

# Evidence Request Bank

## Development Project

## EVIDENCE RESPONSE

### Transition to primary school:

*What factors affect children's transition to primary school, and are there factors which mean that some children manage better than others? What can help in managing transitions, and what are the barriers for services and families?*

This report was produced as part of the Evidence Request Bank Development Project (2013-14). The request for evidence concerns the factors which affect children's transition to primary school. This report outlines key points, gives comments on the range and type of existing evidence, and reports on findings. Spotlight boxes offering examples of programmes, and talking points to stimulate discussion around the evidence, are included throughout. The appendices give search details, keywords used and references.

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<http://evidencerequestbank.org/>

*The Evidence Request Bank Development Project* is seeking to develop an evidence request service model for the children and families sector in Scotland. It produces and shares appraised summaries of evidence for the third and public sectors in direct response to practice needs, and supports practitioners to use evidence in practice.

This project builds on piloting work carried out as part of a Big Lottery Funded knowledge exchange project, About Families (2010-2013) <http://aboutfamilies.org.uk/> which was a collaboration between the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Capability Scotland and Parenting across Scotland.

*The Evidence Request Bank Development Project* is a partnership between the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, West Lothian Council, Parenting Across Scotland, Children in Scotland, and the Scottish Government. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, with additional funding from the Scottish Government and Parenting Across Scotland.



[westlothian.gov.uk](http://westlothian.gov.uk)



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## CONTENTS

1. About this report .....	1
2. Key terms and definitions .....	3
3. Key points.....	4
4. Comments on the research .....	5
4.1. Summary .....	5
4.2. Gaps in research .....	5
4.3. Research in Scotland .....	6
5. Report on findings.....	7
5.1. The transition to school .....	7
5.2. How do specific factors affect children’s school transition? .....	8
5.3. Effective transition programmes .....	12
a) Helping children become familiarized with their new situation .....	12
b) Informing parents about the school .....	14
c) Informing primary teachers about children’s development and prior experiences ...	15
5.4 What works? “top tips” from experts in the field .....	17
6. Conclusion.....	18
7. Appendices.....	19
7.1. About the Evidence Request Bank .....	19
7.2. How the research was carried out .....	19
7.3. Acknowledgements.....	20
7.4. References.....	21

## 1. ABOUT THIS REPORT

### **Why was this report requested?**

This Evidence Response was requested by West Lothian Council.

West Lothian Council has been working as part of the national Early Years Collaborative to use improvement science to help provide better outcomes for children in Scotland. Specifically, the Early Years Collaborative seeks to decrease Scotland's rate of still birth/infant mortality and increase the number of children who meet their developmental milestones across a number of ages up to eight years. This evidence review will provide a firm knowledge base to inform improvement work developed by practitioners in West Lothian. Starting with a planning session facilitated by the Evidence Request Bank, the evidence will inform a series of improvement tests around the transition from nursery to primary which make up one of the pioneer sites supported by the Scottish Government as part of the Early Years Collaborative. It is anticipated that the Evidence Response will allow West Lothian Council to take an informed approach to nursery to primary school transitions and make positive changes to practice, based on peer-reviewed evidence. West Lothian Council will present the results of this improvement work and the accompanying Evidence Response at the summer 2014 Early Years Collaborative Learning Session.

This report brings together international, academic, peer-reviewed research about children's transition to primary school. It has drawn on research from psychology, sociology and education studies.

The report seeks to address the question: *“What factors affect children's transition from nursery to primary school, and are there factors which mean that some children manage better than others? What can help in managing transitions, and what are the barriers for services and families?”*

It focuses on the following themes:

- What helps in managing transitions
- The role of attachment during the transition period
- The impact of the following factors on a family's ability to successfully manage the transition period and what mitigating actions can professionals take:
  - parental mental health
  - domestic and sexual abuse
  - poverty
  - problematic use of alcohol and other substances

The report begins with an overview of the evidence available, including research in the Scottish context. The first theme outlines children's experience of transition to primary school. The second theme explores the specific factors listed above in relation to transition, and finally the report presents three strands of effective transition programmes. 'What works' points are summarised at the end.

## 2. KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Formal schooling/ primary school/ preschool:** This report was drawn together from international research which used a range of terms to describe children’s prior-to-school settings (kindergarten, playschool, preschool) and school settings (elementary school, primary school). This report uses the terms “formal schooling” or “primary school” to indicate children’s first experiences of compulsory schooling, and “preschool” to indicate their prior-to-school settings.

**Guided participation:** A process of adults involving children in cultural activities; built on Vygotsky’s theory of scaffolding children’s learning. As children learn about a particular activity, adults gradually withdraw support—in this way the child’s role expands as he or she grows and develops.

**Priming events:** Activities that children participate in to help prepare them for anticipated or ongoing changes in their lives.

### 3. KEY POINTS

**Children's transition to formal schooling is an ongoing process of change.** During this time, children must adjust to changes in their physical environment, their social identity and social networks, and in the teaching and learning style they experience.

**It is difficult to isolate the effect of specific factors on children's adjustment to school.** Children's lives are complex and influenced by a range of factors. However, there is evidence that certain risk factors in children's lives (low socioeconomic status, for example) do affect children's school transition.

**Relationships are important.** Positive relationships with teachers can act as a protective factor when risk factors are present in children's lives.

**Effective transition programmes incorporate three strands involving children, parents and teachers:** helping children become familiarized with their new situation, informing parents about the school, and teachers being informed about children's development and past experiences.

**Teachers can use practical activities to help children become familiar with school.** These may be most effective when there are multiple opportunities for contact with the school before children start. Teachers can also support children by using simple strategies to foster social relationships in the class.

**Parents' concerns about their children's transition may not reflect children's experience.** However, improved communication between the school and parents can help alleviate anxiety.

**Collaborative working between preschool and primary school teachers may be difficult to achieve.** Opportunities for communication are often limited by constraints on primary teachers' time.

#### **What works in transition?**

- For children: Involving children in planning transition activities; offering a variety of formal and informal activities; participating in activities with older children during visits; teachers rather than heads meeting preschool children; providing resources to support collaborative play once school has begun.
- For parents: using a range of information formats; both formal and informal visits; information on both the school and what to expect during the transition period; providing class-lists to enable out-of-school contact.

## 4. COMMENTS ON THE RESEARCH

### 4.1. SUMMARY

**There is a large body of research on children's transition to formal schooling.** This report has incorporated research from three different fields: psychology, sociology, and education studies. By drawing on a range of literature, the report has looked at the issue through different "lenses".

**There are unavoidable variations in school systems and practices when looking at international research.** In particular, the age at which children start formal schooling and the provision of preschool varies between countries. This report incorporates research from 12 countries. Research that was judged to be too culturally specific has been excluded.

**Some attachment research looks at school transition, mainly linking children's attachment patterns with their social and emotional development.** However, the usefulness of attachment theory for practice is unclear, as most attachment theory deals specifically with maternal attachment in infancy, which is not something that schools can necessarily measure or change. Attachment theory is an extensive body of literature, and beyond the scope of this report.

**There is extensive psychological research on the impact of parental mental health, children's experiences of domestic and sexual abuse, poverty and problematic substance use on children's lives,** again mainly looking at how these conditions affect children's social and emotional development. However, there were few explicit connections to the school transition; inferences can be made between social-emotional development and adjustment to school.

### 4.2. GAPS IN RESEARCH

**There are inconsistencies about how children's adjustment to school is measured.** In particular, it is rare for quantitative studies to ask children about their experiences. Instead, parents and teachers assess children's adjustment to school using predefined, adult-created measures. As this report has also drawn on sociological literature, children's own accounts of their experience have been represented. However, it is important to note how rarely researchers ask children about their own experiences of starting school.

**There are few examples of collaborative working between preschools and primary schools.** Those studies that did describe good practice in this area were usually in the case of a child with a disability or identified additional support needs, or when preschools and primary school were participating in a specific short-term intervention programme.



### 4.3. RESEARCH IN SCOTLAND

**This report includes five Scottish studies**, four of which directly relate to children's school transition (the fifth is a study of inequality in Scotland). Three of these studies are qualitative (Cassidy, 2005; Ross-Watt, 2005; White et al, 2013) and one is quantitative (Bradshaw et al, 2012).

The international research used in this report has been included because it addressed themes that are broadly applicable. However there are specific circumstances in Scotland that are not addressed in the report, mainly regarding the impact of policy trends. For example:

**In Scotland, the *Curriculum for Excellence* aims to** smooth the transition, in terms of teaching and learning practices, as preschool and P1 are grouped together in the Early level. However, the literature search did not reveal any Scottish studies dealing with *CfE* and continuity in the school transition.

**Similarly, GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child)** seeks to promote joint working between agencies, potentially having an impact on how preschools and primary schools work together to support children during the school transition. Again, however, the literature search did not find any research specifically addressing the role/impact of GIRFEC.

## 5. REPORT ON FINDINGS

### 5.1. THE TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

**Children’s transition to formal schooling is an ongoing process of change.** Children recognize that starting school will bring changes, but do not necessarily see those changes as negative (Dockett and Perry, 2007). Some children will be used to experiencing change—for example, children in traveller families, or children of military personnel—while for others, starting school is the first major change in their lives (Fabian, 2007). Children with older siblings consistently show a more accurate understanding of what to expect when going to school (Fabian, 2000; Moska, 2010).

**Children’s early adjustment to school seems to be predictive of their long-term adjustment** (Margetts 2009). Professionals aim to support children to develop coping strategies for dealing with these changes, and to recognize that children’s adjustment to school may not be a linear process (Fabian, 2007).

**Children experience *physical, social and philosophical* changes between home or preschool settings and school** (Fabian, 2002, cited in Dockett and Perry, 2007). These changes include both “vertical transitions”—major changes between educational settings—and “horizontal transitions”—changes inside the school, between grades, between teachers (Johansson, 2007).

***Physically***, the school setting tends to be bigger than the preschool environment. Preschool children anticipate exploring new spaces (Moska, 2010), and primary school children report that negotiating these new spaces was an important part of their transition (Einarsdottir 2010). Children may eventually remember this process of exploring space as being an empowering experience (Loizou, 2011), but in the early days of the transition, children may feel worried, particularly about practical matters like how to buy lunch (Lee and Goh, 2012).

***Socially***, children experience a shift in their social identity and in their social networks. Those who have attended preschool will experience a change in status from being the oldest, most “expert” children to being the youngest, most inexperienced ones (Einarsdottir 2010). New primary school pupils look forward to

playing with current friends, while also feeling excited about meeting new people (Einarsdottir, 2010; Loizou, 2011; Maclean, 1996). However, children may also feel worried about the large number of new people to meet and remember (Moska, 2010). School may be the first place that children mix with older children (Fabian 2000).

***Philosophically***, there is generally a significant difference in the approach to teaching and learning between the preschool and primary school. This change may be the most jarring one that children experience when starting school (Yeboah 2002). Not surprisingly, children are likely to have complex feelings about this new way of learning. For example, they may feel empowered by the intellectual challenges of primary school, and proud that they now feel “older” (Loizou, 2011). At the same time, they may chafe at the constrained daily structure and rigidity of formal learning; children frequently report that they miss being able to choose what to do (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Einarsdottir, 2010, 2011; Huf, 2013). Children who do not fit the “mould” of structured learning may become disengaged from daily experiences (Bartholomew and Gustafsson, 1997; Huf 2013).

## 5.2. HOW DO SPECIFIC FACTORS AFFECT CHILDREN’S SCHOOL TRANSITION?

**Children’s lives are affected by many factors.** Bronfenbrenner’s “ecological model” of human development has been influential in developmental psychology (Tudge et al, 2011). The ecological model shows how different ‘systems’, or areas of life, interact to affect people’s life experiences. For example, a child does not directly experience a parent’s work environment, but that environment may affect how the parent behaves at home, and therefore the child’s relationship with that parent. Bronfenbrenner argued that human development should be understood as a process of interactions between the person, the various systems relevant to their lives, and the passage of time (Smith et al, 2011: 10).

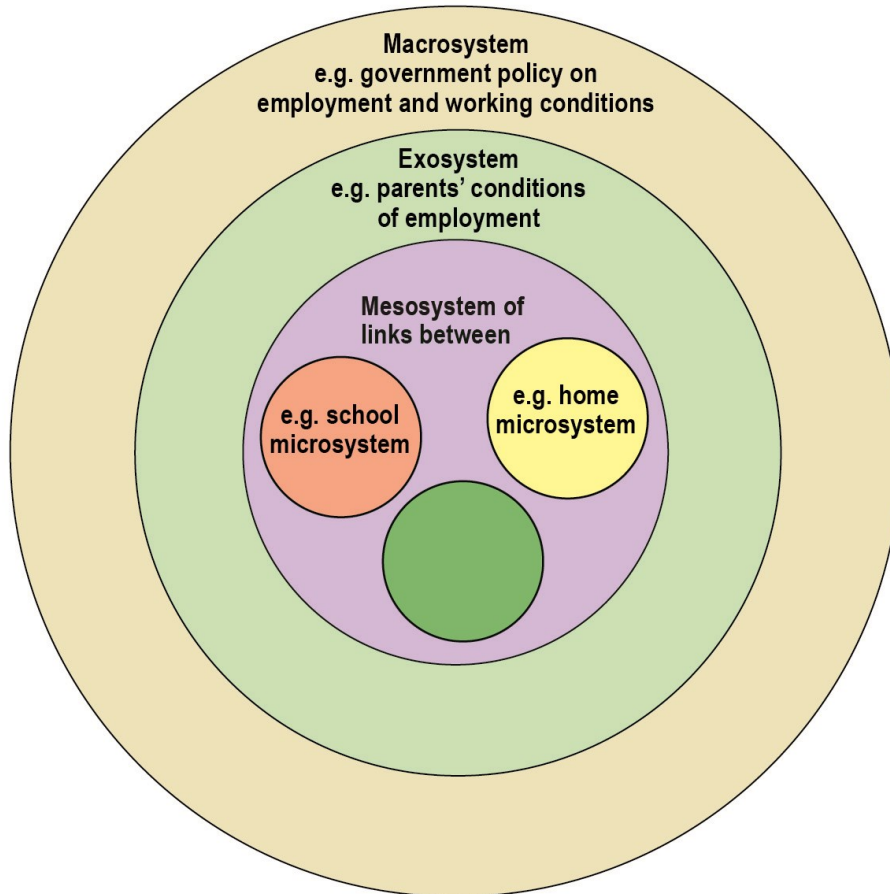


Figure 1. The Ecological model of human development.

The **microsystem** refers to what an individual directly experiences. The **mesosystem** refers to links between these settings. The **exosystem** refers to links between systems in which the child does not participate directly, but which still affect his or her life (for example, a parent’s workplace). Finally, the **macrosystem** refers to the general ideology of the society and culture the child is in (Smith et al 2011).

**A model of “school readiness” which places the onus of school adjustment on the individual child is too limited.**

The “Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition”, adapted from Bronfenbrenner’s original ecological model, suggests that multiple factors should be taken into account when considering children’s “readiness” for school.

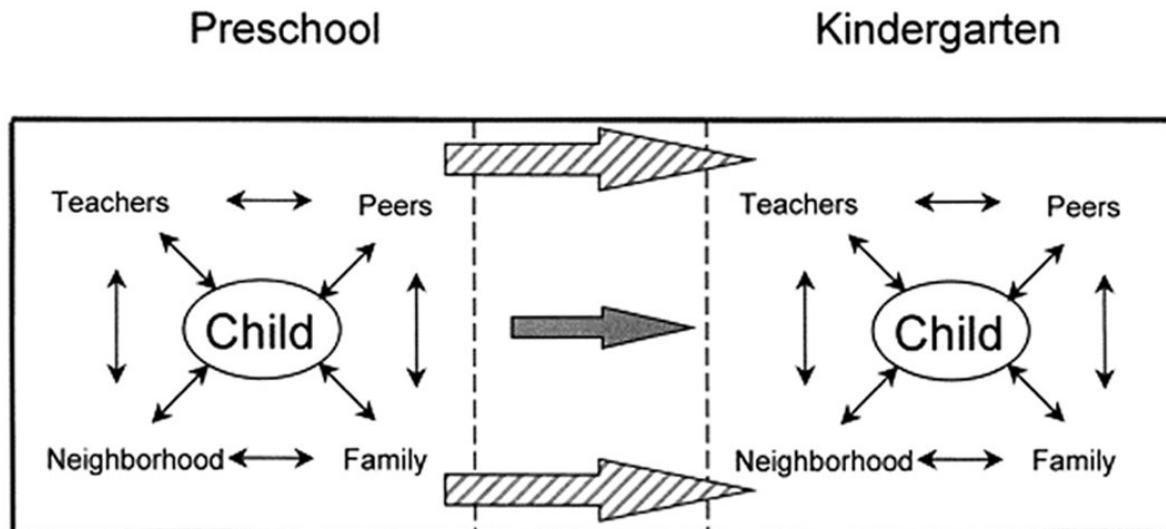


Figure 2. *The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition.*

The **bold arrow** represents the passage of time. The **large, striped arrows** represent two types of links: a) interactions between contexts that *change* between preschool and primary school (for example, conversations between preschool and primary teachers) and b) interactions between contexts that *remain stable* (for example, the same neighborhood, in the case of a child who has not moved house between preschool and primary school). The **small arrows** represent relationships between the child, peers, family, etc. (Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000).

The Ecological and Dynamic Model tells us that factors affecting children’s lives may change unpredictably at any time (Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta, 2000). It also suggests that the burden of being “ready” should not fall solely on the child and family; the school also needs to be ready for the child (Dockett and Perry 2007, 2009).

**Attachment may affect children’s lives, and therefore potentially affect their transition to primary school.** Attachment is a psychological concept, measured by babies’ reaction to being reunited with their caregiver (almost always their mother) after a brief period of separation in the presence of a stranger. According to attachment theory, children use their early experiences with caregivers to form “internal working models”, which they then use as templates for interactions with other people. Children with secure attachments to their mothers are expected to be self-confident; they anticipate that others will behave

sensitively and supportively. Children with insecure attachment patterns may expect people to be rejecting, inconsistent, or ambivalent (Meins, 2011).

**Attachment theory is a complex field, and many aspects are subject to current debate.** The stability of attachment patterns over time is questioned (Smith et al, 2011). There are also questions about how attachment patterns interact with other mediating factors, such as the child's living environment, and how much of children's emotional development can reliably be attributed to attachment (Pasco Fearon and Belsky, 2011). Some research suggests children's attachment patterns influence their social behaviour and peer relationships, therefore affecting their adjustment to school (Raikes et al 2013; Serdal 2010).

**A range of factors in children's lives may affect transition, which are not necessarily explored through attachment theory.** Children who do not speak the language of instruction, who did not attend preschool or who do not come from the dominant cultural group may have particular difficulty adjusting to school (Margetts, 2007). Boys may have more trouble adjusting to school (Bradshaw 2012; Margetts, 2002). Socioeconomic status (SES) is a predictor of developmental difficulty, which can affect children's transition to school; in Scotland, children aged 5-6 years whose SES was in the lowest quintile were 2-3 times more likely to have low scores in at least one developmental area (Marks Woolfson et al, 2013). Some evidence shows that socioeconomic status is a predictor of long-term difficulty in adjusting to school (Margetts, 2009).

**It is difficult to isolate the effects of one particular family circumstance.** Family stressors such as issues with parental mental health, domestic and sexual abuse, poverty, and problematic use of alcohol or other substances, often co-occur (Herrenkohl et al, 2008). These can be risk factors in children's lives (Morrison Gutman and Flouri, 2011).

**The school environment can potentially function as an "external protective factor" for children.** Positive child-teacher relationships are particularly effective in supporting "at-risk" children (Sabol and Pianta, 2012). Conversely, conflict between a child and teacher can potentially establish a pattern of poor relationships throughout a child's schooling (Myers and Pianta, 2008).

**Teachers may serve as an “ad-hoc” attachment figure for children by playing the role of “secure base”.** However, the teacher-child relationship lacks the exclusivity and durability of the attachment relationship as it is generally defined in the psychological literature. However, the younger the child, the more important the attachment “feature” of the teacher-child relationship may be. Teachers can foster positive relationships with children during their transition to school by being sensitive and responsive to their individual needs (Verschuren and Koomen, 2012).

### 5.3. EFFECTIVE TRANSITION PROGRAMMES

The three strands of an effective transition programme are: *helping children become familiarized with their new situation, informing parents about the new school, and teachers being informed about children’s development and previous experiences* (Margetts 2002). This section will address these in turn.

#### A) HELPING CHILDREN BECOME FAMILIARIZED WITH THEIR NEW SITUATION

**The concept of “guided participation” can help teachers sensitively initiate children into school life.** Guided participation is a theory developed from international research about how children’s role in their community expands as they themselves develop and grow, guided by key adults (Rogoff, 2003). It builds on Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory of development, which emphasized the interactive nature of children’s learning and the importance of adult “scaffolding”. Scaffolding is a process of adult guidance during problem-solving, which is gradually withdrawn as the child masters the task (Defeyter, 2011). Guided participation expands Vygotsky’s theory beyond problem-solving to include children’s learning about important cultural skills. In this view, children are not “empty vessels”, but instead take an active role in both learning about and shaping their culture and society (Corsaro, 2005).

**Teachers guiding children through practical activities can help children feel prepared to start school.** Many schools offer “priming events” to help familiarize children with the school environment (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000), such as school visits and tours and meeting the teacher or headteacher . These events may be most helpful when children

make multiple visits in small groups (Margetts, 2007), go along with friends who will be attending the same school (Fabian 2000), and when they are able to talk with children who are currently attending the school (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Dockett and Perry, 2011). Children may benefit from participating in a lesson or other typical activity at the primary school (Chan, 2010).

**Teachers can also use guided participation to help foster relationships between children once they have started school.** Both preschool and primary school children talk about the importance of friendships old and new when starting school (Einarsdottir 2010; Moska 2010). Starting school with friends helps children feel confident in the new environment (Fabian 2000). However, some children may not know anyone at their new school, and those children with friends at school may still need support while negotiating their new social networks (Peters 2010). Simple strategies can help foster social relationships between children. For example, using names will help children learn who is in their class and who the key adults in the school are (Fabian 2000). Paired activities can help children meet each other (Fabian 2000), but can also cause anxiety. For example, asking children to organize themselves into pairs can result in some children consistently not having a partner which can heighten their feeling of isolation (Peters, 2010). Older “buddies” can help incorporate new students into games at break-times, or sit with them during lunch (Peters, 2010).

**Spotlight: involving children in transition planning**

During the *Voices of Children* project, researchers in Australia ran a small investigation into how children’s suggestions could be incorporated into transitional activities. Four schools and ten preschools participated in this project. Preschoolers shared their questions about starting school, while primary school students were asked to reflect on what they thought new children should know.

Based on children’s input, teachers and primary school students made visits to the preschools, and vice versa, sharing information about the school based on preschoolers’ questions. Some primary school children made DVD’s, books, and Power Point presentations that they shared with the preschoolers.

**When asked to reflect on the experience, the teachers who participated noted the importance of involving children in shaping the transition process, as well as the opportunity for increased collaboration between settings.** (Perry & Dockett, 2011)



### Talking point

- How do we respond to children's voices in transition i.e. children's desire for more play in school?
- How do we support friendship groups?
- What can be done to address children's concerns with regards to school systems, e.g., behaviour policies?

## B) INFORMING PARENTS ABOUT THE SCHOOL

**Support offered to parents regarding their children's school transition is typically low-level and generic** (Wildenger and McIntyre, 2011). Commonly, parent evenings, a letter, and a large-scale open house are offered, sometimes after school has started (Pianta, no date). Parents report feeling like "outsiders" during the early days of school (Shields, 2009). Once school starts, parental involvement tends to be dictated by the school's agenda and limited to proscribed roles for parents; classroom volunteer or homework helper, for example. Not surprisingly, this model of parental involvement seems to work best for middle-class parents (Niesel and Griebel, 2007).

**It is unclear how directly parents' concerns reflect children's experience of adjusting to school** (Giallo et al, 2008; Wildenger and McIntyre 2011). Most parents have low-level concerns, typically about understanding teachers' academic and behavioural expectations of their children, and whether their children will meet them (Bradshaw 2012; McIntyre et al, 2007). However, for those who do have more intense concerns about how their children are coping, improving teacher-parent communication can help alleviate anxiety (Shields, 2009).

**Specific short-term interventions to support parents during school transition have had ambiguous results.** For example, two parenting groups were set up in Singapore to prepare children and parents for the transition to school. The programmes involved guided play for children and parents in a group setting as well as activities for parents at home, and parent-only support groups; however, the positive effects of the programmes had diffused by the end of the first year of primary school (Clarke, 2007). Similarly, an intervention with parents in Australia provided four group sessions focusing on both practical and child development issues related to the school transition. Parents reported satisfaction at being more involved

with their children’s transition to school, and believed they could more effectively support their children. However, there was not a significant difference in either parents’ or teachers’ reports of children’s actual school adjustment (Giallo et al 2010).

These interventions were perhaps not sustainable in terms of making a lasting change. More effective, perhaps, is the more complex, long-term work of building social connections between children, family, school and community (Kraft-Sayre and Pianta, 2000).

**Talking point**

- How can parents be more included in the transition process, with the time of the process being unlimited?

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C) INFORMING PRIMARY TEACHERS ABOUT CHILDREN’S DEVELOPMENT AND PRIOR EXPERIENCES

**Collaborative working with preschool teachers can help primary school teachers learn about the children in their class.** At the time of transition, preschool teachers/practitioners know quite a bit about the children formerly in their care (Dockett and Perry, 2001). In Scotland, for example, approximately 98% of eligible children are registered for their funded preschool place—although this does not indicate actual attendance at preschool (Scottish Government, 2013). Preschool teachers have shown willingness to assess children’s wellbeing and pass on information to primary schools—though they reported concerns about reports being used to “label” children (White et al 2013).

**Organizational barriers may prevent collaborative working.** Primary school teachers say that they value collaboration with preschools (Cassidy, 2005). However, they may not read written reports except in the case of children with disabilities or additional support needs (Yeboah 2003). Primary school teachers report a preference for informal, in-person communication rather than written reports (Cassidy, 2005). However, there are significant barriers to making these visits. Not all schools provide cover for teachers, meaning teachers have limited time to make visits, or must do so in their own time (Cassidy 2005). Class lists may be generated too late in the summer for teachers to have time for personal visits

(Pianta, no date). Where headteachers visit the nursery, children may assume the head is their teacher, and feel confused when this turns out not to be the case (Fabian 2000). In-person meetings with parents and preschool teachers are more likely to be supported by the school in the case of children with disabilities or children with identified additional support needs (Einarsdottir et al 2008; Le Paro et al 2000).

**Parents can be a helpful source of information about a child.** This can be particularly useful in the early days when teachers are getting to know the children in their class. However, parents report that they feel isolated from the school environment (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000; Shields, 2009).

**Spotlight: positive collaborative working**

A research project in Scotland investigated whether the rhetoric of inclusion in early years provision matched up with actual practice. “Heather”, a six year-old child with spina bifida, was followed through her transition from nursery to P1. Data was collected through observation of Heather’s daily experiences, interviews with key support staff and Heather’s mother, and attendance at review meetings.

The research found a high level of collaborative working between preschool and primary staff. For example, the primary school teacher attended formal review meetings, and also visited the nursery several times to meet Heather. Frequent meetings helped the various people involved with Heather’s care to identify what changes were necessary.

The researchers noted that, in Heather’s case, the child’s needs were not seen as an obstacle, but instead viewed as “challenges to be addressed positively and in a spirit of kindness and consideration”:

**“Underpinning this whole strategy has been effective management, strong in the belief that it is not the child who has to conform to a rigid school structure but that practice and the school itself must adapt to accommodate the many faceted, ever changing needs of the child.”**

(Ross-Watt, 2005:118)

**Talking point**

- When does dialogue on transition begin with children, parents and professionals?

#### 5.4 WHAT WORKS? “TOP TIPS” FROM EXPERTS IN THE FIELD

- Involving children in the planning of transitional activities: What do preschoolers want to know? What do primary school children think new students need to know? (Perry and Dockett, 2011)
- Using multiple forms of information for parents and children—for example, brochures, DVD’s, stories, and online material (Fabian, 2000; Perry and Dockett, 2011).
- Making the school and classroom accessible to parents for informal visits (Fabian 2000).
- Offering a variety of transition activities, both formal and informal (Margetts 2007).
- Allowing children to participate in a lesson or activity with older children during their visits to school (Chan 2010).
- Offering multiple opportunities for parents to learn not only about the school, but also what they can expect during the transition period (Chan 2010).
- Making class lists available so parents can arrange out-of-school contact between children (Peters, 2010).
- Teachers, rather than heads, meeting preschool children if possible (Fabian 2000).
- Supporting children’s collaborative play by providing simple resources during break-times (skipping ropes, hopscotch, etc) (Peters, 2010).

#### **Talking point**

- How do we create, and sustain a listening culture?
- Who holds the power in transition? How is it shared?

## 6. CONCLUSION

This report has reviewed international research on children's transition to formal schooling. It has drawn together research from psychology, sociology and education studies to provide a picture of the changes that children go through when starting primary school.

At the request of the organisation which asked us to carry out this review, the report has looked at how specific factors influence children's school transition: attachment, parental mental health, domestic and sexual abuse, poverty, and problematic substance abuse. Any links between transition and these areas have been highlighted. However, a full exploration of each area is beyond the scope of this report.

In terms of effectively managing transitions, the report has highlighted the complexity of the transition process, and the importance of positive relationships between children, parents, and schools during this time. It has provided some practical "top tips" as well as examining conceptual issues about how we understand children's lives.

Children's transition to primary school involves physical, social, and philosophical changes. Children's adjustment to these changes may not be a linear process, and can be influenced by a variety of factors in their lives both inside and outside of school. Effective transition programmes involve three strands: helping children become familiar with the school, informing parents about the school, and informing primary school teachers about children's development and prior experiences.

The report has drawn on empirical studies from 12 countries, as well as international writing on the primary school transition, including theoretical and critical analysis and international literature reviews. However, there is a lack of research from Scotland about how key Scottish policies are used in practice during the school transition—for example, *Curriculum for Excellence* or GIRFEC.

There are also few studies that describe successful examples of collaborative working between preschools and primary schools, except in the case of a child with a disability or additional support needs, or when schools are participating in specific intervention programmes. This is perhaps indicative of the organizational barriers to collaborative working.

The report incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research. A particular limitation of some of the research used in the report is that children's perspectives were not included. This was particularly an issue with quantitative studies, in which teachers and parents measured children's adjustment to school.

The report has drawn on peer-reviewed, academic literature. It provides a brief overview and is not intended to be a meta-analysis of studies in this area.

## 7. APPENDICES

### 7.1. ABOUT THE EVIDENCE REQUEST BANK

This brief evidence report has been produced by the Evidence Request Bank Development Project, which is seeking to develop a model for an evidence request service for the children and families sector in Scotland. The Evidence Request Bank produces and shares appraised summaries of evidence for the third and public sectors in direct response to practice needs, and supports practitioners to use evidence in practice.

### 7.2. HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CARRIED OUT

Existing evidence was gathered in the following way:

**Research standards:** To ensure high quality, evidence drawn on is either peer-reviewed<sup>1</sup>, publicly funded or produced by government bodies. Where relevant, grey literature<sup>2</sup> has been drawn on to inform the report and limitations in methodology and robustness of findings are highlighted. The draft report was peer-reviewed.

**Key sources searched:**

Search was carried out using University of Edinburgh Searcher function, which accesses:

The Library Catalogue (including e-books)	All library databases (including Web of Knowledge, Web of Science, Pub Med, PsycArticles, PsycInfo)
Full text e-journals	Conference proceedings
Theses	

Date range from 1980-present, though most that were included are from 2000's

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<sup>1</sup> Peer review is a process used to ensure the quality of academic work through a process of academics with similar expertise reviewing each others' work.

<sup>2</sup> Grey literature refers to documents that are not found through publishers or databases, such as company reports, reports published by not-for-profit organisations, and conference reports. Such literature is generally not peer reviewed.

**Types of evidence included:**

- Critical analysis
- Monographs and edited books
- Psychological textbooks
- Theoretical modelling
- Literature reviews
- Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, longitudinal, in-depth case studies)

**Key words:** Searches were conducted using combinations of:

- Nursery to primary transition
- Transition to primary school
- School transition
- Attachment and (above)
- Mental health and (above)
- Substance misuse/abuse and (above)
- Poverty/deprivation and (above)
- Child abuse/physical abuse/sexual abuse and (above)

**Places of publication:**

The report uses empirical studies from the countries listed below, with awareness of cultural variations. For example, an empirical study that specifically addressed harsh parenting practices in Hong Kong Chinese families (in preparation for the school transition) was not included, as harsh parenting is a particular cultural issue. However, a more general study of what parents in Hong Kong want from their school during the transition time was included:

- Australia (7)
- USA (7)
- Scotland (5)
- Iceland (3)
- England (2)
- New Zealand (1)
- Singapore (1)
- Turkey (1)
- China (Hong Kong) (1)
- Germany (1)
- Italy (1)
- Cyprus (1)

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