change: reinventing education for early adolescents.* London: Routledge Falmer.

Jahnke, I., Bergström, P., Mårell-Olsson, E., Häll, L., & Kumar, S. (2017). Digital Didactical Designs as research framework: iPad integration in Nordic schools. Computers & Education, 113, 1-15.

James, A., Jenks, C. & Prout, A. (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*. Cambridge: Polity.

Leitch, R., Lundy, L., Clough, P., Galanouli, D. & Garner, J. (2005) *Consulting Pupils on the Assessment of their Learning (CPAL*). 6th Annual Conference of Teaching and Learning research programme. Warwick.

Lohaus, A., Elben, C., Ball, J., & Klein-Hessling, J. (2004). School transition from elementary to secondary school: Changes in psychological adjustment. *Educational Psychology*, *24*(2), 161–173.

Lord, S.E., Eccles, J.S. & McCarthy, K.A. (1994). Surviving the junior high school transition: family processes and self-perceptions as protective and risk factors. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 14: 162-199.

Lyman, F. (1981). The responsive classroom discussion. In A. S. Anderson (Ed.), Mainstreaming Digest, 109-113. College Park, MD: University of Maryland College of Education.

Lucey, H., & Reay, D. (2000). Identities in transition: anxiety and excitement in the move to secondary school. *Oxford Review of Education*, *26*(2), 191–205.

Lundy, L. (2007) 'Voice' is not Enough: Conceptualising: Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6) 927 - 942.

Lynch, K. & Baker, J. (2005) 'Equality in Education: The importance of Equality of Condition'. *Theory and Research in Education*, 3(2) 131-164.

Maras, P., & Aveling, E. (2006). Students with special educational needs: transitions from primary to secondary school. *British Journal of Special Education*, *33*(4), 196–203.

Martínez, R. S., Aricak, O. T., Graves, M. N., Peters-Myszak, J., & Nellis, L. (2011). Changes in perceived social support and socioemotional adjustment across the elementary to junior high school transition. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *40*(5), 519–530.

Maunsell, C., Barrett, V., & Candon, M. (2007). Primary to post-primary: Perceptions of pupils with special educational needs. *Beyond Educational Disadvantage. Dublin: IPA.*

McCauley, E. (2009). Transition from primary to post-primary school: Issues for students with special educational needs. *REACH Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland*, *23*(1), 32–46.

McCoy, S., Byrne . D,., O'Connell. P.J., Kelly, E .& Doherty C. (2010) Hidden Disadvantage: A Study on the Low Participation in Higher Education by the Non-Manual Group. The Higher Education Authority. Dublin.

McCoy, S., Smyth, E., Watson, D., & Darmody, M. (2014). Leaving school in Ireland: A longitudinal study of post-school transitions. *ESRI Research Series*, *36*.

Naughton, P. (1998). Time for change a study of primary to second-level schooling transition. *Irish Educational Studies*, *17*(1), 312–326.

Noddings, N. (2005) The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Neal, S., & Frederickson, N. (2016). ASD transition to mainstream secondary: a positive experience? *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *32*(4), 355–373.

National Council for Special Education. (2017). Transition from primary to post-primary for pupils with special educational needs. Promoting positive teaching and learning environments. NCSE. Trim.

Navan School Completion Programme. (2017). Mind the gap – transition steps from primary to post primary. Retrieved from http://louthmeath.etb.ie/latest- news/launch-mind-gap/

O'Brien, M. (2001). A study of student transfer from primary to second level schooling: pupils', parents' and teachers' perspectives. *Dublin, Department of Education and Science.*

O'Brien, M. (2004). *Making the move: students', teachers' and parents' perspectives of transfer from first to second-level schooling*. Dublin: Marino Institute of Education.

O'Brien, M. (2008). *Well-Being and Post Primary Schooling: A review of the literature and research.* National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Dublin.

Robinson, C. & Taylor, C. (2007) Theorizing Student Voice: Values and Perspectives. *Improving Schools*, 10(1) 5-17.

Rose, R., & Shevlin, M. (2010). Count me in! Ideas for actively engaging students in inclusive classrooms. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Ruddock, J., Day, J., & Wallace, G. (1996). The significance for school improvement of pupils' experiences of within-school transitions. *Curriculum*, *17*, 144–153.

Rudduck, J. & McIntyre, D. (2007) *Improving Learning Through Consulting Pupils*. London and New York: Routledge

Sebba, J & Robinson, C,(2011. *The Evaluation of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award*, London, UNICEF.

Scanlon, G., & Kamp. A. (2016). Transitions from Education and Training for People with Disabilites. National Disability Authority. Dublin. Ireland

Scanlon, G., Barnes-Holmes, Y., Mc Entaggart, C., & Desmond. D. (2016). The Experiences of Pupils with SEN and their Parents at the stage of Pre-Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School. European Journal of Special Needs Education

Shevlin, M., & Rose, R. (2010). *Count me in!: Ideas for actively engaging students in inclusive classrooms*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Shirley, D., (2015) 'Education for voice: Challenges and opportunities' *Journal of Educational Change* 16:125–128.

Simmons, C., Graham, A., & Thomas, N., (2015) 'Imagining an ideal school for wellbeing: locating student voice' *Journal of Educational Change* 16: 129 – 144

Smyth, E. (2017). *Growing Up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children: Off to a Good Start?: Primary School Experiences and the Transition to Second-level Education: Infant Cohort*. Stationery Office.

Smyth, E., (July 2015) Wellbeing and School Experiences among 9 and 13 year olds: Insights from the *Growing up in Ireland Study* Dublin: ESRI and NCCA.

Smyth, E., McCoy, S., & Darmody, M. (2004). *Moving up: The experiences of first-year students in post-primary education*. Liffey Press Dublin.

Smyth J., Down B. & McInerney, P. (2010) *'Hanging in with kids' in tough times: engagement in contexts of educational disadvantage in the relational school.* New York: Peter Lang.

Suffolk Education Department. (2001). *Transfer Review* 2001. Ipswich:

Sulkowski, M., Demaray, M. and Lazzarus, P. (2012) Connecting students to school to support their emotional wellbeing and academic success. *NASP Communique.* 40 (7).

Rimm-Kaufman. S.E., & Pianta. C.R. (2000). Teachers judgements of problems in the transition to kindergarten. Early Childhood Research Quarterly. 15 (2), pp 147-166.

Tangen, R. (2008) Listening to children's voices in educational research: some theoretical and methodological problems. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 23(2) 157-166.

Tangen, R. (2009) Conceptualising Quality of School Life From Pupils' Perspective: A Four Dimensional Model. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 13(8) 829 - 844.

Topping, K., Miller, D., Thurston, A., McGavock, K., & Conlin, N. (2011). Peer tutoring in reading in Scotland: thinking big. *Literacy, 45*(1), 3–9.

Tur-Kaspa, H. (2002). The socioemotional adjustment of adolescents with LD in the kibbutz during high school transition periods. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, *35*(1), 87–96.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation. . (1994). *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for action on special needs education: adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education; Access and Quality. Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994*. UNESCO..

United Nations (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: United Nations General Assembly.

Unwin, D., Le Mesurier, N., Bathia, S & Deb, N. (2008). Transition for adolescents and young adults with learning disabilities and mental health problems and challenging behaviour: the parent's carer's view. *Advances in mental health and Learning Disabilities* 2 (1), pp 22-28.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., Garza, N., & Levine, P. (2005). After high school: A first look at the postschool experiences of youth with disabilities. A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). *Online Submission*.

Welty, E. and Lundy, L. (2013). Listening and empowering: Children in science communication. A children's rights-based approach to involving children in decision making studies. *Journal of Science Communication* 12: 3.

West, P., Sweeting, H., & Young, R. (2010). Transition matters: pupils' experiences of the primary–secondary school transition in the West of Scotland and consequences for well-being and attainment. *Research Papers in Education, 25*(1), 21–50.

Whitby, K., Lord, P., O'Donnell, S., & Grayson, H. (2006). Dips in performance and motivation: A purely English perception. *London, England: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority*.

Wray, M. (2012/13). Comparing disabled students' entry to higher education with their non-disabled peers - barriers and enablers to success. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning,* 14(3): 87- 101

Zeedyk, M. S., Gallacher, J., Henderson, M., Hope, G., Husband, B., & Lindsay, K. (2003). Negotiating the transition from primary to secondary school: Perceptions of pupils, parents and teachers. *School Psychology International*, *24*(1), 67–79.

Chapter: 8 Appendices

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

Figure_Apx 8.1: Interview questions for parents of 1st year post-primary students

Transition from Primary to Secondary School in the Dublin 1 Area
An Inclusive Educational Approach

A member of the research team will be asking you the following questions during your individual interview.

We are interested in hearing what you have to say about you and your child's experience of moving from primary to secondary school. There is no right or wrong answer.

Do you think that your child experienced a successful transition to post-primary school?
Was a transition plan put in place?
What were the challenges, if any?
What vision do you have for your child's future education?
How do you think that they will achieve this, and who can help?
Did anyone in the post-primary school talk to you about your child moving from primary to post-primary school?
Did you discuss support needs with anyone prior to transition?
Have you had any meetings with school staff?
How is your child getting on in 1st year?
Are there any aspects of post-primary school that you or your child are finding to be difficult?
What does your child like best about their new school?
Who are the key people that you go to if you have questions about school?

Figure_Apx 8.2: Interview questions for education professionals in post-primary schools

Transition from Primary to Secondary School in the Dublin 1 Area
An Inclusive Educational Approach

A member of the research team will be asking you the following questions during your individual or group interview.

We are interested in hearing what you have to say about the transition of students from primary to secondary school. There is no right or wrong answer.

Is there a dedicated transition programme or process in your school?
When is this activated and with whom?
What kind of information is provided to incoming students and their parents?
How are students with additional support needs facilitated in your school?
Are you engaged in developing a transition plan for them?
Who has responsibility for this?
What role do you have in supporting young people in transition?
What resources are required to enable successful transitions for all pupils?
Which agencies and / or destination institutions do you work with in relation to transition?
What do you think these entities bring to the table?
Do you think that they facilitate the transition process?
Do you work with parents to establish transition plans?
What does a successful transition look like?
What does an unsuccessful transition look like?
If you could change three things about transition arrangements or processes, what would they be?

Figure_Apx 8.3: Interview questions for child participants in 1st year post-primary

Transition from Primary to Secondary School in the Dublin 1 Area
An Inclusive Educational Approach

A member of the research team will be asking you the following questions during your individual or focus group interview.

We are interested in hearing what you have to say about your move from primary to secondary school. There is no right or wrong answer.

How do you feel about your new school now?
What things do you like / dislike about post-primary school?
What support or help did you get in the first few weeks of your new school?
Who helped you to settle in to your new school?
Is there anything that you found to be quite difficult or challenging?
Are you happy in this new school or would you have preferred to go somewhere else?
Is there anything you would have liked to have known before you moved to your new school?
How would you describe transition to 6th class children in your primary school?
If you were running this school, what three things would you do to help students settle in to their new school?
What advice would you give to 6th class children in your primary school

Figure_Apx 8.4: Interview questions for parents of 6th class children

Transition from Primary to Secondary School in the Dublin 1 Area
An Inclusive Educational Approach

A member of the research team will be asking you the following questions during your individual interview.

We are interested in hearing what you have to say about your child's forthcoming move from primary to secondary school. There is no right or wrong answer.

Has anyone in the school talked to you about your child moving from primary to post-primary school?
When did you receive information about transition from primary to secondary school?
What kind of information did you receive?
Have you talked to your child about the differences between primary and secondary school?
How do you think your child will manage this transition?
How does your child feel about moving to a different school?
Has your child participated in any transition activities in preparation?
Do you know which post-primary school they will be moving to?
Is the post-primary school that your child is moving to your preferred choice?
What kind of help do you think your child will need in their new school?
Have you discussed support needs with anyone prior to transition?
What vision do you have for your child's future education?
How do you think that they will achieve this, and who can help?
Do you have any worries or concerns about this transition?

Figure_Apx 8.5: Interview questions for educational professionals 6th class primary school

Transition from Primary to Secondary School in the Dublin 1 Area
An Inclusive Educational Approach

A member of the research team will be asking you the following questions during your individual or group interview.

We are interested in hearing what you have to say about the transition of children from primary to secondary school. There is no right or wrong answer.

Is there a dedicated transition programme or process in your school?
When is this activated and with whom?
What kind of information is provided to 6th class pupils and their parents?
What kind of activities do you provide to support the transition between schools?
How are students with additional support needs facilitated in the transition to post-primary school?
Are you engaged in developing a transition plan for them?
Who has responsibility for this?
What role do you have in supporting young people in transition?
What resources are required to enable successful transitions for all pupils?
Which agencies and / or destination institutions do you work with in relation to transition?
What do you think these entities bring to the table?
Do you think that they facilitate the transition process?
Do you work with parents to establish transition plans?
What does a successful transition look like?
What does an unsuccessful transition look like?
If you could do three things to improve transition, what would they be?

Figure_Apx 8.6: Interview questions for child participants in 6th class, primary school (pre-transition)

Transition from Primary to Secondary School in the Dublin 1 Area
An Inclusive Educational Approach

A member of the research team will be asking you the following questions during your group interview.

We are interested in hearing what you have to say about moving from primary to secondary school. This is sometimes called transition. There is no right or wrong answer.

Has anyone talked to you about moving from primary to post-primary school?
When did your parents or teacher start talking to you about moving from primary to secondary school?
What kind of things did they talk to you about?
Has anyone talked to you about the differences between primary and secondary school?
What do you think post-primary school will be like?
How do you feel about moving to a different school?
Have you done any transition activities in with your class teacher?
Do you know which post-primary school you will be going to?
Have you been / are you going on a school visit?
What things are you looking forward to?
Is there anything about changing schools that worries you?
What kind of help do you think you will need in your new school?
Is there anything that you would like to know known about your new school?
If you could ask a student in your new school three questions, what would they be?