

“Kansas to Oz” –

**An exploration of post-primary teachers’ knowledge of
transition from primary to post-primary in Ireland**

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transition from primary to post-primary in Ireland**

Úna Murray

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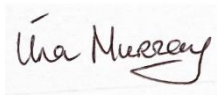


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Declaration

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Una Murray

March, 2024

Summary

This study focuses on the transition from primary to post-primary education. Whereas other studies have focussed on transition from the perspective of students, this study focusses on the role that the post-primary teacher plays in facilitating transition.

Research design and questions

The exploratory sequential mixed methods study was guided by two overarching research questions:

- What knowledge do post-primary teachers possess regarding transition, including the process, pedagogical approaches, practices, and curriculum?
- How is the policy landscape in Ireland structured to enhance teachers' capabilities in facilitating the transition of students from primary to post-primary education?

To address these questions, the study conducted exploratory semi-structured interviews with 26 post-primary students and 30 teachers, principals, and deputy principals. These interviews were thematically analysed. The interviews then informed the development of a national survey to gain further insights into post-primary teacher participants' perspectives on transition. The survey yielded 475 responses. Quantitative data and policy documents were analysed to uncover new key findings about teachers' perceptions and practices around transition.

Findings

The present research fills notable gaps in existing studies. Previous research had not explored participants' conceptualisation of transition, the sources of teachers' knowledge of transition, or their familiarity with primary school curriculum, pedagogies and practices. This study finds that there is a disconnect between teachers' conceptualisation of transition as a continuous process and their preference for a 'fresh start' methodology in the classroom, which sees transition as a 'once-off event'. The study also reveals that teachers' comprehension of the transition process is influenced by their roles within schools, with those in specific leadership positions exhibiting greater familiarity compared to subject teachers. Furthermore, teachers' knowledge of primary education is linked to their age, often sourced from personal experiences such as their own children, family, friends, and recollections of their own primary school experiences.

The research finds that while educational documents have increasingly factored in the progression of students over the transition period, the responsibility for effective transition largely rests with individual schools. This reliance on schools without clear transition guidelines has resulted in varied transition practices.

In terms of information transfer between schools, the effectiveness of the Education Passport for sharing student information faces dissemination challenges. Improving communication between primary and post-primary schools is essential. The study also

finds that the integration of wellbeing into schools offers benefits but also imposes constraints on teachers.

This study adopted a pragmatic approach rooted in the understanding of knowledge as socially constructed. The research used Galton et al.'s (1999) 'Five Bridges of Transfer' as the conceptual framework. However, the findings of the study indicated a disparity between the participants' conceptualisation of transition as a process and the reality of a start from scratch approach in the post-primary subject classroom. Therefore, a new Action model for Transition called the 'Three Ts of Transition' emerged from this study. This new action model views transition as a process and highlights three aspects: Transition of Learning (ToL), Transition for Learning (TfL) and Transition as Learning (TaL). The model aims not only to bridge the gap between frameworks and theories, but also to provide a practical solution for educating teachers about transition and anchoring change in practice through a more reflective lens.

Recommendations

The study makes a number of practical recommendations to improve the transition experience for both students and teachers within the constraints of time and resources. Firstly, there is a need to enhance the format and dissemination of the Education Passport, ensuring that essential student information is effectively shared between schools and is accessible to subject teachers. Secondly, there is a need to strengthen the continuity of curriculum and pedagogy to create a more seamless educational journey for students. Thirdly, there is a need to promote cross-sector professional development opportunities to equip educators with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate this critical transition period. Fourthly, there is a need to facilitate efficient communication between primary and post-primary schools by developing a structured transition communication model. Lastly, there is a need to implement a well-defined transition framework for action, such as the 'Three Ts of Transition' framework advanced in this study. Together these measures will offer a structured and organised insight into this significant phase in a student's educational journey.

In conclusion, this mixed methods study offers a comprehensive exploration of the landscape of primary to post-primary transition, providing valuable insights into post-primary teachers' knowledge, practices, and perspectives. Because of the limited number of comparable studies on transition and teachers (outside of specific subject areas) within the Irish educational research context, this research makes a valuable contribution in these areas. The emergence of the 'Three Ts of Transition' model serves as a pragmatic solution to overcome shortcomings found in knowledge and practice about transition. The recommendations arising from this study strive to reconcile theoretical frameworks with real-world practices, ultimately advancing our understanding of educational transition and offering a pathway to improved student experiences and performances.

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Table of Contents

“Kansas to Oz” –.....	1
An exploration of post-primary teachers’ knowledge of transition from primary to post-primary in Ireland	1
“Kansas to Oz” –.....	2
An exploration of post-primary teachers’ knowledge of transition from primary to post-primary in Ireland	2
Declaration	i
Summary	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents	v
Abbreviations and Glossary	xi
List of Figures	xiii
List of Tables	xv
1 Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Beginnings of educational transition.....	1
1.3 Aim of study.....	5
1.4 Thesis structure	6
1.5 The research and me.....	8
1.6 The conceptual framework.....	9
1.7 Conclusion	10
2 Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.1.1 Key studies.....	13
2.2 Section 1: Definitions, theories, and frameworks	16
2.2.1 Overview	16
2.2.2 Terminology.....	17
2.2.3 Definitions.....	18
2.2.4 Importance of an agreed understanding	22
2.2.5 Conceptual frameworks and theories	24
2.2.6 Most frequently used theories and frameworks	26
2.2.7 ‘Five Bridges of Transfer’	32
2.2.8 Interactions between frameworks.....	36
2.2.9 Section 1 Summary	40
2.3 Section 2: Navigating transition.....	41
2.3.1 Overview	41
2.3.2 Overall student experience	41
2.3.3 Impact of transition experience	46

2.3.4	Factors associated with students' experiences of transition	48
2.3.5	Section 2 Summary	55
2.4	Section 3: Facilitating a smooth transition: school and teacher practices	55
2.4.1	Overview	55
2.4.2	Role of the teacher.....	56
2.4.3	Administering the transition	57
2.4.4	Social, emotional, and academic supports.....	62
2.4.5	Curriculum and pedagogy	66
2.4.6	Section 3 Summary	69
2.5	Section 4: Teachers and transition.....	69
2.5.1	Overview	69
2.5.2	Transition and teachers' concerns	70
2.5.3	Teachers' perspectives on pedagogy and learning	74
2.5.4	Disparities in policy and practice	79
2.5.5	Influence and sources of teacher knowledge on transition.....	87
2.5.6	Section 4 Summary	91
2.6	Section 5: Research gap and rationale.....	91
2.6.1	Overview	91
2.6.2	The perspective of teachers	92
2.6.3	Research gap in Irish context	93
2.6.4	Research and the concept of transition.....	94
2.6.5	Relevance for professional development.....	95
2.6.6	Research and international relevance	96
2.6.7	Section 5 Summary	97
2.7	Conclusion.....	97
3	Chapter Three: Methodology	99
3.1	Introduction	99
3.2	Section 1: Ontology, epistemology, and methodology.....	100
3.2.1	Research questions and approach.....	100
3.2.2	Research overview	101
3.2.3	Worldview: Researcher as a pragmatist	102
3.2.4	Joint worldviews: Pragmatism and constructivism in conversation.....	105
3.2.5	Paradigm: Social constructivism	106
3.2.6	Summary	108
3.3	Section 2: Methodological approach.....	108
3.3.1	Overview	108
3.3.2	Mixed methods research (MMR)	109
3.3.3	Rationale for choice of MMR.....	110

3.3.4	Exploratory sequential mixed methods	112
3.3.5	Review of methodologies in transition research	114
3.3.6	Other possible research designs	116
3.3.7	Sampling	118
3.3.8	Methods.....	119
3.3.9	Reliability and validity	124
3.3.10	Ethics.....	131
3.3.11	Section 2 Summary	133
3.4	Section 3: This study	134
3.4.1	Overview	134
3.4.2	Phase 1: Literature review and documentary gathering	135
3.4.3	Phase 2: Qualitative data generation (interviews).....	138
3.4.4	Qualitative methods: Semi-structured interviews	144
3.4.5	Qualitative data analysis	148
3.5	Phase 3: Quantitative data generation (survey).....	150
3.5.1	Quantitative methods: Survey	150
3.5.2	Quantitative data analysis	153
3.5.3	Quantitative sampling	153
3.5.4	Sample profile	155
3.6	Limitations	163
3.7	Conclusion	166
4	Chapter Four: Transition documentary analysis findings	167
4.1	Introduction	167
4.2	Section 1: 'Transition' in curricula documents	169
4.2.1	Transition and developments in primary education	169
4.2.2	Transition in post-primary education	181
4.2.3	Responsibility for transition.....	184
4.3	Section 2: Transition within the continuum of education	188
4.3.1	Céim to Droichead to Cosán (Step, bridge, path).....	188
4.3.2	The continuum of Education and CPD	193
4.3.3	Policies	197
4.4	Conclusion	199
5	Chapter Five: Quantitative and qualitative findings	201
5.1	Introduction	201
5.2	Section 1: Qualitative findings (Student interviews, (n=26)).....	202
5.2.1	Bridge 1: Administrative.....	202
5.2.2	Bridge 2: Social & emotional.....	204
5.2.3	Bridge 3: Curriculum	209

5.2.4	Bridge 4: Pedagogy	215
5.2.5	Bridge 5: Managing learning.....	220
5.3	Section 2: Qualitative findings (Teachers & management interviews, n=30).....	224
5.3.1	Bridge 1: Administrative	225
5.3.2	Bridge 2: Social & emotional	234
5.3.3	Bridge 3: Curriculum.....	238
5.3.4	Bridge 4: Pedagogy	244
5.3.5	Bridge 5: Managing learning.....	248
5.3.6	Building bridges	251
5.4	Comparative summary Phase 2	256
5.5	Exploratory sequential design: Implications for QUANT.....	259
5.6	Section 3: Quantitative findings	262
5.6.1	Pre-service and in-service presentation of findings.....	262
5.6.2	Bridge 1: The Administrative bridge.....	263
5.6.3	Bridge 2: Social and emotional	275
5.6.4	Bridge 3: Curriculum.....	282
5.6.5	Bridge 4: Pedagogy	289
5.6.6	Bridge 5: Managing learning.....	298
5.6.7	Transition.....	301
5.7	Overall summary of Phase 3	310
6	Chapter Six: Discussion	314
6.1	Introduction	314
6.2	Section 1: Teachers' knowledge and understanding of transition	315
6.3	Section 2: Information and communication	319
6.3.1	Impact of policy.....	325
6.4	Section 3: Teachers and social, emotional & academic supports.....	326
6.4.1	Induction.....	327
6.4.2	Managing learning.....	328
6.5	Section 4: Continuity in curriculum and pedagogy	331
6.5.1	Knowledge of curriculum continuity.....	331
6.5.2	Pedagogy	333
6.6	Section 5: Knowledge on transition	336
6.6.1	Acquiring professional knowledge.....	336
6.6.2	Professional development.....	339
6.6.3	Collaboration as effective knowledge	342
6.6.4	Responsibility	343
6.7	Section 6 Implications on policy and practice.....	346
6.7.1	Recognition of the importance of transition	347

6.7.2	Shared communication - the Educational Passport (EP).....	348
6.7.3	Other professionals - ITE programmes	355
6.7.4	Variety of experiences.....	356
6.8	Section 7 Towards a new framework for action	357
6.8.1	‘Three Ts of Transition’	360
6.8.2	Conclusion	368
7	Chapter Seven: Conclusion	370
7.1	Introduction	370
7.2	Originality	374
7.3	Recommendations for policy and practice	374
7.4	Research process: From limitations to opportunities	377
7.5	Navigating my journey.....	379
7.6	Closing insights.....	379
8	References	381
9	Appendices.....	406
9.1	Appendix: Chapter 2	406
	Appendix 2.1 Breakdown of European countries according to age of transition.....	406
	Appendix 2.2 Levels of discourse in scientific research.....	406
	Appendix 2.3 Note on additional frameworks	407
9.2	Appendix: Chapter 3	408
	Appendix 3.1 Overview of design approaches.....	408
	Appendix 3.2 Overview of research timeline.....	409
	Appendix 3.3 Notes to avoid bias during interviews	409
	Appendix 3.4 Overview of methodologies in Irish transition studies	410
	Appendix 3.5 Ethics Information and Consent forms.....	411
	Appendix 3.6 Interview schedules	413
	Appendix 3.7 Phase 2 Overview of student participant profiles.....	415
	Appendix 3.8 Phase 2 Overview of teachers and management sample	419
	Appendix 3.9 Phase 2 Coding.....	420
	Appendix 3.10 Phase 3 Survey - profile of survey participants.....	425
	Appendix 3.11 Phase 3 Survey overview of subject breakdown	427
9.3	Appendix: Chapter 4	429
	Appendix 4.1 List of documents and agencies.....	429
	Appendix 4.2 Sample of collation of references within documents.....	430
	Appendix 4.3 Frequency of terms in three documents.....	431
	Appendix 4.4 PME providers, consecutive programmes	431
	Appendix 4.5 Supports available from NCSE for professionals.....	432
9.4	Appendix: Chapter 5	433
	Appendix 5.0 Pre-service and in-service breakdown of data.....	433

Appendix 5.1 Bridge 1: Examples of comments	436
Appendix 5.2 Bridge 2: Examples of comments	437
Appendix 5.3 Bridge 3: Impact of transition on subject preference.....	439
Appendix 5.4 Student perceptions of subject coverage in primary school.....	441
Appendix 5.5 Students' perceptions of teachers in the classroom	442
Appendix 5.6: Students' perceptions of who is responsible.....	443
Appendix 5.7 Bridge 5: Examples of comments	445
Appendix 5.8 Students' advice for teachers of First years	446
Appendix 5.9 Characteristics of teachers with less experience	447
Appendix 5.10 Phase 2: Bridge 1: Sample comments: Teachers & management.....	448
Appendix 5.11 Perception of a curricular gap.....	450
Appendix 5.12 Phase 2 Examples of comments	453
Appendix 5.13 Overview of participants' source of knowledge	454
Appendix 5.14 Perception of pedagogy methods.....	455
Appendix 5.15 Comments on fresh start approach.....	456
Appendix 5.16 Phase 1 Comparative summary	459
Appendix 5.17 Overview of responses to Fresh start approach by subject.....	461
Appendix 5.18 Overview of agreed departmental approach by subject.....	462
Appendix 5.19 Overview of responses to revision by teaching subject.....	462
Appendix 5.20 Overview of CPD by subject of respondents.....	463
Appendix 5.21 Overview of preferred CPD by respondents by teaching subject	464
Appendix 5.22 Overview of additional comments on definitions.....	465

Abbreviations and Glossary

AEN	Additional Education Needs
AO	Avoidance Orientation
B.Ed.	Bachelor of Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CS	Case Study
CSL	Children's School Lives
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
D.Ed.	Doctorate in Education
DEEPEN	Droichead: Exploring and Eliciting Perspectives and Narratives
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ERC	Education Research Centre
ERIC	Education Resources Information Centre (an online digital library of educational research and information)
EP	Education Passport
ER	External Regulation
ESCI	Education Support Centres Ireland
ESRI	The Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GUI	Growing Up in Ireland
HCSL	Home Community School Liaison
H.Dip. Ed.	Higher Diploma in Education
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
JCT	Junior Cycle for Teachers
MMR	Mixed Methods Research
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NIPT	National Induction Programme for Teachers
NPC	National Parents Council
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
ORACLE	Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation
PE	Physical Education
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PME	Professional Master in Education
PP	Post-primary
RiRS	Research in Residence Scheme
SEN	Special Education Needs
SET	Special Education Team
SLR	Systematic Literature Review
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
SPITE	School Placement in Initial Teacher Education
TC	The Teaching Council

Glossary

Céim:	The Irish word for ‘step’. Here it refers to the Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education providers.
Continuum of Education:	This refers to the formal and informal learning in which teachers engage as life-long learners during their teaching career. In Ireland, it encompasses initial teacher education (Céim), Droichead (the integrated professional induction framework), and Cosán (teachers’ learning - DEEPEN report, (2021)).
Curriculum:	The term ‘curriculum’ is used in this study to refer to the content, structure and processes of teaching and learning, which the school provides in accordance with its educational objectives and value. ‘Pedagogy’ refers to the medium by which this curriculum is enacted in the classroom (Dolan, 2011).
Cosán:	The Irish word for ‘pathway’. Here it refers to the name given to the national document for teachers’ professional development.
Droichead:	The Irish word for ‘bridge’. Here it refers to the programme for newly qualified teachers that is completed directly after qualification.
National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT):	A State-funded service that coordinates the provision of a multi-faceted induction programme at primary and post-primary level.
Post-primary:	The terms ‘post-primary’ and ‘secondary’ both refer to second-level education. The term ‘post-primary’ will be used throughout this study unless it occurs within a direct quotation.
Primary:	This noun is used to describe first level education and is the equivalent of Junior school in the US.
Student:	The noun ‘student’ is used instead of ‘pupil’ to refer to children in primary and post-primary schools unless it occurs within a direct quotation.

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Categorisation of most used theories and frameworks.	25
Figure 2.2 Model for primary to post-primary transition.	29
Figure 2.3 Illustration of the Twelve Pillars of Transitions (Jindal-Snape, 2023).	31
Figure 2.4 Overview of theories/frameworks aligned with the Five Bridges of Transfer.	37
Figure 2.5 XII Pillars of Transitions comparison. (Jindal-Snape, 2023).	38
Figure 2.6 Realms of the teacher's persona (Davis, 2011).	89
Figure 3.1 Representation of the philosophical and methodological foundations.	102
Figure 3.2 Word art collated by researcher (Murray, 2019).	103
Figure 3.3 Similarities and differences in worldviews.	105
Figure 3.4 Core methodological principles of this study and pragmatism.	108
Figure 3.5 Overview of research questions and methods.	109
Figure 3.6 Mixed Methods Research: Explanatory and exploratory sequential.	113
Figure 3.7 Overview of sampling strategy.	119
Figure 3.8 Overview of research design.	120
Figure 3.9 Overview of ethical procedures.	132
Figure 3.10 Overview of research phase. participants and sample sizes.	134
Figure 3.11 Student participant sampling overview.	138
Figure 3.12 Student participant sampling overview.	139
Figure 3.13 Representation of sampling methods for Phase 2.	140
Figure 3.14 Profile of Stage 2 teacher and management participants by years of experience. .	142
Figure 3.15 Profile of Stage 2 participants by teaching subjects.	144
Figure 3.16 A priori themes.	149
Figure 3.17 Profile of survey respondents by age.	156
Figure 3.18 Profile of survey respondents by teaching qualification.	157
Figure 3.19 Profile of survey respondents by years of experience.	157
Figure 3.20 Profile of survey respondents by teaching subject categories.	158
Figure 3.21 Profile of survey respondents by specific teaching subjects.	159
Figure 3.22 Profile of survey respondents by role in school.	159
Figure 3.23 Location and number of feeder schools.	161
Figure 3.24 Respondents by location and school type.	161
Figure 4.1 Overview of timeline of changes in relation to transition.	169
Figure 4.2 Document analysis 1 Frequency of key words within five documents.	173
Figure 4.3 6th Class Report Card (NCCA, 2020)	178
Figure 5.1 Students' favourite subjects in primary and in post-primary.	210
Figure 5.2 Awareness of the EP by teacher and management participants.	225
Figure 5.3 Participants' usage of the EP.	228
Figure 5.4 Awareness of EP according to subjects taught.	264
Figure 5.5 Overview of knowledge of EP and respondents' roles in schools.	265
Figure 5.6 Overview of knowledge of awareness of and access to entrance information.	269
Figure 5.7 Overall satisfaction of respondents' knowledge of incoming students.	271

Figure 5.8 Types of communication between primary and post-primary schools/teachers.	273
Figure 5.9 Activities reported as being part of induction.	278
Figure 5.10 Knowledge of school policies on transition.	279
Figure 5.11 Responses regarding overall knowledge of aspects of primary school.	283
Figure 5.12 Responses to curriculum as two parallel pathways by subjects.	285
Figure 5.13 Breakdown by % of those who agreed that students were prepared by subject.	288
Figure 5.14 Overview of familiarity with aspects of primary school.	290
Figure 5.15 Overview of responses to use of prior learning.	291
Figure 5.16 Respondents and their sources of knowledge about primary school.	295
Figure 5.17 Overview of responses to ‘Primary and post-primary teachers are separate tribes’.	297
Figure 5.18 Perceptions of First years’ ability to manage themselves and their learning.	299
Figure 5.19 Overview of responses categorised by definition of transition.	301
Figure 5.20 Respondents and their source of information on the topic of transition.	303
Figure 5.21 Overview of areas where CPD is preferred.	306
Figure 5.22 Overview of barriers to supporting transition.	308
Figure 6.1 (a) Assessment levels and (b) Key Skills, Primary Framework, (DES, 2023)	349
Figure 6.2 Extract from EP Report Card for 6th Class (NCCA, 2020).	351
Figure 6.3 Example of an Education Passport template for teachers.	354
Figure 6.4 Comparison of proposed model and the five bridges framework.	361
Figure 6.5 Transition of Learning.	363
Figure 6.6 Transition for Learning.	366
Figure 6.7 Transition as Learning.	367

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Overview of timescale of the CSL study.	16
Table 2.2 Overview of Five Bridges of Transfer.	34
Table 2.3 Influences on teachers, Maskit (2011).	90
Table 3.1 Cross-reference of research questions to Blaikie, 2009; 2013.	100
Table 3.2 Worldview statements.	104
Table 3.3 Six principles of constructivist learning (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003).	107
Table 3.4 Realms of MMR (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007).	110
Table 3.5 Purposes of MMR. (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013).	112
Table 3.6 Overview of research designs in studies on transition.	115
Table 3.7 Overview of Research approaches in studies on transition.	115
Table 3.8 Overview of Research designs in studies on teachers and transition.	116
Table 3.9 Case study compared to aims of this researcher's study.	118
Table 3.10 Five categories of generalisation (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).	125
Table 3.11 Four types of triangulation (based on Denzin, 2006).	128
Table 3.12 Properties of an Expert Group.	130
Table 3.13 Inclusion and exclusion criteria.	136
Table 3.14 Inclusion and exclusion criteria for policy document analysis.	138
Table 3.15 Overview of student participants and stage of education.	141
Table 3.16 Overview of semi-structured interviews.	145
Table 3.17 Format of Interviews, Finch et al.'s (2003).	146
Table 3.18 Six steps for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	148
Table 3.19 Overview of quantitative survey.	151
Table 3.20 Overview of recorded survey responses.	155
Table 4.1 Key priorities and skills of primary and Junior Cycle.	183
Table 4.2 Overview of ESCI professional development sessions. (Murray, 15/12/22)	195
Table 5.1 Students' perceptions of engagement with subjects in primary school.	212
Table 5.2 Students' perceptions of differences in curriculum continuity.	213
Table 5.3 Student perceptions of continuity in teaching practices.	216
Table 5.4 Overview of reasons for use/non-use of EP.	229
Table 5.5 Overview of communication between primary and post-primary schools.	233
Table 5.6 Overview of participants' perceptions of students and JC Key Skills.	249
Table 5.7 Frequency breakdown of assumptions & expectations.	252
Table 5.8 Findings of satisfaction with information provided.	271
Table 5.9 Overview of communications between primary and post-primary schools.	274
Table 5.10 Overview of supports from additional comments.	280
Table 5.11 Summary of knowledge of primary schools.	284
Table 5.12 Overview of age and statistical significance.	296
Table 5.13 Sources of CPD on transition in DEIS/Non-DEIS schools.	305
Table 5.14 Overview of respondents' perceptions of the relevance of topic of transition.	309
Table 6.1 The Three Ts of Transition.	360

1 Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Transitions are intrinsic to all facets of existence and have acquired attention from scholars from various disciplines such as sociology, psychology, health and education. This study is exclusively focussed on transitions within the educational landscape, specifically, on post-primary teachers and their understanding of transition from primary to post-primary education.

This chapter presents a personal justification for the topic selection and outlines the objectives and structure of this thesis. But before we turn to these topics, it is important to contextualise educational transition within the Irish educational landscape.

1.2 Beginnings of educational transition

Formal education in Ireland is compulsory up to the age of 16. While two years of pre-schooling are available, they remain optional rather than mandatory. Within this educational framework, Ireland's formal education system encompasses three significant transitional phases. The initial transition into formal schooling occurs from either home or preschool to primary school at the age of four or five. Subsequently, students spend approximately eight years in primary school, with a dedicated teacher guiding them through each school year. The second transition takes place when students move from primary to post-primary education at the age of 12 or 13. This transition involves a considerable shift to larger and new school environments, exposure to multiple teachers, the introduction of new rules and regulations, a continuation of core subjects like English, Irish and Maths, as well as a specialised focus on new subjects. The third significant transition occurs as students in the 16 to 19 age brackets move from post-primary school

to either the workforce, apprenticeships, or third-level education. Unlike the preceding stages, this transition is optional and based on personal choice.

According to official statistical data the total enrolment of students in post-primary education in 2020 was recorded as 362,899 (reported by Lawlor & Burke, 2020). Specifically, it was anticipated that around 71,890 students would join the first year of post-primary school in 2020. As there were 70,305 pupils enrolled in 6th class in 2019/2020 (Department of Education (DES), 2020), this points to a transition rate of nearly 100% from primary to post-primary education in Ireland¹. This is a significant departure from the situation in 1967, when the number of students in post-primary education was merely 148,000, underscoring the substantial growth and development of post-primary education in Ireland over the past 50 years.

The transition from primary to post-primary education did not become of interest nationally until the 1960s. There had been no necessity, as access to second level education in Ireland was limited to those with means or scholarships (O'Brien, 2019; O'Donoghue, 2016) unlike many European countries that offered free post-primary education at that time. Minister for Education Donogh O'Malley's announcement of free second-level education on September 10, 1966, marked a pivotal shift. This change was prompted by the OECD report on education commissioned by the government in 1965, which emphasised education's role in addressing manpower needs. This policy shift was influenced by the theory of human capital formation, linking education investment to economic development (Loxley, Seery & Walsh, 2014).

¹ These findings are based on calculations performed by this researcher using figures from DES, (2020).

Primary curriculum reform was introduced in 1971 and primary education moved towards a more child-centred curriculum. Meanwhile, the post-primary system remained subject-centred. The disparity raised concerns about primary-to-post-primary transition. In 1978, a committee, chaired by Tarlach Ó Raifeartaigh, examined issues relating to the shift from this child-centred education in the primary system to subject-centred education at post-primary level. This committee's report advocated for curriculum changes, teacher training, and communication improvements between primary and post-primary schools (DES, 1982). The report is early evidence of the growing awareness and understanding of the importance of the transition from primary to post-primary within an Irish context, especially in relation to continuity in curriculum and pedagogy.

During the 1980s and 1990s, other types of educational transitions took the spotlight away from primary to post-primary transitions. Ireland faced significant economic difficulties, prompting a heightened focus on education's role in preparing individuals for the workforce. The *Programme for Action in Education* (Government of Ireland, 1984) was a notable policy that acknowledged education's pivotal role in workforce development. The 1990s saw the introduction of the 'Transition Year,' serving as a link between the Junior Certificate and Senior Cycle, and further educational reforms in the 1990s continued to prioritise transitions beyond school. Initiatives like the 'Leaving Certificate Applied' (LCA) and 'Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme' (LCVP) aimed to facilitate the shift to adult working life (Walsh, 2011). However, in primary to post-primary transition, challenges persisted. These included inadequate communication between primary and post-primary schools, issues of accessibility, and discrepancies in curricula (DES, 1995).

Historical divisions

A significant obstacle that has hindered educational progress, particularly concerning transitional matters in Ireland is historical separation between the primary and post-primary education sectors. These sectors have evolved independently in terms of training, policies, and practices. This division is further manifested through distinct teacher unions for each sector.

Traditionally, the education of primary teachers took place in specific institutions like Carysfort College, St. Patrick's Teacher Training College and Coláiste Mhuire, Marino in Dublin, and Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, among others. Some of these institutions have now closed (Carysfort College in 1988), while others have amalgamated with larger universities – Froebel has become a part of Maynooth University and St. Patrick's Drumcondra has merged with Dublin City University. However, teaching at post-primary level has historically required an additional third-level qualification on top of a level 8 degree, primarily associated with universities. This requirement was stepped up in 2014 when the qualification pathway for teaching at post-primary shifted from a one-year higher diploma postgraduate qualification to a more extensive two-year (Level 9) programme. There has also been an increase in the provision of undergraduate degrees (Level 8) provided by universities specifically for post-primary teaching.

However, while the historical division of primary and post-primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE) institutions has begun to narrow, the school system itself has been slower to embrace continuity between primary to post-primary, and it remains an area that requires attention. While national longitudinal studies, such as Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) and Children's School Lives (CSL) provide insights from students on the transition from primary to post-primary, little attention has been paid to teachers, their cross-

sectoral knowledge and their role in transition. In the light of the substantial transformations in curricula and pedagogical approaches in both primary and post-primary and in ITE that have occurred over the past decade, this lack of attention is a gap that needs to be addressed.

Educational transitions

It must be acknowledged that there are many educational transitions points in life. They occur from pre-school to post-primary, from class to class in primary, from year to year and from Junior to Senior Cycle in post-primary, and indeed from second to third level education. In this regard, many of the advantages and challenges may reoccur. While the transition year programme eases the Junior to Senior Cycle transition for many students, and the move to further education is a choice rather than a requirement, the move to post-primary is not a choice. Primary to post-primary transition not only entails the physical transition of environment from a primary to a post-primary school, but it also coincides with a time for students of both physical and emotional change, leading Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan (1996) to describe the transition from primary to post-primary as “a triple transition” (p.7).

1.3 Aim of study

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper insight into the teachers’ role in, and understanding of, the transition process. The study is centred on two primary research questions:

- **Research question 1:** What knowledge do post-primary teachers possess regarding transition, the process, pedagogical approaches, practices, and the curriculum within primary schools?

- **Research question 2:** How is the policy landscape in Ireland structured to enhance teachers' capabilities in facilitating the transition of students from primary to post-primary education?

The study is an exploratory sequential mixed methods study. A three-phase research approach is employed to address these questions. Initially in Phase 1, a comprehensive examination of pertinent research and policy documents is undertaken to establish the standing of the concept of transition within policy discussions. In Phase 2, interviews with both post-primary students and teachers are conducted to gain a more nuanced understanding of transition as perceived from their vantage points. The outcomes drawn from this qualitative dataset inform the development of an online national survey for post-primary teachers in Phase 3. The population for the national study comprises in-service and pre-service post-primary teachers across all subjects and school types in Ireland.

1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters, followed by an Appendices section, and adheres to APA 6 referencing criteria. Appendices are structured by Chapter and number. Chapter 1 furnishes a comprehensive overview, encompassing personal, educational, and structural aspects of the work.

Chapter 2 explores research literature and empirical findings related to the educational transition from primary to post-primary levels. The opening of the chapter sets the stage by examining foundational concepts of transition, the definitions and theories. The chapter continues to identify potential challenges that might hamper a students' smooth transition and highlights the important role teachers and schools play in this process. It explores the potential barriers that teachers' face in achieving a smooth transition for

students and considers the factors that may influence teachers' understanding of transition. Finally, the chapter highlights the gaps in current research and addresses how this study aims to bridge these gaps.

Chapter 3 outlines the research approach and methodologies employed in the study. The chapter examines the research questions and their intent and explores the researcher's worldview (ontology and epistemology). This foundation paves the way to discuss the chosen methodological approach, Mixed Methods Research (MMR), and the rationale for its selection as the most fitting for this study. It continues by describing the methods used in the study and by evaluating issues of choice, ethics, reliability, and limitations.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the documentary analysis of educational documents and policies (Phase 1). This chapter explores transition and historical policy changes, collaborative strategies, and evolving roles of responsibility in these documents.

Chapter 5 presents the qualitative and quantitative findings of the exploratory interviews (Phase 2) and survey (Phase 3). The findings present the insights into the experiences of transition by students and teachers and describe the results from a national survey delivered to post-primary teachers. The findings are structured according to Galton, Gray & Rudduck's 'Five Bridges of Transfer' (1999). With regard to quantitative findings, the survey was conducted with in-service and pre-service teachers. Statistical tests (t-tests or chi-square tests as appropriate to the data type) were conducted to determine whether the responses from each group were statistically significantly different. Where the responses for the two participant groups were statistically significantly different, the results are reported separately. Where the results of the groups are not different, they are reported as one group.

Chapter 6, the discussion chapter, evaluates the findings in relation to the research questions and literature. It focuses on the areas of communication, knowledge and continuity in curricula and pedagogy, offering new insights into research on the transition process, and the implications for policy and practice. It also presents a new Action Framework for Transition called the ‘Three Ts of Transition’ that emerged from this study.

Chapter 7 brings this study to a conclusion, offering insights into the opportunities and limitations of this study. It presents recommendations and considers the contribution of this research to the national and international debate on transition and describes areas for further research.

1.5 The research and me

Transition encompasses a broad array of agents, including students, parents, primary and post-primary schools, as well as teachers. Personally, I navigate this terrain in various capacities: as a parent to four teenagers, a teacher, and as a teacher educator. Within the realm of the PME (Professional Master in Education) consecutive post-graduate programme, I serve as a Strand leader for English pedagogy, and my role extends as a Placement Tutor across different Initial Teacher Education (ITE) institutions.

My initial encounter with the topic of transition from primary to post-primary was personal, and the impetus for this study arose from my perspective as a parent, rather than my role as a teacher educator or post-primary teacher. While I had experienced the transition from pre-school to primary and from one class to another as my children moved through primary school, the transition from primary to post-primary, however, was new. Before embarking on my D.Ed. journey, my eldest son had entered post-primary education. After one of his initial First-year English lessons, driven by curiosity about his

experience, I asked him how the class had fared. His response was candid: “It was boring because we had already covered it in 6th Class.” This spurred me to delve further, sparking conversations with fellow teaching friends and colleagues. In these informal dialogues with post-primary educators, a shared sentiment emerged – there seemed to be a scarce recognition of primary school experiences within the post-primary classrooms. I had presumed that post-primary teachers were well-versed in primary curricula. Given my numerous visits to student teachers in first-year classes, the benefits of integrating knowledge of primary school curricula into their professional development seemed self-evident.

Yet, my convictions rested on observations and anecdotes. With three more children poised to make the leap to post-primary, I had a personal incentive to explore this area. Furthermore, a sense of professional responsibility, stemming from my role as a teacher educator, impelled me to address this very topic. Thus, my journey into this realm was set in motion. The expedition, as it unfolded, bore a close resemblance to Homer’s ‘Odyssey’. It was a voyage laden with encounters and revelations, a blend of exasperation and exhilaration, culminating in a sense of both personal and professional fulfilment.

1.6 The conceptual framework

This research employs Galton et al.’s (1999) ‘Five Bridges of Transfer’ as its conceptual framework. A bridge is a construct. It embodies intentionality and direction, yet its crossing might vary in ease and strength for different students. More significantly, a bridge conveys connectivity and ongoing progress. Transition, within this framework, is viewed as a state marked by both continuity and discontinuity, emphasising change as an integral facet of development rather than treating it as an ‘event’ or ‘rite of passage’. This approach aligns with the outcomes of a systematic review conducted by Jindal-Snape et al., (2021), which found that most studies leaned toward researchers’ theories in

comparison to theoreticians' theories. In particular, the prevalent understanding of transition within these studies was one of change.

A personal rationale also underpins the selection of the bridge as a conceptual anchor, as highlighted in ongoing presentations during the D.Ed. programme (Murray, 2020). The bridge is not merely a representation of connection; it carries profound significance. Originating from a town situated at the confluence of two rivers, the bridges in this locale have entered into my educational journey. These rivers became the subject of my first research project as a young scientist in 1987 – “The River Boyne – Asset or Acid?” The bridges assumed a role in my wedding photos, daily commutes as an undergraduate to Trinity, and now, they offer the conceptual scaffold for both my pragmatic worldview and the framework guiding this thesis. It also aligns harmoniously with my conviction that knowledge is a product of social construction.

The bridge metaphor aptly acknowledges the existence of two distinct cultures in primary and post-primary education. Its aspiration is to forge a connection between them. However, within this selection of the bridge as a conceptual framework, there is a potential for researcher bias. Recognition of this potential is pivotal for safeguarding the research's integrity. As a result, this metaphor and framework is not embraced uncritically, or exclusively (Maxwell, 2003); instead, it is questioned wherever and whenever relevant.

1.7 Conclusion

This research study explores transition from primary to post-primary education, with a distinct emphasis on the role of teachers in this process. Chapter 1 has provided a professional and personal rationale for the study, offered a preliminary overview of the Irish educational context pertinent to the subject, and sets the stage for a deeper

exploration of transition in the subsequent chapter. Chapter 2 embarks on a comprehensive review of empirical literature concerning educational transitions. Its aim is to uncover valuable insights that will further inform the researcher's understanding of teachers' roles in this critical educational phase.

2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature concerning educational transition from primary to post-primary level. With a focus on illuminating teachers' perspectives and practice, this chapter considers the multifaceted aspects of student support during transition and the important role teachers and schools play in the process. Commencing with an analysis of the conceptual underpinnings of transition within both theoretical frameworks and practical applications, it examines potential challenges that may hinder a smooth transition for students. The review also outlines potential barriers encountered by educators when addressing transition-related concerns. This includes sources of teacher knowledge in relation to transition. Only literature explicitly relating to the primary-to-post-primary transition in Ireland is cited in this review, except in cases where its relevance extends to an Irish context.

This chapter is organised as follows. Section 1 establishes a common understanding of transition by exploring the definitions and conceptualisations of transition in the research literature, the terminology used, and its implications for research. The section outlines the key theories most commonly used in research in the field and examines the Five Bridges of Transfer (Galton et al., 1999) as the theoretical framework deployed in this thesis.

Section 2 explores the empirical data on student experiences of transition. It highlights the crucial impact of this period on their post-primary journey as identified in international research. The focus lies on factors associated with successful transition, specifically those related to school and/or teacher practices. By exploring these factors and their implications, the section provides valuable insights to guide teachers in understanding the challenges their students may encounter during this critical period.

Section 3 examines school and teacher practices during transition and considers how successful educational transitions can rely on effective information sharing, close coordination between primary and post-primary schools, and supportive measures like pastoral care and preparation activities. The section is guided by the Five Bridges of Transfer.

Section 4 investigates the origins of teachers' knowledge and the factors that influence their pedagogical perspectives. This exploration adds insights into the factors that may influence teachers' understanding of transition.

Finally, considering the empirical research in the field, Section 5 identifies gaps in the research and highlights how this study contributes to the understanding of transition into post-primary school from the perspective of teachers within the Irish educational context.

Prior to the examination of definitions, theories, and frameworks in Section 1, it is essential to draw attention to two points: Firstly, it is important to highlight three studies that are highly relevant to research on transitions within an Irish context. These longitudinal studies play a crucial role in the understanding of educational transitions. The studies in question are *Moving Up* (Smyth, McCoy & Darmody, 2004), *Growing Up in Ireland* (GUI), and *Children's School Lives* (CSL). These studies will be referenced throughout this literature review but given their importance, their parameters are summarised here for clarity.

2.1.1 Key studies

Moving up

Published in collaboration with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, (NCCA) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), *Moving Up* (Smyth et al., 2004) was the first of three publications that explored the curriculum realities of Junior

Certificate implementation. The second and third publications, *Pathways through the Junior Cycle* (Smyth, Dunne, McCoy & Darmody, 2006) and *Gearing up for the Exam* (Smyth, Dunne, McCoy & Darmody, 2007) focussed on second and third year of the Junior post-primary Cycle respectively. In relation to the moving of students from primary to post-primary, *Moving up* looked at “the impact of (variation in) the way in which post-primary schools manage the transfer and learning process on student experiences of first year” (Smyth et al., 2004, p.17). It was a multi-phased mixed methods study in which 567 post-primary principals were surveyed, and interviews were conducted with 103 key personnel involved in transition², 226 post-primary teachers, 916 first year students and 81 parents were interviewed. These stemmed from 12 case-study schools. While the authors acknowledge that the schools had not been selected as a representative sample of post-primary schools in Ireland, they capture important insights into the nature of the transition process within different educational contexts.

Growing up in Ireland (GUI)

The primary objective of *Growing Up in Ireland – the National Longitudinal Study of Children* is to comprehensively depict the lives of Irish children in various aspects, with the ultimate purpose of providing valuable insights to inform Irish policies and services (Greene et al., 2010). The study tracks the development of two cohorts of young people growing up in Ireland: one born in 1998 and the other in 2008. The latter study (Cohort 08) involved over 11,000 9-month-old infants and their families. Among the various reports generated from the study, two are significant in the context of this thesis – Report 5 (Smyth et al., 2017), which delves into the transition from primary to post-primary education, and Smyth et al.’s (2018) report that examines the transition from pre-school

² Key personnel comprised school principals, deputy principals, guidance counsellors, year heads for First years, first-year class tutors, home-school liaison co-ordinators, learning support and resource teachers as well as counsellors and chaplains.

to primary education. The data collection for Cohort '08 at 13 years was completed in 2022, and the key findings were published in July 2023. In addition to these reports, there are other noteworthy findings, such as key insights from a special online 'COVID-19' survey (Nolan & Smyth, 2021), while a *Scoping review to inform the development of a potential new birth cohort for Growing Up in Ireland* (Counihan et al., 2023) focuses on generating data for the future.

Children's School Lives (CSL)

Children's School Lives (CSL), commissioned by the NCCA, is a national longitudinal study that delves into the lived experiences of more than 4000 children attending 189 primary schools throughout Ireland. This extensive research project, conducted between Spring 2019 and Spring 2024, includes in-depth case studies involving principals, teachers, parents, and grandparents of the students in these schools.

As illustrated in Table 2.1, CSL comprises two distinct cohorts: Cohort A, which traces students from Junior Infants to 2nd class, and Cohort B which follows students from 2nd class through to First year of post-primary. To ensure comprehensive data collection, the study incorporates six waves. At present, the published findings encompass data collected up to 2021, with both cohorts reaching wave 2. Due to its timescale, Cohort B will reach First year in 2023/2024 (Wave 6.1 and 6.2). Consequently, the results of CSL are not incorporated within the scope of this specific study. Among the five key focus themes of the CSL research, educational transitions (from pre-school to primary and from primary to second level) stand out. Report 4 (Sloan et al., 2022), concentrating on the transition from pre-school to primary, provides valuable insights into collaboration between pre-schools and primary schools, information transfer between different educational levels, as well as effective communication among teachers and parents.

	Wave 1	Wave 2.1	Wave 2.2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6.1	Wave 6.2
Year	2019	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2023	2024
Cohort A	Pre-School	Junior Infants	Junior Infants	Senior Infants	1st Class	2nd Class	-	-
Cohort B	2nd Class	-	3rd Class	4th Class	5th Class	6th Class	1st Year	1st Year

Table 2.1 Overview of timescale of the CSL study.

Source: <https://cslstudy.ie/about/research-design/>

Secondly, throughout this study, references are made to the Junior Certificate and to the Junior Cycle. From 2017, the Junior Cycle was phased in to replace the Junior Certificate with changes made to subject specifications, assessments and the embedding of Key Skills into pedagogy and practice. These are further explored in Chapter 4. Both still culminate in an exam at the end of three years. Therefore, it must be noted that research prior to 2017 references the Junior Certificate rather than the new Junior Cycle for certain subjects.

2.2 Section 1: Definitions, theories, and frameworks

2.2.1 Overview

In the context of a discussion on educational transitions, it is essential to begin by clarifying what is meant by ‘transition’. This step is crucial as it sets the foundation for understanding how students move from one educational stage to another, both conceptually and practically. The call for clarity echoes the concerns of previous researchers, such as Downes (2019) and Jindal-Snape, Symonds, Hannah and Barlow (2021), who have emphasised the need for a more in-depth exploration of the concept of transition in the educational context. Therefore, Section 2.2.2 considers the different terms used to describe transition; Section 2.2.3 examines the definitions of transition as it applies to educational transition research, and Section 2.2.4 examines how different interpretations of transition can impact perspectives and approaches to educational transition.

2.2.2 Terminology

In educational research, both ‘transition’ and ‘transfer’ are used as verbs and nouns to describe the movement of students from primary to post-primary education. In UK research, ‘transfer’ is commonly used to denote the change from primary to post-primary level (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021). Galton et al., (1999) describe ‘transfer’ as “the move to a new school” (p.9) and ‘transition’ as the “move from one year to another within a school” (ibid., p.9).

By contrast, Thurston et al., (2010) define ‘transfers’ as “the ability of students to use previous learning, attitudes, and skills in the new educational context”, while they describe ‘transitions’ as “moving from one school context to another” (p.502). Marshall and Hargreaves (2007) complicate the distinctions further by arguing that “to transfer to a new school is an event which happens quickly, but to ‘make the transition’ from primary to secondary school is a process which may take far longer” (p.77).

However, the distinctions identified in UK research are not universally followed, and both terms are often used interchangeably in international research. In Ireland, Darmody’s (2008) preference for ‘transition’ over ‘transfer’ is based on the fact that the latter signifies the movement to a new learning environment and is more suitable for denoting the process of transferring between schooling levels. In the context of Irish educational documents, ‘transition’ is the preferred term for describing the movement from primary to post-primary, as evidenced by its use by the NCCA in subject specifications and frameworks. Transition is also the preferred term used by the Teaching Council (TC), the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT), and in national studies such as GUI and CSL. The NCCA uses ‘transfer’ specifically within the context of information transfer from primary to post-primary schools. It is also used to describe the movement

from Junior National School to Senior National School and from one class to another. In this study, in line with practice in Ireland, the term ‘transition’ is used to denote the move from one school level to the next, and the term ‘transfer’ is used in relation to transfer documents.

2.2.3 Definitions

The Chamber’s dictionary (1998) defines transition as “a passage from one place, state, stage, style, or subject to another” (p.1764). However, the concept of ‘transition’ in the context of educational research lacks such a clear-cut definition. Jindal-Snape et al., (2021), in the first systematic review of ontologies used by researchers on the topic of educational transition, found that most of the 96 studies collated did not provide a clear definition of transition nor did they use defined concepts to either inform research design or frame the findings. Furthermore, they observed that these studies did not report participants’ understanding of transition.

The terms used to define transition in these research studies include transition as an event, a phase, or a process, resulting in multiple conceptualisations of educational transition. Jindal-Snape et al., (2021) identified nine such conceptualisations: “1. transition as change in variety of contexts from social to pedagogical; 2. transition as a normative event in one’s school career; 3. transition as a time of multiple concurrent transitions; 4. transition as discontinuity in curriculum and relationships; 5. normative life transitions; 6. transition as a life course perspective; 7. transition as a turning point; 8. transition as disruption and/or risk, and 9. transition as a rite of passage” (p.9).

The concept of transition, whether seen as a life event, rite of passage, or status passage, finds its roots in anthropology and, as a result, is shaped by social constructs. In Western culture, a rite of passage represents a socially constructed shift from childhood to

adulthood, marking the transformation from a dependent to a full-fledged member of society (Symonds, 2015; Schlegel and Barry, 1991 as cited in Jindal-Snape et al., 2021). According to Van Gennep (1960; 2019), a ‘rite of passage’ encompasses events that are accompanied by special acts or ceremonies that facilitate individuals in transitioning from one defined position to another. He describes this rite of passage as three stages – rites of separation, rites of transition and rites of incorporation.

Within the educational realm, Fabian (2013) proposes that certain pre-transition events, such as purchasing uniforms, books, and 6th class graduation, could be considered as ‘rites of passage’. However, it is essential to recognise that these events are not universally applicable in an Irish context due to variations in school practices. In the context of two Irish studies, O’Brien’s (2004) ethnographic approach and Naughton’s (1998) work, both reference ‘rites of passage’ within their investigations on transition, although they do not directly define it as such.

Other researchers view transition as a normative life event. In this case it is more closely related to the child’s age and developmental stage rather than a ‘rite of passage’ change in the child’s status from primary school student to post-primary student. According to Mumford and Birchwood (2021), it is defined as “a movement from one educational institution to another, once a child or young person reaches a certain age” (p.377). Nicholson (1984) associates these events with Piagetian stages and delineates distinct time frames or phases, including “preparation, initial encounters, adaptation, and stabilisation” (as cited in Jindal-Snape et al., 2021, p.3). The age range for this transition varies across countries. In Ireland, Scotland and Australia it is around 12-13 years, and slightly earlier in the UK. For an overview of transition according to country and age, see Appendix 2.1.

Yet other researchers are concerned with how the student adapts to their new environment, observing transition as a process that extends over time. Jindal-Snape et al., (2019) define transition as “a dynamic and ongoing process of psychological, social and educational adaptation over time due to changes in context, interpersonal relationships and identity, which can be both exciting and worrying at different times for different people and requires ongoing support from a range of significant others” (p.1256). The Australian Ria Hanewald (2013) acknowledges the juxtaposition of excitement and apprehension in her definition of transition as “a period of change that can be both challenging and exciting, in which children and their families adjust to new roles, identities and expectations, new interactions and new relations” (p.62). Martinez et al., (2011), in their US study, describe transition as personal, physical, social, and/or emotional and view it as representing a period of significant change and potential turmoil and difficulty in a child’s life. Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan (1996) describe it as “a triple transition” that involves shifts in school cultures, friendship groups, and the transition from childhood to adolescence (p.7). Ding (2008) describes it as a period during which students are required to acquire new routines and modify previously accepted behavioural patterns to align with unfamiliar environments. While each of these definitions acknowledge the difficulties of transition, their focus is on transition as change requiring adaptations and modifications over time.

Maurice Galton has been studying transition in the UK since the early 1970s. Galton et al., (1999), use the term ‘transfer’ defining it as “the transfer from one school to another” (p.9). Their definition recognises the differences and the similarities that exist in the different schools’ culture and organisation. While Galton et al. acknowledge that transition can encompass aspects of a rite of passage for students, as evidenced by responses from his own research where students celebrated completing the bridging units

in Maths (Galton & Hargreaves, 2003), they also contend that transition should strike a balance between continuity and discontinuity (Galton et al., 2009). Like Hanewald's definition, which emphasises both discontinuity and continuity and students' adaptation, Galton et al.'s definition offers an opportunity to explore the process in a more balanced way. While it looks back to feed forward as it considers both the similarities and differences of the primary school experience with post-primary and vice versa, its emphasis is progressive rather than causal.

In an Irish context, studies on transition such as GUI and CSL, address the move from primary to post-primary education, but they do not provide a precise definition of transition. Instead, they depict it as a "key turning-point" in young people's school careers, involving encounters with "new learning approaches, different teacher-student relationships, and novel peer groups" (Smyth, 2017, p.10). The use of the phrase 'a key turning point' might suggest that these studies position transition as a rite of passage. However, they also explore elements of continuity, discontinuity, and adaptation, which echoes views that see transition as a process that happens over time such as Hargreaves and Galton (2002), among others. Notably, GUI references the work of Hargreaves and Galton in this regard.

The definition of transition that underpins this research categorises it as a form of change, recognising the coexistence of continuity and discontinuity. Drawing from Galton et al. and Jindal-Snapes' perspectives, it defines transition as an ongoing process, rather than a one-time event or a mere status passage. This definition aligns with the NCCA's description of transition as a process, as stated in their documentation (NCCA, 2023).

2.2.4 Importance of an agreed understanding

An agreed understanding of the concept of transition is crucial for teachers, as it enables effective assistance to students during periods of change, leading to improved educational outcomes and wellbeing. This shared understanding has proven to be beneficial in the field of inclusive education, where teachers with a better comprehension of definitions show more positive attitudes and feel better prepared to implement inclusive practices (Krischler, Powell & Pit-Ten Cate, 2019). McGuckin (2019) in his article on transition for students with AEN cites Minton and McGuckin (2014) who posit that “school professionals, particularly those concerned with the non-curricula aspects of students’ school careers, should be critically aware of the theoretical perspectives of human development and the wide range of programs, policies, and research that inform their practice” (p.37).

However, just as researchers differ in their definitions of educational transition, teachers also differ in their understanding of the term. Findings from Jindal-Snape and Cantali’s (2019) mixed methods study, which included a number of primary (n=6) and post-primary stakeholders (n=10), revealed a lack of shared understanding about what transition means among both primary and post-primary school staff from the same school cluster. Some teachers conceptualised transition as a one-time event linked with major moves at specific time points, while others saw it as an ongoing process involving several visible and invisible changes. The authors highlighted the importance of gaining an understanding of how professionals view transition. They see this as a major gap in the literature and a key factor in teachers’ practice and how they support students during transition. Marshall and Hargreaves (2007), in their qualitative study of music involving 75 students in primary and 68 students in 13 post-primary schools, found that student

transition worked best when their post-primary teachers viewed it as a process, and not as an event.

The varying interpretations of transition as a one-time event, a rite of passage or a continuous process can significantly impact the approach taken by stakeholders to the transition from primary to post-primary education. Galton and Hargreaves (2002) describe the implications of UK schools in the 1970's viewing transition as a status passage: they marked the shift through specialist teaching and streaming in core subjects from day one. By contrast, schools that viewed it in terms of (dis)continuity kept First-year students away from their older peers through physical separation and retained a single teacher approach for the majority of lessons. Coffey, Berlach, and O'Neill (2011) also discuss the impact and successes of changing from a middle school continuity model in Australia to a more separated primary and secondary model like Ireland. In their study the schools (n=6) used a variety of approaches that included aspects of both models (separate buildings, continuity of teachers etc.).

Researchers have emphasised the need for clarity and “more interrogation” of the conceptual foundations of transition in education (Downes, 2019, pp.1465-1466). Downes describes it as “conceptually fragmented in its understanding” (ibid.). The following section of this Chapter examines the concept of transition in greater detail and provides essential context for empirical findings. This is important given the focus on effective teacher support for student transition in this thesis. Informed by Jindal-Snape et al.'s (2021) literature review of conceptual frameworks in educational transition research, the section examines conceptual frameworks and theories that have been found to be popular in educational research. These include Stage-Environment Fit Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, Life Course Theory, The Five Bridge of Transfer (Galton et al., 1999)

and two more recent models by Cantley et al., (2021) and The XII Pillars of Transitions (Jindal-Snape, 2023).

2.2.5 Conceptual frameworks and theories

As discussed in the previous section, the exploration of transitions in the realm of educational research has been marked by a diversity of perspectives, mirroring the varied definitions and conceptualisations of transition itself by researchers and teachers. While some theories frame transition within the context of the individual student, others delve into the intricacies of the surrounding environment. Downes (2019) draws attention to the prevailing research tendency to concentrate on what he terms “the child as foreground object” while often “neglecting the background context—the school system into which the student integrates” (p.1467).

Within this complex landscape, a limited number of frameworks have become prominent, drawing inspiration from various transition theories and fields. Among the theories that have been used in an educational context are Schlossberg’s theory on transition (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012), Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), Resilience theory, and Self-efficacy theory. Notably, Jindal-Snape et al., (2021) have reviewed the educational transition research landscape, spanning the years 2008 to 2018, and identified the most frequently referenced theories. These theories include Eccles and Midgley’s (1989) Stage-Environment Fit Theory, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1989), and Elder’s Life Course Theory (1998). The authors categorised these theories and frameworks into Overton’s (2015) scientific distinct conceptual forms, ranging from observational or “commonsense” concepts to higher order “meta-theory and world views” (p.13). For clarity, Jindal-Snape’s diagram is reproduced here (Figure 2.1). (See Appendix 2.2 for Overton’s diagram.)

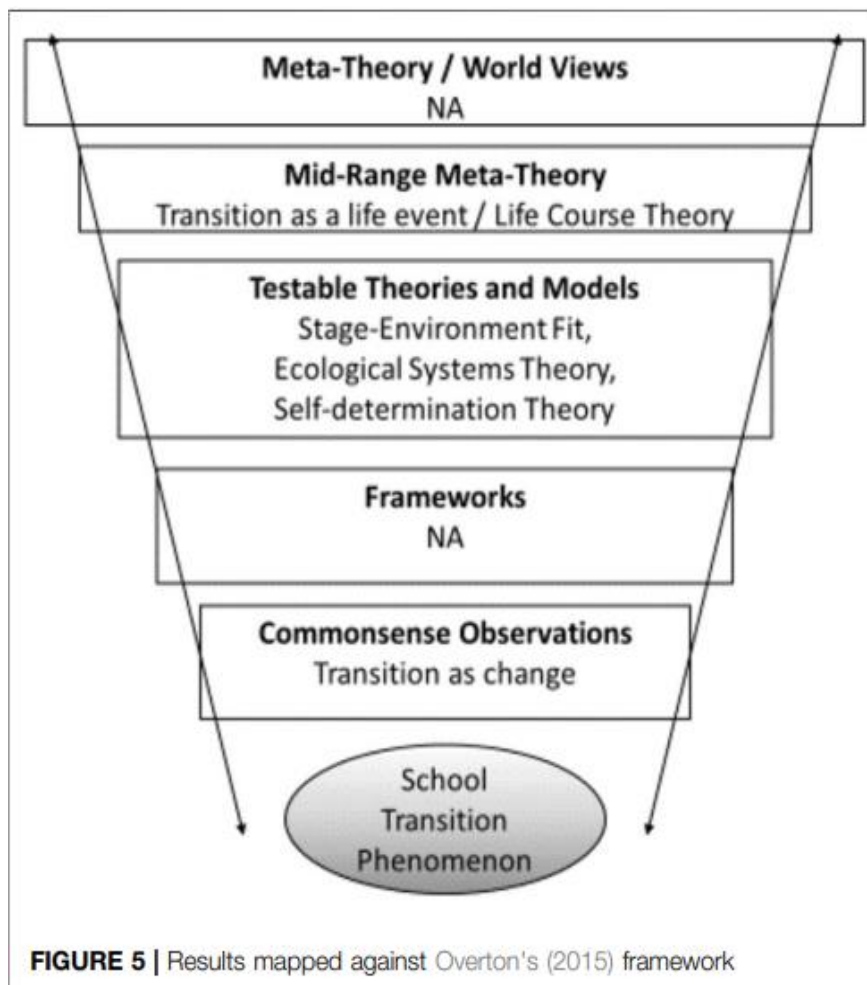


Figure 2.1 Categorisation of most used theories and frameworks.

Source: Jindal-Snape et al., (2021, p.3)

Drawing upon this theoretical overview, the next two sections are dedicated to an in-depth exploration of the frameworks and theories most applied to educational transitions as identified by Jindal-Snape et al., (2021). Specific attention is given to Galton et al.'s (1999) Five Bridges of Transfer — the framework adopted both in this study and in research conducted within an Irish context (O'Connor & Flynn, 2019; NCCA, 2022). Additionally, the Five Bridges are compared with two newer models — Cantley et al.'s (2021) model for primary to post-primary transition and Jindal-Snape's (2023) 'XII Pillars of Transitions'.

2.2.6 Most frequently used theories and frameworks

Stage-Environment Fit Theory

As indicated above, Eccles and Midgely's (1989) Stage-Environment Fit Theory is a commonly used theory in educational transition research. The theory highlights the importance of students' *developmental stage* in the transition from primary to post-primary school. It emphasises discontinuity, that is, the mismatch between the needs of developing adolescents and the opportunities afforded them by their social environments (Eccles et al., 1993). Also described as the 'transfer paradox' by Hallinan and Hallinan (1992), the paradox describes the contradictory emotions of excitement for something new, yet the fear of the unknown – the adolescent desire for autonomy in post-primary versus the constraints of the learning environment. For stage-fit theorists, successful transition most likely happens when "these two trajectories [student's personal development and school] are in synchrony with each other... (even slightly preceding) the patterns of change occurring at the individual level" (Eccles, 2004, p.429). Therefore, it strives to create as much continuity between primary and post-primary as possible. Gorwood (1986) suggests this stage-fit approach leads to a particular emphasis on curriculum continuity and pedagogy. From the perspective of the teacher, this implies strong knowledge and understanding of primary and post-primary educational contexts. In general, this theory also implies a negative perspective on transition as it focusses on the 'mismatch' rather than similarities leading Galton (2009) to put forward the call for a perspective on transition that focuses on both continuity and discontinuity.

Ecological Systems Theory (EST)

By contrast, Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Ecological Systems Theory (EST) emphasises the importance of the environment and the various systems that influence human development. The theory proposes that an individual's development is shaped by a complex set of interrelated factors that exist at different levels of their environment, from the immediate microsystem to the larger macrosystem. At the microsystem level, for example, the relationship between the student and their teacher, peers, and family members can play an important role in shaping their experiences and attitudes toward the transition. Positive relationships with these individuals can provide support and encouragement, while negative or unsupportive relationships can contribute to feelings of stress, anxiety, and disconnection. At the mesosystem level, the interactions and connections between different microsystems can also play a role in shaping the transition experience. For example, the relationship between the student's primary and post-primary schools, and the ways in which they communicate and collaborate to support the transition, can impact the student's sense of continuity and connectedness across the two settings. At the exosystem and macrosystem levels, broader social and cultural factors can also shape the transition experience. For example, policies and practices related to school choice, curriculum, and assessment can impact the ways in which students and families navigate the transition process. Similarly, societal attitudes and values related to education, gender, and ethnicity can influence the expectations and experiences of students as they move from primary to post-primary school.

This theoretical perspective is very valuable in exploring transition as a process of development involving proximal processes and sustained interactions with significant others in a child's life, which is situated within social contexts that are influenced and constrained by societal, cultural and policy drivers. The theory provides a framework to

explore development, identifying how context can influence processes and outcomes for children but it does not provide a specific perspective on transition to guide analysis. Within the Irish research context, EST holds significant popularity, particularly in studies focusing on students (O'Toole, Hayes & Mhic Mhathúna, 2014; McGuckin, 2018). Notably, the longitudinal GUI and CSL studies firmly ground themselves in Bronfenbrenner's EST, as evidenced in Green et al., (2010), Devine et al., (2020), and Sloan et al., (2022).

Life Course Theory

Historical context and social structure play an important role for the individual in Elder's (1998) Life Course Theory. This is a sociological framework that underscores the significance of historical and social structures in influencing human development throughout life. According to this theory, an individual's development is moulded by their experiences and opportunities at various life stages, which are impacted by broader social and historical processes. In the context of the transition from primary to post-primary school, Elder's Life Course theory suggests that this period represents a crucial phase of development that can have long-term implications for an individual's trajectory over their life course. Specifically, the theory proposes that the transition from primary to post-primary brings both opportunities and challenges, as students must navigate new social and academic demands, establish fresh peer relationships, and develop a sense of identity and independence. Elder's theory also underscores the significance of the broader social and historical context in shaping the transition. For instance, the theory indicates that the experience of the transition may be influenced by factors like social class, gender, race/ethnicity, and historical trends in education and labour markets. Although this researcher's study is not solely preoccupied with the individual within a social and historical context, it does discuss the focus on transition in policy within the socio-

economic context of the time (See Chapter 4). Elder’s theory has been used in various studies on transition in the fields of psychology and sociology including those conducted by Benner and Graham (2009), Kingdon et al., (2017), Felmlee et al., (2018), among others (as cited in Jindal-Snape et al., 2021).

Cantley et al., (2021)

While the theories discussed above have been used to ground research on transitions, they are used *to frame* rather than specifically *focus on* or *derive from* educational transition research. In Ireland, Cantley et al., (2021) have proposed a framework for analysing continuity in students’ learning experiences during the transition from primary to post-primary school (see Figure 2.2). Focussing specifically on curriculum and pedagogical continuity, the authors describe this framework as drawing on “elements of Bronfenbrenner’s EST, Dewey’s principle of continuity of experience, and Chevallard’s Anthropological Theory of Didactics (ATD) with its levels of didactic codetermination” (p.13). By combining these theoretical perspectives, the authors aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interactions among teacher characteristics, school organisational factors, and societal influences that contribute to successful transitions.

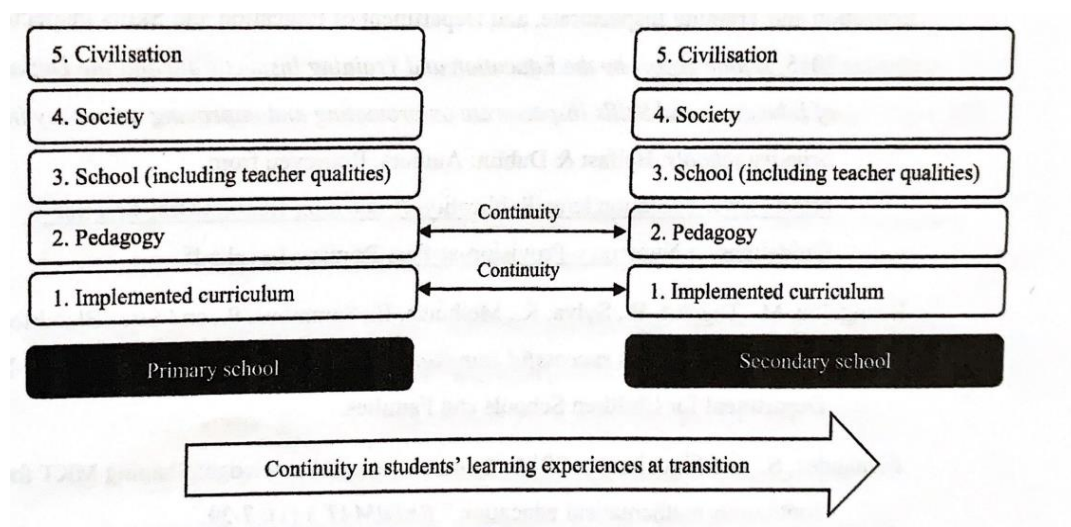


Figure 2.2 Model for primary to post-primary transition.

Source: Cantley et al., (2021, p.12).

While this framework acknowledges the role of society, context, and social structure, the authors suggest that differences at school level can influence pedagogy and implemented curriculum. Level 4 and 5 factors (society and civilisation), however, should not impact on levels 1 and 2. Central to this model is collaboration and communication between primary and post-primary sectors. While Cantley et al.'s framework is specifically designed for the transition from primary to post-primary school in relation to mathematics, the authors suggest that it can be applied to other educational transitions.

XII Pillars of Transitions Framework

During this researcher's thesis write-up phase, Jindal-Snape published her **XII Pillars of Transitions Framework** (2023). By comparison to Cantley et al.'s model, the author suggests that the XII Pillars is applicable to *more than* just educational transitions. This multiple and multi-dimensional transitions framework draws from Educational and Life Transitions Theory (ELT) and Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions Theory (MMT). The author compares the latter MMT theory to a Rubik's Cube, where one change can have multiple effects. The XII Pillars within the framework are interconnected and mutually influence each other but are also independent. They encompass an "individual's disposition, beliefs, support systems, and environmental factors such as culture and discourse" (Jindal-Snape, 2023, p.540). Figure 2.3 presents an overview of these pillars.

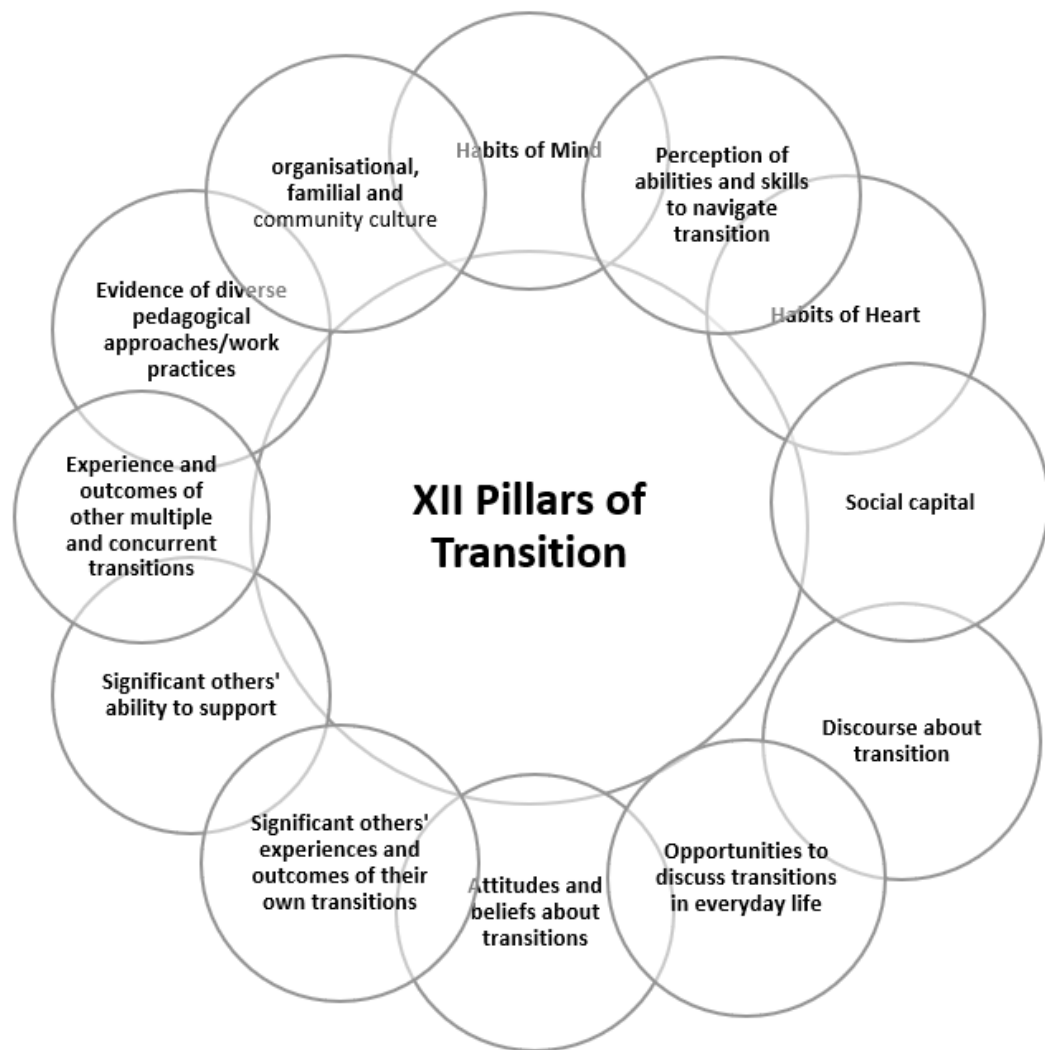


Figure 2.3 Illustration of the Twelve Pillars of Transitions (Jindal-Snape, 2023).

These pillars combine aspects of other transition theories. Similar to Bronfenbrenner's systems, the individual is seen as interacting with different systems. The role of significant others is also important. Like Elder's Life Course theory (1998) social capital is significant in the role of 'significant others'. However, although derived from research on educational transitions, the emphasis is on an individual's disposition and beliefs about transition. The term 'significant other' varies among individuals, as it may refer to a teacher for some, while for others, it could be a parent or friend. When the XII pillars are viewed from the perspective of a teacher or teacher educator, the links to teaching and

supporting students are evident within these pillars. However, these pillars could also be examined through the lens of a student or other educational stakeholders. Hence, this framework allows for multiple interpretations depending on the viewpoint adopted. Within the context of this study the focus is on the teacher. The role of policies and curriculum continuity in educational transitions is not apparent in this model.

2.2.7 ‘Five Bridges of Transfer’

This section considers Galton et al.’s (1999) Five Bridges of Transfer, the framework used in this study. Although Jindal-Snape et al., (2021) found no research within their timeframe that used the Five Bridges of Transfer, this framework has been employed in research both before and after their study review period (O’Connor & Flynn, 2021; Smyth, 2020).

The foundation of the Five Bridges framework can be traced back to seminal UK research on transfer from primary to post-primary education, known as the Observational and Classroom Learning Evaluation (ORACLE) study. Conducted between 1975 and 1980 under the leadership of Maurice Galton and his team, this pioneering study centred on curriculum continuity during the critical period of transition. Employing a mixed-methods approach, which included classroom and student observations, the researchers closely followed the experiences of eight students in each participating school during the initial three days of their first year in the new school. Subsequently, this research was replicated and documented in 2002 (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002), and again in 2018 (Galton & McLellan, 2018), reaffirming its significance.

The Five Bridges of Transfer, (the phrase is attributed to Michael Barber, 1999 as referenced in Hargreaves, Delamont, & Williamson, 2011) emerged from the work of Galton and his team on ORACLE. Their research identified five pivotal themes of ‘cross-

phase business', which have since provided an overview of key aspects of the transition process. Labelled as the Administrative bridge, Social bridge, Curriculum bridge, Pedagogy bridge and Managing Learning bridge, these themes encompass communication between schools, social supports, curriculum, pedagogy, and students' role as managers of their own learning (Table 2.2). The Administrative bridge, often referred to as the Bureaucratic bridge, is concerned with information transfer between primary and post-primary schools. The Social bridge, known as the Social and Emotional bridge, encompasses initiatives and activities designed to support individuals in their integration into the new school environment, fostering new relationships.

Bridges 3 and 4 focus on continuity in curriculum and pedagogical practices and explore effective ways of facilitating communication between primary and post-primary schools and teachers. Lastly, the Managing Learning bridge offers insights into supporting students' development of essential skills appropriate to their new learning environment, including independent learning, organisational skills, and metacognitive skills, i.e., knowing how to learn, which as Kennedy et al., (2023) in their literature review of Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy posit, is important across all literature. The comprehensiveness of this framework makes it an invaluable tool for understanding the intricacies of the transition process, enabling researchers to approach studies on educational transition from diverse viewpoints.

Five Bridges of Transfer (Galton et al.,1999)		
Bridge	Function	Examples
Administrative	Designed to smooth the process of transfer	Meetings of senior staff Subject co-ordinators, SENCos etc. Transfer of attainment data and pupil records; Communication with parents etc.
Social	Measures to ease pupils' anxieties	Induction days; open evenings; use of secondary ICT, drama and sports facilities by primary school Support for pupils at risk Buddy schemes etc.
Curriculum	Maintaining continuity and progression	Secondary staff observing and teaching lessons in primary schools; video conferencing lessons; bridging units; summer schools.
Pedagogy	Helping post-primary teachers build on previous effective practice	Joint programmes of teacher exchanges; joint training days; structured peer observation
Managing Learning	Helping pupils become 'professional learners'	Extended induction programmes involving study skills, identifying preferred learning styles; thinking strategies etc.

Table 2.2 Overview of Five Bridges of Transfer.

Source: Collated from various sources.(Murray, 2023)

The Five Bridges framework stands as a highly pragmatic and authoritative model, empowering schools to assess their strengths and weaknesses across specific areas. This assertion is supported by O'Connor and Flynn (2021), who affirm its usefulness in effectively planning, developing, and evaluating successful transition support systems within educational institutions. Also, this framework is not restrictive in the sense that its broad and flexible categories accommodate diverse and changing educational landscapes, fostering insightful and meaningful comparisons.

The adaptability of the Five Bridges framework to embrace new and potential future transition initiatives is valuable in a research context. The language of the Bridges transcends any predisposed positive or negative discourse. This is in contrast to Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Mulhish, and Sammons' (2008) adjustment categories of social adjustment, institutional adjustment, and curriculum interest which imply an inherent need for alteration or change. Instead, the Five Bridges revolve around the

concept of communication, aptly representing the intricate dynamics between two institutions – primary and post-primary – and the individual as they navigate the transformative journey from one to the other.

Despite its pragmatic nature, the Five Bridges framework has not evaded scrutiny. This framework (as categorised by Jindal-Snape et al., 2021) occupies a position within Overton's 'common sense' category, an assessment also corroborated by Downes (2019). Downes (2019), whose primary focus lies in institutional change to facilitate the student's journey, critiques the bridges' construct, asserting that while it aids temporal understanding of transitions, it overlooks the imperative for "deeper investigation into the background conditions that sustain systemic processes and practices" (p.1471). Comparing it to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems, Downes deems the bridge framework as more passive, lacking the dynamic "two-way flow" (p.1469) inherent in Bronfenbrenner's systems.

To put it simply, while the Five Bridges framework serves as an effective tool to frame and structure transitions from various perspectives – those of students, teachers, and parents – it may not entirely capture the intricate interactions between students, schools, and teachers to the extent accomplished by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems. Downes (2019) posits that the focus should instead be on stability issues, delving into the underlying environmental conditions necessitating change, emphasising that the problem lies in "the absence of system change" (p.1469). He suggests that such metaphors (e.g. the bridge), exemplify a view of transition as a "blockage," (p.1470) (rather than a connector) where the connection between environments A and B belies a lack of communication despite them functioning well individually. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the Five Bridges framework has proven effective in various studies,

successfully highlighting discontinuities in pedagogical practices between systems, as exemplified by Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2009), and revealing curriculum (dis)continuities, as presented by Galton et al., (2003), Galton (2010) and Galton and McLellan, (2018). The framework's strategic application in these studies underscores its value in shedding light on key aspects of educational transitions.

2.2.8 Interactions between frameworks

The frameworks used to describe education transitions are not necessarily mutually exclusive and each can offer a particular lens for analysis and discussion. For example, the Irish CSL study employs the Bridges as its analytical framework, as well as adopting Bronfenbrenner's systems model as the theoretical foundation (Sloan et al., 2022). While variations exist in the frameworks and categories used to describe educational transitions, this researcher has found notable intersections between the Five Bridges framework and various other categories and frameworks. These are graphically depicted in Figure 2.4 in as far as possible, and are colour coded according to the Five Bridges of Transfer. For instance, Evangelou et al.'s (2008) social adjustment, institutional adjustment, and curriculum interest closely align with distinct facets of the bridges. Bridge 2 (yellow) finds alignment with social adjustment, while bridges 2 and 3/4 demonstrate overlap with institutional and curriculum aspects, respectively. Furthermore, certain elements of bridge 5 (blue), the Managing Learning bridge, can be associated with curriculum interest.

Similarly, Eccles and Roeser's (1999) framework, which encompasses four hierarchical and interdependent levels of organisation, shares striking similarities with Galton's Five Bridges of Transfer. For example, Level 1 of Eccles and Roeser's model encompasses teacher-student relationships, teacher efficacy, and curriculum content, akin to Galton's Bridges 3 and 4. Level 2 examines extracurricular activities, school climate, size,

curricular tracking, and non-instructional spaces, which correspond to aspects of the Social and Emotional bridge and initiatives to support students. Level 3 explores the links between different school levels and their impact on students, akin to Galton's Administrative bridge. Only level 4, which views schools as embedded in larger social systems (including links to parents and the labour market), is not as obviously aligned to the Five Bridges and is highlighted in grey in Figure 2.4. Similarly, Cantley et al.'s Levels 4 and 5 are not as easily aligned to the Five Bridges and they too are in grey. As Elders' Life Course theory is mainly age and stage related, it is not represented in Figure 2.4, although the role of social and historical context would be colour-coded grey if present.

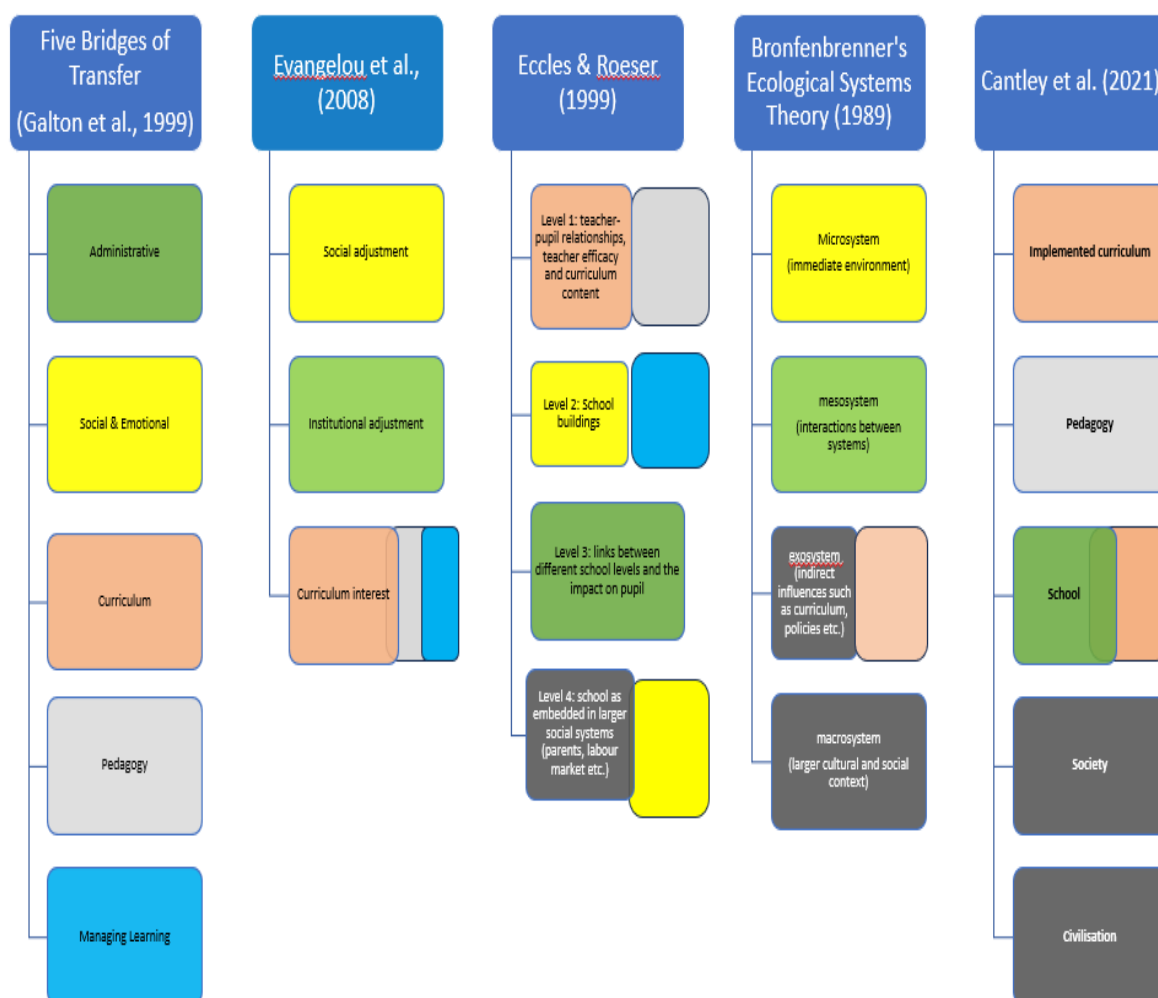
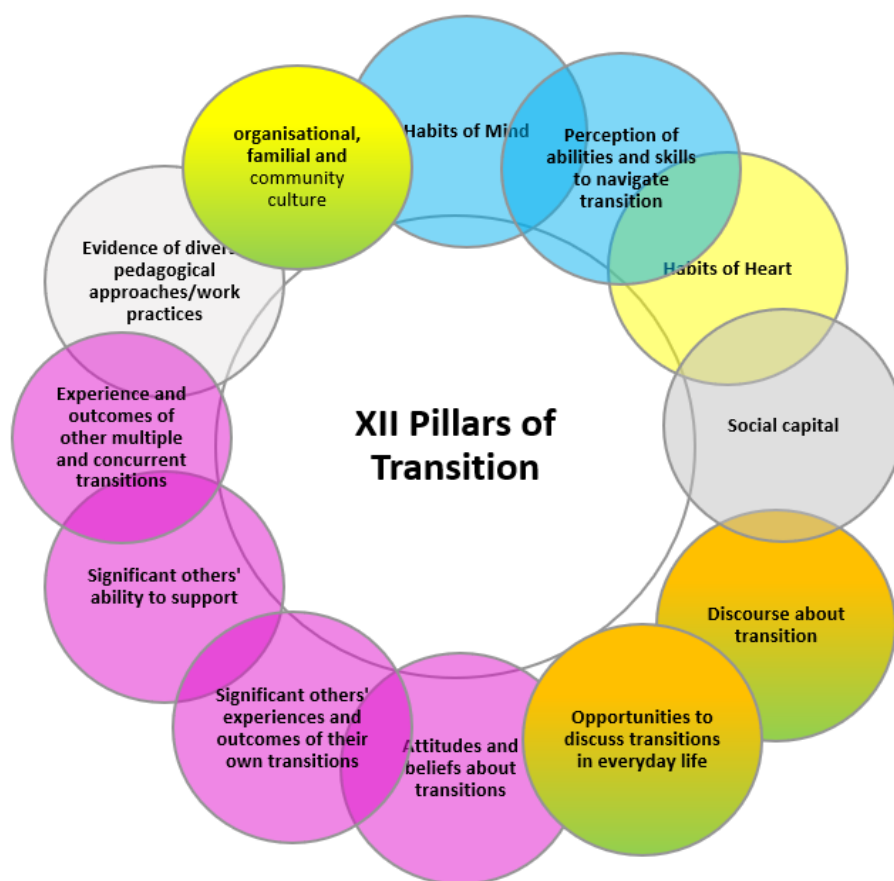


Figure 2.4 Overview of theories/frameworks aligned with the Five Bridges of Transfer.

Source: (Murray, 2023). See Appendix 2.3 for note on additional frameworks.

Note: Going from left to right, the frameworks are presented from most to least similar.



Key	
	Bridge 1 Administrative
	Bridge 2 Social and Emotional
	Bridge 3 Curriculum
	Bridge 4 Pedagogy
	Bridge 5 Managing Learning
	Significant others
	Social/cultural issues

Figure 2.5 XII Pillars of Transitions comparison. (Jindal-Snape, 2023).

With respect to Jindal-Snape's XII Pillars, the crossover between the Five Bridges is not as clear cut. An attempt has been made to align the pillars with the Five Bridges through colour-coding (see Figure 2.5). Aligning closely with Galton's Managing Learning bridge, the 'habits of mind' pillar, characterised as 'thinking dispositions,' and the 'perception of skills to navigate transition', relate to bridge 5 (blue). 'The Habits of Heart' pillar aligns with the Social and Emotional bridge (yellow). Other pillars, however,

overlap with multiple bridges, leading to somewhat less distinct categorisation. For example, the orange/green of discourse could cross over with pedagogy and curriculum, while the green/yellow could belong to both Bridge 1 and 2. Pink refers to the role of the ‘significant other’ in the transition process which could crossover with any of the bridges. Jindal-Snape (2023) advocates that teachers can leverage these twelve pillars to select pedagogical approaches that cultivate students’ habits of mind and heart and stimulate positive discussions about transitions. Although both this framework and Cantley et al.’s (2021) proposal are relatively novel, their application in published studies is yet to be fully explored.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the enduring utility of Galton’s framework extends to international research, evident in studies such as those by Galton and Willcocks (1983), Delamont and Galton (1986); Galton and McLellan (2018); Holland, Sun, Hosseinian-Far, Southwell & Smith, (2019), and many others. Moreover, within the context of Ireland, as previously mentioned, the longitudinal CSL study employs the Five Bridges framework in their analysis of transitions from pre-school to primary school, with the noteworthy addition of a sixth bridge termed Home/school partnership (NCCA, 2022). Furthermore, O’Connor and Flynn (2021) recently employed this framework to examine the perspective of Irish teachers in DEIS schools regarding transitions.

Additionally, the Five Bridges framework serves as the fundamental underpinning for the NIPT (National Induction Programme for Teachers) in structuring their workshop on the ‘Transition from primary to secondary’. Further references under the NIPT expanded ‘bureaucratic’ bridge encompass information evenings, sibling, and family influences, as well as more formal meetings between teachers at both schools and the Irish-specific Education Passport (NIPT, 2022). These instances of adoption validate the continued

relevance and applicability of Galton's Five Bridges of Transfer, solidifying its significance in understanding and addressing educational transitions.

2.2.9 Section 1 Summary

As established in Section 2.1 the terms 'transfer' and 'transition' are used differently by researchers, while the term 'transition' is used in this study. The concept of 'transition', however, in an educational research context lacks a clear-cut definition. Different viewpoints on transition exist, ranging from focusing on the individual or the environment, continuity, or discontinuity, and considering it as an event, phase, or process that can be defined by age, specific time frames, or distinct phases.

The use of theoretical frameworks in research on transition varies. As described in the literature review most studies are based on the individual researchers' view of transition rather than relying on any established by theoreticians. Notably, the most prevalent conceptualisation of transition is simply that of 'change' (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021), an idea intrinsic to the Five Bridges framework that is used in this study. Further exploration of these educational transitions and their conceptual frameworks revealed both variations and intersections (Section. 2.2.8). The Five Bridges framework, however, remains distinct in its approach, abstaining from exclusive focus on either the individual or the environment.

Having laid the theoretical foundations, the next section examines empirical data from international and national research. It analyses the impact of post-primary experiences and identifies the key factors associated with students' experiences during this transitional phase. Such knowledge allows educators to design and implement effective support systems and develop evidence-based interventions to facilitate a smooth and successful

transition for their students as they embark on the journey from primary to post-primary education.

2.3 Section 2: Navigating transition

2.3.1 Overview

This section examines factors affecting student transition during the move from primary to post-primary to understand what constitutes positive transition, and by comparison negative transition. Gaining a grasp of such factors can help teachers understand the potential influence of different factors on the transition process. The chapter outlines common concerns and the challenges faced by certain student groups.

2.3.2 Overall student experience

Edmond and Price (2012) describe a positive transition as a state where students have successfully settled and are doing well both academically and emotionally. While numerous international and national studies have consistently reported that most students undergo a successful transition (O'Brien, 2004; Smyth et al., 2004; Evangelou et al., 2008; Smyth, 2017, etc.) it is essential to acknowledge that despite the prevailing trend, some students may confront challenges.

Student anxieties and concerns

National and international studies consistently highlight that the transition from primary to post-primary education is fraught with various anxieties and concerns for students. For instance, Lester et al., (2019), in a UK study involving 109 students pre- and post-transition, found that 50% of the sample exceeded clinical levels of anxiety pre-transition. Nevertheless, these anxieties appeared to subside by the end of the first term in post-primary school. These findings are consistent with earlier studies that also reported

similar trends in pre-transition anxiety levels (Galton & Morrison, 2000; Smyth et al., 2008; Graham & Hill, 2003).

The pre-transition causes of anxiety for students encompass a range of organisational and social concerns, including a requirement to manage many subjects, navigating classroom changes, fear of bullying, unfamiliar terminology, managing lockers, mixed schools, increased homework, study techniques, and the challenges of forming new friendships while leaving old ones behind (O'Brien, 2004; Smyth et al., 2004; Mizelle, 1999; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Galton & Hargreaves, Smyth et al., 2017; Kaur et al., 2022).

The lack of friendship stability emerges as a significant contributor to anxieties for all students during this transitional period. While 79% of students in the GUI report attended post-primary with three or more friends (Williams et al., 2018), the data also indicate that at least one fifth of students report anxiety about making new friends and leaving old ones behind (Smyth, 2017). The UK study by Ng-Knight et al., (2019) of 593 students across ten post-primary schools further emphasises the importance of friendship stability as a crucial resource for children during school transitions. In urban settings, where multiple primary schools feed into a post-primary school (as is the case in Ireland), research by Temkin et al., (2018) revealed a decline in friendship stability and an increase in social distance between students.

Earlier research conducted within an Irish context also aligns with international findings, revealing that Irish teenagers encounter many similar social and emotional concerns during the transition from primary to post-primary school. Naughton (1998) examined anxieties among 6th class students in one Irish county (sample of 101 students from four schools) finding similar pre-transition concerns related to organisational, social, and emotional aspects. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of Naughton's

study. Its local focus restricts the general applicability of its findings, and the study only conducts interviews at a single data point, i.e., pre-transition. Despite these limitations, Naughton's work laid a foundational platform for future researchers to build upon and reference in exploring this critical area of study.

O'Brien's (2004) extensive quantitative study further reinforced the presence of such anxieties and provided vital insights into Irish students' experiences during this critical phase. The longitudinal approach taken by O'Brien, encompassing interviews at three points in time (pre-transition, the beginning of First year, and the end of First year), contributed to the study's reliability within its sample and methodology. The study collected data from multiple stakeholders, including 153 students, 35 primary teachers, 29 post-primary teachers and 48 parents. While some anxieties raised by students pre-transition specifically those relating to bullying, proved well-founded in this study, concerns about increased homework load and difficulty of work were not. Zeedyk et al., (2003) found similar results in their quantitative study of English and Scottish participants (n=192 primary; 128 in First year; 119 parents; 11 primary and 19 post-primary teachers). Anxieties in relation to homework were especially noticeable in lower streamed classes or disadvantaged schools where students received less homework (or none) than expected (O'Brien, 2004, p.79). According to O'Brien, this led to a sense by students being different and lowered the students' self-esteem.

O'Brien's study was one of the first longitudinal studies in Ireland on the transition from primary to post-primary. Successive smaller-scale Irish studies, such as those conducted by Downes et al., (2007) and Maunsell et al., (2007) in DEIS contexts, corroborate the feelings of anxiety and concerns within disadvantaged environments. Moreover, Irish studies conducted by Scanlan, Barnes-Holmes, McEnteggart, Desmond and Vahey

(2016) with students with Special Education Needs (SEN) during transition revealed that students with SEN expressed higher levels of specific concerns. However, Foley et al., (2016) found minimal difference between those students who were identified as having Additional Education Needs (AEN³) and those who were not identified as such (57% of non-SEN) compared to 56% SEN of a sample of 63 students, including nine identified as SEN in post-primary).

As mentioned earlier, initial anxieties about transitioning to a new school tend to be temporary. For most students, these concerns fade away relatively quickly and are replaced by more enduring worries about their overall school experience (Delamont & Galton, 1987). In fact, by the end of the first term, the majority of students see a reduction in these pre-transition anxieties (Galton et al., 1999). Graham and Hill (2003) also observed that, for some, this transitional phase can be relatively short-lived, lasting only a few months or until midterm.

A study conducted by Mudaly and Sukhdeo (2015) in a South African context found that by the end of the first term in high school, none of the students expressed a desire to return to their primary school days. This suggests that they preferred high school, despite acknowledging a significant increase in workload.

However, for some students, the challenges posed by transition may be more protracted, as found by Smyth (2017) in her analysis of the GUI study data. Smyth (2016) suggests the proportion of students experiencing protracted transition is 1 in 6 within the Irish system while Galton (2009) indicates it is approximately 10% in the UK. Yet these difficulties are not always a result of the transition to a new school environment; they are

³ Both terms SEN and AEN are used here as per the individual studies.

often linked to the personal characteristics of the students themselves. According to West et al., (2010), the wellbeing of students appears to be more closely tied to individual conditions rather than school-specific factors. This is especially true of students with AEN and those with lower self-esteem who tend to experience a more negative school transitioning experience. For those with AEN, studies recommend that a longer and more personal transition support is required (Vaz et al., (2014); Foley, Foley, & Curtain, (2016); Smyth, 2017).

Factors associated with transition difficulties

Various empirical studies have explored the relationship between the supports needed during transition and the age of the student. However, findings are varied. For instance, a substantial Norwegian study conducted by Bru et al., (2010), encompassing a sample size exceeding 7000 students, found that the amount of perceived support required decreased as students got older and is perceived as a gradual and continuous decline that occurs during the transition, rather than a sudden shift from primary to post-primary. Similarly, comprehensive research undertaken by West et al., (2010) across different age groups (11, 13-15 & 18/19) confirms the findings that difficulties diminish with increasing age, ultimately reaching a plateau by the age of 18/19. Consequently, this suggests a need for increased support during the early years of post-primary schooling. While the authors make no reference to any conceptual theory in their study other than reporting references to transition as a ‘rite of passage’, their age-related findings align with aspects of Elder’s Life Course Theory.

Smyth’s (2017) analysis of the GUI data presents an alternative perspective, emphasising that concerns and issues surrounding transitions are more closely tied to the educational stage rather than exclusively age-related development. This finding, derived from a

comparative study of various waves within the GUI study, provides an interesting counterpoint to the prevailing discourse.

Indeed, as noted in numerous literature reviews on transition, it is important to recognise the potential influence of variables such as age, gender, school size and the number of feeder schools, as they too may significantly impact the transition process. For example, Martinez et al., (2011) in the US suggests that girls may face more challenges in developing peer relationships, while McGee et al., (2003) in New Zealand found the opposite. Furthermore, Martinez et al., (2011) found that boys find negotiating the school environment more challenging than girls. Nonetheless, given the diversity in methodologies, sample sizes, and study durations among various investigations, researchers advise caution when extrapolating findings from these diverse studies (Jindal-Snape, 2020; West et al., 2010).

2.3.3 Impact of transition experience

International research consistently emphasises the critical role of positive transitions in students' academic performance and overall educational experience. Studies have revealed that positive transitions are associated with clear structure and routine (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), positive teacher-student relations (Booth & Sheehan, 2008), and dynamic, engaging, and knowledgeable teachers (Cueto et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, a decline in academic achievement has been observed during the transition from primary to post-primary. This so-called 'attainment dip' has been shown, however, to be an established and integral aspect of transition irrespective of positive or negative experiences of transition. Jindal-Snape et al.'s (2020) systematic review, analysing 14 studies on transition and student educational outcomes, found that none of the reviewed papers reported a positive effect of transition on academic performance, with the majority

indicating a decrease in grades in at least one subject. While these research findings do not definitively establish a “cause-and-effect relationship” (p.547) they underscore the prevalent pattern of declining academic performance during this period. A longitudinal study of students moving from primary to post-primary by Reyes et al., (2000) similarly identified that a drop of one grade (e.g., from A to B) was not uncommon during the transition. The data was collated from school records by tracking the grade point average drop of a group of students (n=235) from two inner city elementary schools over four years. While a more scientific approach such as the use of standardised tests, and a more diverse sample (the sample was predominately low income) would have provided more definitive results, similar observations of grade point average drops were reported by other studies such as Midgely et al., (2000), while Cauley and Jovanoich (2006) found that 38% of students performed less well academically in their US study.

Irish studies, such as Smyth et al.’s (2004) research on academic transfer, also corroborate these findings, revealing similar dips in academic performance during the transition. Their study indicated that students in the first year did not improve on their results from primary school in the areas of reading and mathematics, underscoring the challenges faced during this critical period. These research findings emphasise the importance of fostering positive transitions to support students’ academic progress and overall educational outcomes during this significant phase of their schooling.

The repercussions of negative experiences during the transition from primary to post-primary school are far-reaching. Extensive research has consistently demonstrated that such negative transitions are associated with various adverse outcomes, including early school dropout, increased absenteeism, a decline in academic performance and motivation, deterioration in subject interest, heightened support needs, and self-reported

school problems (Hanewald, 2013; Hopwood et al., 2016, etc.). West et al.'s, (2010) longitudinal Scottish study highlights the enduring implications of a smoother transition on later life. The study found that poorer school and peer transitions predicted higher levels of depression, lower attainment, reduced self-esteem, and higher levels of anti-social behaviour at the age of 15. These adverse consequences can further lead to socioeconomic difficulties later in life (Darmody, 2008; West et al., 2010). In the US, Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) observed that students facing academic difficulties were 20% more likely to leave school, underscoring the severity of the impact of negative transitions. The prevalence of negative discourse on transitions has prompted a call for more positive discussions about primary to post-primary transitions internationally (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020 in Scotland; Strand, 2020 in Norway).

2.3.4 Factors associated with students' experiences of transition

The concluding part of this section 2 examines factors such as the impact of family, teacher-student interactions, and curriculum continuity. By examining research findings, this section provides insights into areas that could be supported during this transition.

Family and background factors

The transition from primary to post-primary education is subject to the influence of various family and background factors, including the support provided by family and extended family members (Anderson et al., 2000; McGee et al., 2003). Studies have shown that students with siblings or cousins in the same school tend to experience less stress during this process (Measor & Woods, 1984; Rice, 1997; Mackenzie et al., 2012). Parental involvement emerges as a crucial element in ensuring a smooth transition, with the GUI study demonstrating that formal parental engagement in the school reduces difficulties faced by students (Smyth, 2017). Moreover, Smyth (2017) found that the day-to-day communication between parents and their children plays an even more significant

role in minimising challenges. Consequently, the parent-child relationship may underpin certain difficulties experienced during the transition period. Notably, Darmody, Robson, and McMahon (2012) found that students who have positive interactions with parents also developed better relationships with their post-primary school teachers, highlighting the essential nature of interactions between children, parents, and schools for successful transitions to post-primary education.

However, students who may not have had stable relationships in their home environment (or for those with AEN, Scanlon et al., 2016) experience difficulty in leaving behind primary school teachers with whom they had formed secure attachments (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Additionally, socio-economic status plays a role in transition difficulties, as young people from families with lower levels of education and/or unemployment often encounter more challenges during the transition (Smyth, 2017). Smyth's research also indicates that girls from lower social class groups face more challenges during the transition compared to middle-class girls, aligning with earlier findings by O'Brien (2003). These findings underscore the importance of recognising and addressing the influence of family support, socio-economic status, and interpersonal relationships in facilitating a successful transition to post-primary education.

Teacher expectations

Researchers on transition have also highlighted the concerning impact of both teachers' high expectations of students' capabilities and students' apprehension in meeting the academic demands of post-primary subjects (Evangelou et al., 2008; West et al., 2010; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). Student participants in Foley et al., (2016) identified the presence of multiple teachers with varying expectations as a key distinction between primary and post-primary schools. Primary students' expectations of how they might cope

with new subjects, material and unknown teachers' expectations emerged as a significant source of anxiety among students during the pre-transition period. This finding is further supported by other studies (Pratt & George, 2005; Crockett et al., 1989, as cited in Mackenzie et al., 2012).

O'Brien (2004) highlights the potential consequences of low teachers' expectations for lower stream students, particularly in terms of the amount of homework given, finding that it can lead to lower self-esteem and feelings of being different. Students also described the challenge of managing different expectations by teachers concerning homework. O'Brien (2004) found that many schools in her research lacked a cohesive homework policy. Prior research by Hannan et al., (1996) and Smyth (1999) revealed that students tended to perform better at Junior Certificate level when schools had clear rules and monitoring of homework, reinforced by appropriate sanctions. Additionally, Smyth et al., (2004) identified problems rooted both in low and high expectations by teachers of students' knowledge: on the one hand excessively high expectations of students' knowledge by some teachers and on the other, the repetition of content in First year. This suggests the need for greater awareness among post-primary teachers of the primary curriculum. Recommendations were made to provide information to primary teachers about the curriculum and approach taken in post-primary schools (Smyth et al., 2004)

The impact of the teacher-student relationship on academic achievement and student conduct is well-established in numerous studies (Eccles et al., 1993; Longobardi et al., 2016 as cited in Galton & McClellan, 2018). O'Brien (2004) found that the majority of students (91%) held positive views about their teachers and perceived them as supportive during the transition (*ibid.*, p.52). However, she also found that certain aspects, such as a lack of patience, unrealistic expectations, failure to listen to student concerns, and

excessive punishment for minor breaches of classroom rules, were disliked by students and could potentially affect their transitional experience. Students' perspectives from other studies also highlighted negative transition experiences associated with inadequate communication between primary and post-primary teachers (Muldaly & Sukhdeo, 2015), higher expectations and rules set by post-primary school teachers (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008), and unspoken and inconsistent rules (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013).

Teacher-student interactions

A large body of research consistently highlights the critical influence of positive teacher-student interactions and support on students' transitional experiences. While the relationship with the teacher is particularly important for those with AEN (Scanlon et al., 2016), it is also important for every student. As underscored by Smyth (1999), such positive interactions significantly bolster students' motivation and self-esteem. Nonetheless, concerning classroom dynamics, studies reveal that interactions are largely teacher-directed, with less than 49% of students reporting encouragement to ask questions during class (ibid.). Recognising the significance of this issue, the GUI study examined the frequency of various types of feedback from teachers for students transitioning from primary to post-primary education. The findings demonstrated that positive interactions outweighed negative ones, particularly among female students (Smyth, 2017). Furthermore, negative interactions with teachers were strongly associated with early school-leaving, lower educational aspirations, and poorer grades in Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations (Byrne & Smyth, 2010; Smyth et al., 2011).

Importantly, Smyth (2017) revealed that students experiencing more positive interactions with their second-level teachers, particularly in subjects like English and Irish, displayed a greater likelihood of finding the subjects interesting. Similarly, positive interactions

with post-primary Maths teachers were linked to increased interest in the subject and a diminished sense of difficulty (ibid.). These findings underscore the pivotal role played by teachers in shaping students' educational experiences and underscore the vital importance of fostering positive teacher-student interactions to enhance students' academic engagement and achievement during transitional phases.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that quality teacher-student relations may not be uniform across all schools, reducing the benefit for those concerned. In a cross-sectional study involving 230 primary and 162 economically challenged suburban post-primary Dublin schools, Downes et al., (2013) noted a significant decrease in the number of students who discussed schoolwork problems with teachers in post-primary compared to primary school. They also highlighted that within disadvantaged environments there was a statistically significant increase in students' perception of being treated unfairly by teachers in post-primary school compared to primary school. Although Smyth (2017) found that generally students were more likely to confide in a parent (83%), friend (78%), or sibling (44%) about a general problem ahead of the teacher (30%), 30% is still a substantial number of students who turn to teachers.

Transition difficulties have been found to be more prevalent in disadvantaged school environments. Smyth (2017) observed that greater transition difficulties and more negative experiences were reported among young people who had moved from DEIS primary (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) to DEIS second-level schools. However, Smyth also noted that most students from disadvantaged backgrounds do not attend DEIS post-primary schools.

Continuity in curriculum and pedagogy

Elliot (1998) states, "...mere changes in syllabus content do not require fundamental pedagogical change but curriculum change ... does, since it implies a new way of representing knowledge to the student" (as cited in Looney, 2014, p.8). The impact of change and curriculum and pedagogy continuity in mathematics was the focus of a study by Mutodi (2014) in South Africa. His study found that the factors that most impacted student performance during the transition from primary to post-primary education were the changes in curriculum context and pedagogy. These critical shifts in teaching methods and subject content were identified as key contributors to the observed decline in student performance.

Previous Irish studies by Smyth et al., (2004) also point out the vital importance of subject continuity between primary and post-primary schools. The clarity and coherence of subject continuity were found to have profound implications for students' decision-making and subject choices. Instances of uncertainty in subject continuity were shown to lead students to avoid subjects perceived as disconnected from their prior learning experiences, potentially limiting their academic and career prospects. In the context of an Irish educational setting, where students may be required to make subject choices in relation to Science or Music before commencing post-primary school, these findings take on even greater significance.

Inconsistent reference in the classroom by post-primary teachers to prior learning in primary school has been found to have a mixed impact on students in their new environments. Hawk and Hill (2004) suggest that revision serves several purposes as it overcomes a holiday break and refreshes memory from the students' perspective. Chambers (2012) posits that a lack of reference to previous learning not only indicates a

disinterest, but also “a sense of distrust of the [previous] learning” (p.87). However, Hawk and Hill (2004) acknowledge that the first few weeks can be a very boring time for students as they repeat work already done, with the result that young people can become “bored and turned off”. This was also found by Muschamp et al., (2000) and Sutton, (2000). Yet some students may need the revision. For instance, Vale et al., (2012) found that the academic attainment of students from lower socioeconomic groups significantly declined during the summer holiday period which Hopwood (2016) refers to as the “summer slide” (p.292).

Students’ attitude to subjects in primary school can significantly influence their transitional experience in post-primary education, particularly if they carry anxieties related to specific subjects with them. Kaur et al., (2022) in their review of transitional studies in Maths and Science education describe that students carry an increased anxiety in Maths (as opposed to Science). The GUI study also revealed that these early experiences influence students’ perceptions of subjects such as English, Irish, and Maths during their post-primary education (Smyth, 2017). However, there is significant between-school variation in what subjects the students perceive as difficult with the primary school they attended playing a crucial role.

Smyth (2017) also found that the extent to which primary schools prepare young people for the second-level curriculum can differ significantly. Similarly, Evangelou et al., (2008) conducted a longitudinal study involving over 500 students and families in England, finding that the work completed in Year 6 was highly beneficial for Year 7, contributing to successful transitions. Likewise, Hopwood et al., (2016) suggested that sharing students’ primary school work with post-primary teachers would provide valuable support during the transition process. This collaborative approach allows post-primary

educators to gain invaluable insights into students' abilities and areas requiring improvement.

2.3.5 Section 2 Summary

This section critically examined the challenges associated with facilitating a smooth transition from the perspective of students. Pre-transition anxieties often arise from organisational and social concerns. However, family support and positive teacher-student interactions are crucial elements that contribute significantly to successful transitions. Additionally, lack of clear connections between continuity in curriculum and pedagogy between primary and post-primary school can impact students' subject choices, attitude, and decision-making, potentially affecting their preparedness for the transition. The following section explores the role of teachers and schools in facilitating transitions, drawing insights from research conducted both nationally and internationally.

2.4 Section 3: Facilitating a smooth transition: school and teacher practices

2.4.1 Overview

Researchers have emphasised the significance of communication between schools, curriculum continuity, adequate teacher support, and positive learning environments for successful transitions (Evangelou et al., 2008; Attard, 2010; Hopwood et al., 2016; Kaur et al., 2022). While the previous section examined general and individual factors that can hamper a smooth transition for students, this section looks at transition from the perspective of the teacher, specifically, the importance of the role of the teacher, their practices, and the use of supports to address various challenges during transition. The discussion begins by considering the role of the teacher. The section continues to look at these challenges by following the structural framework of the Five Bridges of Transfer (with an initial focus on information transfer).

2.4.2 Role of the teacher

Teachers play crucial roles in facilitating successful transitions from primary to post-primary schools (Midgley et al., 2000). According to Hopwood et al., (2016), teachers occupy a central position in providing the necessary social and academic support for a successful transition. Their influence in the classroom extends to their interactions with students, establishment of routines and expectations, pedagogical practices, and subject knowledge. In Ireland, this transition entails a shift from a child-centred to a subject-centred environment (Smyth et al., 2004) and involves a change from a single teacher to multiple teachers, which can pose challenges for many students (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013), although some students may also benefit from moving on from the single teacher environment.

Smyth (2016) underscores the significance of teacher-student relationships, particularly during First year, in supporting students throughout the transition. However, teachers' professional roles within schools can influence the extent of their knowledge of individual students and the transition process. McCauley's (2010) quantitative study, involving 39 post-primary teachers from 38 different schools highlights the significant roles played by senior management in post-primary schools during the transition. This includes principals, guidance counsellors, first-year year-heads, special needs coordinators, and deputy principals. Interestingly, despite their direct involvement with SEN, some individuals in the study reported marginal participation in the transfer process. Additionally, subject teachers may not be directly involved in the transition process.

When teachers are responsible for organising structured transition programmes, Hopwood et al., (2016) found that they tend to focus more on preparing students for the “physical and structural aspects of post-primary school” (p.297), leaving academic

preparation to subject teachers. This suggests that transition initiatives are more oriented towards social and emotional support rather than academic support.

2.4.3 Administering the transition

Under Galton's Administrative bridge, the effective sharing of information is a crucial aspect of institutional and social adjustment during educational transitions (Evangelou et al., 2008). Schools with smooth transitions demonstrate close links and coordination between primary and post-primary schools. When advisory teams or inspectorates play a stronger role in the process, innovative curriculum practices and continuity are more likely to occur (*ibid.*). Administrative communication plays a pivotal role, especially in the English system, where local authorities facilitate movement to post-primary schools, passing on essential information like personal data, academic records, needs, and reports, including attendance and health issues (Galton et al., 1999). In Ireland, communication operates as a triangular process between primary schools, post-primary schools, and parents, with parents choosing the school and receiving information from the schools once a place is secured, rather than engaging with a central agency. Such a localised approach, while more personal in nature, potentially lends itself to a less formal approach to documentation and communication. Additionally, parents might be reluctant to share information with schools due to concerns about privacy.

Barber (1999) posits that the transfer of relevant documents and information ensures that post-primary schools receive useful, easy to understand information about students' ability, and enable the tracking of students' performance as they move between schools (as cited in McGee, 2003). However, transfer documents are not always effective (Gorwood, 1986; McGee, 2003; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). To address this, OFSTED

in the UK, recommended a standardised electronic minimum set of information (OFSTED, 2002).

From the teachers' perspective, the exchange of relevant information is crucial for providing adequate support during the transition process. Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) conducted a longitudinal study of eight students in Scotland and found that most practitioners and parents expressed concerns about the lack of communication between primary and post-primary schools. Although some information was shared, it often proved incomplete, inaccurate, or failed to reach the teachers. Notably, one participant highlighted a specific instance where crucial information about a child's additional support needs at the primary level was not communicated to the post-primary school, resulting in difficulties during transition and a decline in the child's self-esteem (*ibid.*, p.11). Although Bagnall et al., (2020) criticise studies that are selective in those they interview, it could be said that Jindal-Snape and Foggie's study could face similar criticism. However, similar results were reported in other UK and international studies (Gorwood, 1986; Mackenzie, 2012; O'Connor & Flynn, 2021) where transfer documents were not referenced.

Inconsistencies in the transfer and use of information are not isolated occurrences but have also been observed in other studies. Capel, Zwozdiak-Myers, and Lawrence (2004) conducted a comprehensive investigation on information transfer and planning between 80 primary and 299 post-primary schools in the domain of Physical Education, yielding mixed results. They found that although there was an exchange of information, it was not consistently practiced across all primary and post-primary schools. Among those schools that exchanged information, not all of them effectively used the received information to inform continuity and progression (*ibid.*). The study also highlights a discrepancy in the

way teachers engaged with the information provided. While some teachers of Year 7 demonstrated a willingness to read and use the information for their planning, only 10% of Year 6 teachers considered forward progression in their pedagogy planning (ibid.).

The lack of usefulness attributed to transfer documents is also addressed by McGee et al., (2003) in Australia. They highlighted that post-primary schools often receive documentation from students' prior schools, but this valuable information unfortunately is not consistently referenced. The reasons vary, ranging from the documents not reaching the classroom teacher to being ignored by them. Such criticisms are also found in other research (Galton & Wilcocks, 1983; Mizelle & Mullins, 1997; Suffolk Education Department, 1997). Furthermore, Nicholls and Gardner (1999) noted that the information provided to post-primary schools seldom encompasses the complete range of relevant details available (as cited in McGee, 2003).

In the Irish context, the available evidence on the usefulness of transfer documents remains limited. Some studies including the NCCA-commissioned report by O'Kane and Murphy (2016b) have centred on the transition between pre-school and primary levels and have provided valuable insights. O'Kane & Murphy's report shed light on the absence of a systematic and comprehensive approach to collaboration and communication regarding documentation transfer. The report indicated a relatively low transfer of information on children between pre-school and primary schools. Moreover, it revealed a concerning lack of knowledge about the subsequent handling of these documents if, and once, they reach primary schools, leading to fragmented transfers and duplicated efforts by stakeholders. The Children's School Lives study also revealed that although 54% of pre-school educators wrote reports for primary schools, only 26% of primary teachers

reported receiving such information (Sloan et al., 2022, p.28). These statistics are within the context of Ireland having introduced formal transfer documentation.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that even before the introduction of formal transfer documentation, Ireland faced communication gaps. O'Brien's (2004) study, published a year after McGee's research, underlined the critical necessity for improved communication between primary and post-primary levels. A comprehensive investigation by Smyth et al., (2004) explored this concern, revealing that only a minority of post-primary school principals reported receiving information on incoming students. The study pointed out principals' dissatisfaction with the quality of the information received, particularly pertaining to "the coverage of the curriculum" (p.282). Adding to the matter, most communication regarding incoming students was primarily verbal, rather than documented. These findings support similar observations made in other Irish studies (Lowe, 2019; O'Brien, 2004).

McCauley's (2010) study involving 39 post-primary teachers from 38 different schools participating in an SEN course, revealed a good level of general awareness among educators of transition issues for students with additional needs. Nonetheless, the study also identified certain challenges, notably the lack of comprehensive information provided to teachers concerning students' needs, and the subsequent difficulty of "effectively adjusting instruction based on this limited information" (p.69). Notably, a large number of participants emphasised the "highly significant" role (p.70) of information transfer, particularly regarding social and emotional issues.

In another study by Barnes-Holmes et al., (2013), it was observed that although Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students with SEN were indeed received by post-primary resource teachers, only 25% of first-year teachers had received formal training in working

with IEPs. However, the communication between primary and post-primary schools concerning students with SEN was positive. Specifically, 87% of primary schools (n=32) reported having direct contact with the destination post-primary schools of their SEN students, and 95% of post-primary principals were aware of the primary schools from which these students were coming. It is important to note that this evidence predates the introduction of formal transfer documentation in Ireland for all students.

McCauley's (2010) study provides valuable insights into the post-primary teachers' general awareness of transition issues for students, yet it also highlights the existence of certain difficulties. To tackle the challenges in information transfer during the transition process, formal transfer documentation, such as the Education Passport (EP), was introduced. However, evidence suggests that awareness of the EP among teachers remains low. In a survey conducted by Prendergast et al., (2019) among primary and post-primary Maths teachers in Ireland, 72% of post-primary Maths teachers and nearly 90% of primary teachers were found to be unaware of the Education Passport. This study had included a substantial sample, covering 27.7% of all post-primary schools in Ireland. Similarly, a smaller-scale study by O'Connor and Flynn (2021) involving 55 English, Irish, and Maths teachers in DEIS post-primary schools consistently reported a lack of awareness of the EP, suggesting that this knowledge gap is not confined to Maths teachers alone.

Evidence, however limited in Ireland, suggests that transfer information is also not used to its full potential. 74% of second-level Maths teachers were uncertain if their schools referred to the EP (Prendergast et al., 2019). Similarly, O'Connor and Flynn (2021) found that 72.7% of their respondents indicated either uncertainty about the EP's usage or, whether the NCCA Education Passport had significantly impacted their practice as First

year teachers. Uncertainty about access to information was also found by Foley et al., (2016). Additionally, Lowe (2019) discovered (in her qualitative research involving participants from nine different post-primary schools) that one of the primary reasons for the perceived lack of usefulness of the EP was the timing of its receipt, with some schools not receiving it until November. One participant teacher revealed, “I have never been told about their uses and how I should be handling them once they arrive” (p.51).

2.4.4 Social, emotional, and academic supports

The role of schools and teachers in facilitating successful transitions for students is vital, encompassing the development of belongingness, school connectedness, and effective communication. According to Nichols (2006) students perceive three categories of belongingness in schools: interpersonal relationships (teacher-student and student-student); the learning and academic community, and the school facilities and activities (as cited in Longaretti, 2020). Attard’s (2010) longitudinal Australian study⁴ also found similar factors citing support from school-based professionals as crucial factors for successful transitions by teachers and schools. A strong sense of connectedness to a school was also found to lead to fewer academic, social, and emotional problems for students (Waters et al., 2014).

School activities can positively impact students’ experience of transition. Provision of pastoral care strategies and academic support by schools was found to significantly impact students’ social and emotional concerns (Hanewald, 2013). In contrast, the absence of transition or induction programmes in schools has been linked to increased issues of bullying (Frey et al., 2009). The benefits are evident for both parents and students and can have short- and longer-term effects. Positive preparation through pre-

⁴ 20 students in Maths education.

transition activities has also been found to be effective in supporting positive transitions for both parents and students (Graham & Hill, 2003; Coffey, 2013; Rice et al., 2015; Strand, 2020). In addition, schools with extensive transition programmes experienced significantly lower failure and dropout rates compared to those schools without comprehensive programmes in a US study by Bottoms, 2002, (as cited in Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Maher's (2010) quantitative investigation involving 22 primary students, demonstrated that using the internet to communicate with students and teachers in post-primary school offered valuable preparation for primary school students, fostering the development of relationships with post-primary students and teachers (as cited in Spernes, 2022).

The evidence strongly advocates for the implementation of comprehensive programmes and supports to facilitate successful student transitions. Studies propose a range of effective strategies, including mentor systems, collaboration with older students, engagement in extra-curricular clubs, specific form tutors, and explicit group activities within classes aimed at fostering connections among students (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Galton et al., 1990, 2018; Evangelou et al., 2008, etc.). To address students' concerns comprehensively, transition activities must encompass academic, developmental, social, and procedural aspects (Black, 1999; Schumacher, 1998, as cited in Cauley & Jovanovich, 2016). In addressing concerns related to friendship groups, schools can play an active role by considering students' friendship preferences when forming class groups, thereby contributing to reduced poor conduct and increased academic achievement (Ng-Knight et al., 2019).

It is crucial for schools to recognise that some students may take the entire first term to acclimatise to their new environment, while others need longer. This suggests that

continuous support throughout the academic year should be available, rather than just during the pre- and post-transition periods. Graham and Hill (2003), McLellan and Galton (2015), and Jindal-Snape and Cantali (2019) all recommend extending supports throughout the academic year. This is particularly recommended for students with additional needs (Foley et al., 2016). It is important to acknowledge that the length of induction programmes and transition supports may be a key factor in determining positive transitions for some students. However, there is inconsistency in the length of supportive initiatives across schools. McCauley (2010) found that out of the 38 schools in his study, only six continued their induction programmes beyond September, and two schools extended their monitoring process into the second year (p.71).

The social and emotional supports required during transitions fall under Galton's second bridge, which, according to Galton and McLellan (2018), has been well supported compared to other bridges in their study 20 years after ORACLE. In an Irish context, evidence shows that students' social and emotional concerns are also well supported. The GUI data show that 62.6% of schools had formal transition programmes with class tutors and induction days. Student mentoring was present in over 90% of schools (Williams et al., 2018). Induction data in O'Connor and Flynn (2021) also found that this bridge required the least amount of formal support in the form of CPD (Continuing Professional Development) for teachers with 83.6% of 55 teachers indicating that their schools were effectively supporting their students through induction programmes and practices. For students in need of additional supports - such as those with less stable parental relationships as identified by Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) – increased involvement of primary teachers in transition programmes could play a role in successful adjustment. However, Smyth et al., (2004) found that while such programmes may reduce anxiety,

the day-to-day interactions with post-primary teachers play a more crucial role in ensuring successful transitions.

Transition initiatives in schools also address academic supports such as study skills. Galton et al.'s fifth bridge called Managing Learning, is focussed on students and the development of essential skills appropriate to their new learning environment. These skills encompass independent learning, organisational abilities, and metacognitive skills, which involve knowing how to learn effectively. While 75.8% of post-primary schools in Ireland (GUI study) state that they offer a study skills programme as part of transition, this aspect is not rated as a most important element in transition for schools (Williams et al., 2018). The literature review by Kaur et al., (2022) that focusses on Maths and Science education, underlines the significance of fostering a learning environment where students feel comfortable making mistakes. Such a supportive atmosphere leads to increased student enjoyment, self-confidence, and the cultivation of a growth mindset, ultimately promoting resilience (Kaur & Prendergast, 2021, as cited in Kaur et al., 2022, p.18).

Alongside emotional, social, and academic supports, studies also highlight the importance of addressing students' organisational and academic capabilities. However, O'Connor and Flynn (2019) found that teachers felt they needed CPD to support students in this area. 89.1% of 55 teachers expressed a need for training on managing students' metacognitive skills and requested additional support in managing student learning, organisational skills, and pedagogy. This highlights the need for better teacher preparation and CPD in addressing these aspects to effectively support students' successful transitions.

Indeed, school autonomy has been identified as an important factor in ensuring successful transitions, as emphasised in Coffey, Berlach, and O'Neill's (2011) study on transition programmes in six Australian Catholic schools. The researchers highlighted several key factors that support effective transitions, such as designating a co-ordinator for transition programmes, implementing mentorship programmes with older students, providing opportunities for students and parents to experience the academic programme and school culture, strategic timing of academic testing to prevent disruptions, and arranging appropriate rites of passage in the departing school. Coffey et al.'s study was comprehensive (n=506 students; 334 parents, and 86 teachers in six schools). It was also conducted at a time when the schools in this part of Australia were moving from a three-tiered structure to a two-tier structure (from a continuity perspective to a 'rite of passage' perspective). Therefore, the study's findings are uniquely placed to pinpoint the importance of granting schools autonomy in designing programmes that are tailored to their specific cohort. In Irish schools, Lowe (2019) observed a considerable amount of autonomy in how they handled transitions, but she also observed that commonalities were nonetheless evident in their timeframes and methods.

2.4.5 Curriculum and pedagogy

According to Dewey (1902/1990) academic work that is meaningful to the historical and developmental reality of students' experiences will promote sustained attention, high investment of cognitive and affective resources in learning, and strong identity with educational goals and aims (as cited in Eccles & Roeser, 2003). As Eccles and Roeser state, content that encourages meaningful student engagement is critical because "boredom in school, low interest, and perceived irrelevance of the curriculum are associated with poor attention, diminished achievement, disengagement and alienation from school" (ibid., p.410). Braund (2009) identified four themes that negatively

influence performance in, and attitudes to, the subject of Science in post-primary. These are (1) repetition of material without sufficient increase in challenge; (2) the environment and culture of learning where teaching styles and teacher's language are different to primary schools; (3) value placed on previous learning, where teachers do not make use of or refer to students' previous learning or use information to plan; and (4) lack of trust in assessment by post-primary teachers in students' performance in primary tests, citing grade inflation and intensive revision as reasons.

Efforts to maintain curriculum continuity in the UK during the 1980s resulted in the introduction of bridging units, undertaken in the last term of primary and the first few weeks of post-primary. However, studies have shown varying results regarding their effectiveness. Some bridging units were successful, particularly those that were locally based and involved collaboration between teachers in feeder schools and transfer schools (Galton, 2009). Nonetheless, challenges were encountered, such as accommodating bridging units in busy school timetables and inconsistent completion of such bridging units by students as they come from multiple feeder schools (Galton, 2003).

The dip in academic attainment has been associated with discontinuity in pedagogical approaches and curricula between primary and post-primary schools (Galton et al., 1999; Hargreaves & Galton, 2002; Smyth et al., 2004; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). However, Ryan et al., (2021), in an Irish study that used mathematical testing, found that an academic dip in Maths could be attributed to First year teacher's knowledge of the primary curriculum and teaching methodologies. This is despite a Common Introductory Course (similar to a bridging unit) that had been introduced to bridge the specific gap in Maths. Similarly, from South Africa, Mudaly and Sukhdeo (2015) also suggest that differences in teaching methods could be linked to a dip in students' mathematical

achievement. According to their participants, lessons (in high school) lacked drilling and continuous revision as compared to primary school. This change in pedagogy affected the way these learners performed in the classroom. They expected “drill and memorising to continue into the higher grades” (p.250). They also found that teachers from post-primary schools did not necessarily make the effort to meet with teachers in the primary school. The researchers suggest that the decline in learner achievement after the transition could be attributed to the lack of communication between teachers in both levels about the maths taught, the types of learners they have and the possible collaboration in their work. However, the size of the sample (six students and four teachers) is a limitation of this study.

The findings from Galton and McLellan’s research over a 20-year period highlight concerning trends in certain transfer bridges. Their 2018 results indicate a regression rather than progression in some respects. Specifically, teachers’ expectations of what had been learned in feeder schools remained generally low and contact between schools remained predominantly at an administrative level. Their analysis showed that over time, no changes were evident in two critical bridges - Curriculum and Pedagogy (Galton et al., 2018). In the past, practices involved bridging units and collaborative efforts between teachers from different schools to support students transitioning from primary to post-primary education. However, they found that these collaborative practices seemed to have regressed, with no activity in pedagogy transfer.

2.4.6 Section 3 Summary

In conclusion, achieving successful educational transitions hinges on effective information sharing, close coordination between primary and post-primary schools, and the implementation of supportive measures such as pastoral care and preparation activities. While transfer documents can be beneficial, their effectiveness can vary.

Schools and teachers are pivotal in facilitating positive transitions. They do so by fostering a sense of belonging, enhancing school connectedness, and maintaining open communication. The autonomy of schools is crucial, and notable improvements have been made in addressing previous issues. Adequate social and emotional support systems are well-established, although teachers may benefit from additional training to support and manage students' metacognitive and organisational skills. In summary, providing sustained support throughout the transitional period is essential for students to successfully adapt to new educational environments.

2.5 Section 4: Teachers and transition

2.5.1 Overview

Although the ideal transition arrangement involves knowledge, communication, collaboration and support initiatives between schools and teachers, the realities of the profession often hinder this. This section focuses on teachers, the barriers they may face during the transition period, their knowledge of transition and the factors that may impact how they use this knowledge in practice. Lastly, it considers where teachers might acquire knowledge about transitions and explores the various factors that shape teacher development.

2.5.2 Transition and teachers' concerns

To ensure the efficacy of professional development, it is imperative to address the specific needs that teachers have identified (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). According to Evans (2010), the success of professional growth hinges on two pivotal factors: (1) teachers' motivation and (2) the approach employed in delivering developmental opportunities. However, within the context of educational transitions, there exists a scarcity of empirical evidence regarding the impact of Irish post-primary teachers' involvement in professional development.

The National Induction Programme for Teachers' (NIPT) review conducted by Smyth (2016) did not incorporate the concept of transition as one of the fundamental Continuing Professional Development (CPD) topics for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs). Nonetheless, it is important to note that a specialised workshop addressing the transition from primary to post-primary education is available, tailored explicitly for post-primary educators.

Insights into the concerns of Irish teachers about transition (beyond their initial teacher education) can be gleaned from Darmody's (2008) comparative study between Ireland and Estonia. Focussing on teachers' perspectives, the study pinpointed factors that were perceived to contribute to challenges faced by Irish students during transitions. Analysing quantitative data from 567 Irish post-primary principals who took part in the *Moving Up* (Smyth, 2004) longitudinal study, the findings revealed that their foremost concerns were academic in nature. Notably, literacy (59%) and numeracy (58%) were the top concerns, closely followed by apprehensions about homework volume, and an increased number of subjects. Roughly 50% of principals voiced minor concerns about differing teaching styles, while 10% did not view teaching styles as significant. Similar outcomes were

echoed in terms of worries about schoolwork being excessively challenging. These findings were corroborated by interviews conducted by Darmody with 916 Irish first-year students from the same study who generally felt adequately prepared for the transition. Similar findings are found in Prendergast et al.'s (2019) study twenty years later.

Cross-sectoral collaboration

While cross-sectoral collaboration plays a vital role in facilitating effective communication between schools, the lack of sharing of expertise and information between primary and post-primary teachers transcends national educational systems. The TALIS report indicates that, overall, 44% of teachers engage in training focussed on peer learning and networking. This statistic stands out given that collaborative learning ranks among the most impactful training elements identified by teachers in TALIS (OECD, 2019)⁵. Moreover, Hopwood et al., (2016) found that while both primary and post-primary teachers are aware that knowledge of each other's teaching practices and curricula would be beneficial, in reality, they had little awareness.

Regarding collaboration within the Irish context, the scope of empirical evidence relating to primary-to-post-primary collaboration is limited. However, insights from research focussing on *pre-school to primary school* collaboration shed light on similar trends. In a NCCA (2022) study, 92% of preschool teachers reported that cross-sector classroom visits between primary and preschool teachers were non-existent. Furthermore, 90% of respondents stated that the exchange of teaching and learning policies between these educational levels was also non-existent.

⁵ Ireland has not taken part in TALIS since 2008.

Turning to the transition from primary to post-primary education, empirical evidence from the Irish post-primary perspective is notably scarce. McCauley's (2010) small-scale study provides some insight into this area, revealing a one-sided nature of transfer activities. It indicated that primary schools predominantly engaged in pre-transfer visits to post-primary schools, while reciprocal visits by primary teachers were notably absent (p.73). Comparable findings are echoed in Hopwood et al.'s (2016) study conducted in Tasmania. When teachers were asked for recommendations to improve the transition, the study found a noteworthy divergence between primary and post-primary teachers' contributions. More primary teachers than their post-primary counterparts recommended increased communication and more frequent school visits between the two levels.

Teachers and professional development

Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) have found that successful professional development occurs when there is active participation and hands-on experience rather than abstract discussions. This leads to increased motivation and a feeling of responsibility for their own development rather than perceiving it as mandated. In their study of in-depth interviews with 12 teachers from primary and post-primary schools in Tasmania, Hopwood et al., (2016) asked teachers about their perceptions of best practice in the preparation of students for successful transitions. According to the teachers, adequate teacher support in terms of time and resources, curriculum continuity and awareness, and communication between the schools were essential for successful transitions. McGee et al., (2003) had reported similar concerns by teachers such as large numbers of feeder schools and lack of time for staff to discuss current issues.

Insights into the impact of cross-sectional curriculum and pedagogy collaboration between teachers within an Irish context are described in a limited number of Irish studies. Research conducted as part of PISA 2006 (but specific to Ireland) by Eivers, Shiel, and Cheevers, (2006) looked at curriculum continuity through teacher CPD. In a survey sample of 668 Science teachers from 163 post-primary schools, with an average of 17 years of experience, the researchers focussed on the introduction of the revised Science Junior Certificate of 2003 to “create a better match between primary and post-primary syllabi” (ibid., p.3). The study found that despite specific training given to these teachers on the revised syllabus and the primary Science curriculum, only 6% of the participants described themselves as familiar with the Science content and processes in primary school Science.

German teacher participants in Chambers’ (2018) study also noted that initial collaboration worked for a while but did not result in longer-term effects. However, the impact of workshops to effect change has been challenged by Day and Sachs (2004) who believe that “one-shot” workshops (p.47) or “spray-on CPD” (p.21) fail to effect change in practice or competences. Darling-Hammond et al., (2009) also found in their US study that 90% of teachers found that such sessions had little or no impact on their practice or their students’ learning.

While Eivers et al., (2006) found little impact on teachers’ scientific knowledge, McCormack et al.’s (2014) action research study on the implementation of the Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE) programme across 11 primary and six post-primary schools yielded benefits for students’ academic achievement. For students who had been taught the course across primary and post-primary schools, better academic achievement was observed. McCormack et al.’s rationale for the success of their study

was based on research that found “changing teacher pedagogy cannot be done through short one-off courses” but requires “extended opportunities to engage with professional development” (p.2904). The programme was implemented over 6th class and in First and Second year, focusing on collaboration and communication of subject content and methods between teachers, resulting in improved academic outcomes. Teachers were trained specifically in different teaching methodologies for primary and post-primary levels for this study and not just in curriculum knowledge. Interestingly, they also found that the non-specialisation of primary teachers in Science was not a disadvantage (p.2912). The success of this content-specific and classroom-based sharing of expertise echoes results in Roth et al., (2011) in the US, where students of those who participated in the programme achieved greater learning gains (as cited in Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

Although evidence may not be extensive in an Irish context, there is consensus that cross-sectoral CPD would be beneficial. O’Connor and Flynn (2021) found that 89.1% of teachers expressed willingness to embrace cross-sectoral CPD, while Prendergast et al., (2019) reported 95% of respondents agreeing with this notion. Prendergast et al., (2019) also found that the majority of CPD for Maths teachers was level specific and that teachers welcomed cross-sectoral CPD. These Irish studies welcome and call for cross-sectoral collaboration, specifically in relation to curriculum, pedagogy and managing learning bridges.

2.5.3 Teachers’ perspectives on pedagogy and learning

Knowledge of students’ prior knowledge is recognised as a competence required for effective teaching in the 21st century (European Commission, 2012b). However, research has shown that recognition of prior learning is low by teachers. Despite students having

completed between six and eight years of primary school, studies show that a ‘fresh start approach’ is preferred by subject teachers when students come into post-primary schools (Jindal-Snape & Miller, 2008; Galton et al., 1999). Issues that arise are summed up succinctly in the following quote:

Problems included post-primary teachers repeating topics already studied at primary school, ignoring or distrusting information from feeder (primary) schools, teaching to the lowest common denominator, discontinuity in and ignorance of each others’ schemes of work and teaching strategies, and failure to build on the work of primary school (Suffolk Education Department, 1997; Thornton, 1999a; Ward, 2001). (McGee et al., 2003, p.21).

Mills (1996) identified five approaches to the introduction of Music to First year students by teachers. The first approach involved the creation of ability groups based on a superficial test; the second approach involved the teacher using questioning techniques to ask about previous learning; the third approach was back to basics approach of teaching fundamental concepts; the fourth involved the praising of all music produced regardless of ability; the fifth approach (‘no keyboards until Xmas’) removed musical resources (cited in Marshall & Hargreaves, 2007). As pointed out by Marshall and Hargreaves, little empirical evidence exists to support Mills (who based this on anecdotal evidence from their role in the Inspectorate in the UK). However, examples of these different approaches by teachers have been cited by Galton et al., (1999) in observations of first days in school of the ORACLE studies.

Curriculum continuity also varies. In the UK, research has uncovered a notable lack of continuity in curricula, and teachers in secondary education often possess limited knowledge of what was covered in the final year of primary school (Galton & Willcocks, 1983; Delamont & Galton, 1986; Galton et al., 1999; 2002; Galton & McLellan, 2018). Studies from ORACLE revealed that teachers occasionally spoke disparagingly about

primary school work, even referring to it as “not disciplined or serious work,” resulting in a lack of continuity as teachers frequently began anew, either for revision purposes or due to misconceptions about the quality of primary education (Hargreaves & Galton, 2002). Unfortunately, as Galton (2009) highlights, the ‘fresh start approach’ continues to dominate despite numerous studies.

Chambers’ (2018) qualitative investigation of 25 post-primary language teachers in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, reflects similar concerns during the transition from primary to secondary education. His study revealed a lack of awareness among post-primary teachers regarding prior approaches or materials used in primary education. Collaboration between primary and post-primary teachers had also declined in that region, a trend observed by Galton et al., (2018) in other contexts. Reasons behind the ‘fresh-start approach’ were identified by Comber and Galton (2002). These included the desire to establish an equitable starting point for all students, regardless of their primary school background. (While there are merits to this approach, the advantages of revision are discussed in Section 2.3.4).

Turning to Ireland, while empirical evidence is limited, Smyth (2004) found that around 50% of teachers demonstrated some familiarity with the primary school curriculum, a familiarity often influenced by the strength of relationships between post-primary and primary feeder schools. This research underscores the significance of integration within post-primary schools (ibid., p.143).

More recent insights into the perspective of Irish post-primary teachers have emerged from O’Connor and Flynn’s (2021) study. Their study revealed a general lack of knowledge about primary curricula, with only one out of 55 respondents demonstrating awareness of primary-level learning outcomes. This one teacher’s awareness stemmed

from their involvement in a research project. Prendergast et al.'s (2019) quantitative study (298 primary-level 6th class teachers and 173 second-level Maths teachers), echoes these findings. Their research emphasises the lack of curriculum knowledge and limited communication between teachers at both levels, despite the existence of a Bridging Framework for mathematics. This framework, designed to explain differences between primary and secondary mathematical terms and concepts, has not resolved the issue of curriculum discontinuity within the subject.

Differences in understanding

While a lack of communication between teachers and schools and insufficient knowledge of primary school curriculum and pedagogy is often cited as a potential reason for discontinuity in pedagogy and curricula, other factors have also been suggested. Strand's (2020) small-scale Norwegian study of 12 post-primary practitioners highlighted the issue of common understanding of terms, especially concerning descriptions of levels of attainment in transfer documents. One participant emphasised the need for primary and post-primary teachers to share a common understanding of how "goal achievement is defined" (ibid., p.138). Without this common understanding, challenges arise in adjusting teaching practices for lower-achieving students in the first term (ibid.). Furthermore, Delamont identified the use of different terminology within subjects between primary and post-primary teachers as a factor that differentiates one level from the other (as cited in Comber & Galton, 2002). In addition, Galton and Wilcocks (1983) found in ORACLE⁶ that, in some cases, students had to learn new ways of approaching Maths, including new procedures and terminology.

⁶ ORACLE – Observational Research and Classroom Learning Environment.

Managing learning

In Section 2.3, the student's perspective on managing their learning was discussed. From the teachers' perspective differences in learning expectations can present difficulties for students and teachers. Galton and Pell (2002) found that students are expected to work more independently in class, with teachers offering "less personalised support" than in primary school (as cited in Symonds & Galton, 2014, p.7). Klatter, Lodewijks and Aarnoutse, (2001) found that students undergoing the transition from primary to post-primary education showed significant changes in learning conceptions, particularly pre-, during, and post-transition (as cited in Robbers et al., 2018). In the Netherlands, Robbers et al., (2018) tracked students' learning conceptions during their last two years of primary school and the first two years of post-primary education. They used a Likert scale survey to measure eight scales of learning conceptions, with a focus on 'external regulation' (ER), which reflects the extent to which students rely on external guidance, particularly from teachers. The findings showed that ER decreased during the four-year study, but there was an increase between years two and three, which corresponded to the transition years. However, ER levels stabilised by the fourth year. Notably, the study also found that girls relied less on ER compared to boys during the same period.

These findings highlight the importance of teachers being aware of changes in students' learning conceptions during transition and adapting their pedagogical approach accordingly. However, it is essential to strike a balance between providing support for students who need it and encouraging autonomy in learning to prevent disengagement. According to Deakin Crick et al., (2010) while some schools have adopted metacognitive and learning styles programmes to encourage students to guide their own learning, such progressive approaches are not widespread (as cited in Symonds & Galton, 2014). However, it must be acknowledged that the use of learning styles has been criticised as

being without scientific basis (Kirschner, 2017). Critics also reference the fact that “self-reported preferred way of learning is often a bad predictor of the way people learn most effectively; what people prefer is not, per definition, what is best for them” (ibid., p.167).

2.5.4 Disparities in policy and practice

The previous discussion highlighted the significant role of teachers in successful transitions from primary to post-primary education. This section follows by delving deeper into the challenges that hinder this process, including the lack of collaboration and discrepancies between intended and implemented curricula. To address these issues, the importance of effective professional development and continuous collaboration is highlighted, aimed at better supporting students’ transitions.

Despite extensive research and policy guidelines aimed at achieving a smooth transition, the issue of transitional challenges persists. Handal and Herrington (2003) identified a disparity between the intended curriculum, prescribed by policymakers, and the implemented curriculum, reflecting what teachers actually put into practice in schools (as cited in Ní Dhuinn et al., 2021, p.25). McGarr et al., (2023) in their study into the Junior Cycle also found that such variation exists between what the Junior Cycle calls for and what happens in Irish classrooms. Notwithstanding this, the post-primary teachers mainly agreed that the new Junior Cycle has strengthened links between primary and post-primary (ibid.).

Orafi and Borg’s (2009) small-scale qualitative study on changes to the English language curriculum in Libya reveals multiple interlinking factors that explain the gap between the intended and implemented curriculum. Teachers filter the content and pedagogy of the new curriculum based on what they find feasible and desirable in their specific context. The researchers suggest that this filtering process is influenced by teachers’ personal

theories about teaching and learning, which ultimately shape their implementation choices. Similar findings are evident in Manouchehri and Goodman's (1998) US study on Maths teaching, where teachers' knowledge of content, innovative pedagogical practices, and personal theories about learning and teaching mathematics significantly influenced their implementation of educational programmes.

In his discussion on 'How teacher education can make a difference' Korthagen (2010) outlines five reasons for the potential disparity between research and practice. Although Korthagen frames his discussion in the context of Initial Teacher Education (ITE), it can be relevant to any teacher in any school at any stage of their career. Firstly, Korthagen refers to the existence of established practices within schools, making it challenging for an individual teacher to influence these patterns. Secondly, Korthagen highlights the complexity of teaching, which is influenced by various factors, including the curriculum, context, and students' responses to instruction at a particular time, (as discussed by Hoban (2005) and cited in Korthagen's work). This complexity aligns with the notion of situational context mentioned by Blömeke and Kaiser (2017). Thirdly, Korthagen points to the learning process within teacher education itself, referring to Wubbels' (1992) research, which emphasises the powerful role of teachers' prior knowledge and the resistance to change displayed by their preconceptions. This resistance can be attributed to their extensive experiences as students within the educational system, (as explained by Joram and Gabriele (1998) and Lortie and cited in Korthagen, 2010, p.709). Fourthly, Korthagen discusses epistemological problems, highlighting that teachers require not only formal knowledge but also practical knowledge, (as defined by Fenstermacher, 1994, *ibid.*). They often face time constraints and seek prompt and concrete answers to address various situations, (as described by Eraut, 1995, *ibid.*). Insufficient time allocated to communication between primary and post-primary sectors was also cited by Foley et al.,

(2016) who called for an understanding of the demands of teachers at both levels to improve curricula and teaching methods. However, as previously discussed, Mudaly and Sukhdeo (2015) found, the teachers also “didn’t make the effort” to meet their primary colleagues.

Lastly, Korthagen addresses the emotional aspect of teaching, recognising that teaching is a profession in which feelings and emotions play an essential role. While the fourth reason may seem less applicable to transition compared to the previous three, the issue of time, the need for increased planning time and increased resources was found by Hopwood et al., (2016) as important for teachers to ensure successful transition. Provision of emotional and social support to students is also significant as it requires teachers to be empathetic. Characteristics generally associated with teacher support include being caring, friendly, understanding, and dependable (Ryan & Patrick, 2001, as cited in Coffey et al., (2011).

Korthagen’s five reasons resonate within an Irish context, particularly in relation to primary education, which has undergone significant changes over the past two decades. Many post-primary teachers may not have had direct involvement with primary schools since they were in school. Consequently, they would rely on information gained from their ITE or professional development opportunities. Additionally, Irish teachers are often resistant to change, as evidenced by the contested introduction of changes to the Junior Cycle during 2012 to 2017, leading to strikes and non-engagement with new practices. This ultimately resulted in a modified form of the Junior Cycle framework (as cited in Ní Dhuinn et al., 2021, p.25). It is indeed challenging for individuals to initiate change, regardless of their position. However, support through local and national policies is recommended. For example, the findings of GUI underscore the significance of fostering

a positive climate within school policies to enhance students' wellbeing (Smyth, 2016, p.473). References to the beneficial impact of local school policies on homework have already been referenced. Yet McGuckin (2019) highlights the fact that despite a lack of formal policies on dissemination and accessing of information on students (in this context - students with AEN) communication was happening with First year teachers. McGuckin suggests that in the absence of some form of "ownership of the communication and information flow, there are opportunities for latent errors with a potential for negative outcomes for students" (p.11).

Internationally, Spernes (2022) notes that educational policies are rarely mentioned in international articles on transition. Yet recommendations for collaboration within policies are increasingly being made in studies. Mumford and Birchwood (2021) (citing research by Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013) suggest that professionals should work at different levels of the school system, collaborating with schools to develop a whole-school ethos and school policies that impact transitions. Holland et al.'s (2019) small-scale study on information transfer also recommends the establishment of consistent policies, protocols, and evaluation surveys. Kaur et al., (2022) also make similar recommendations.

Researchers also emphasise the value of ITE programmes in imparting knowledge about primary to post-primary transition. But unfortunately, ITE programmes seem to be underutilised. According to O'Connor and Flynn (2021), the lack of knowledge regarding transition process in ITE consecutive programmes remains an issue, despite changes in the revised Teaching Council guidelines for ITE programmes (DES, 2017). Although only one teacher in their study mentioned having experience of observing a primary class as part of their course, it is unclear whether the sample in the study consisted of graduates from concurrent or consecutive programmes, as primary school placements are sometimes part of concurrent ITE programmes.

Trust, attitude, and accountability as barriers

Inter-institutional collaboration stands as a pivotal principle for facilitating effective transitions, as emphasised in the EU's published guidelines for policy development on learner pathways and school education transitions (European Commission, 2018). The document, grounded in international research, states that successful collaboration requires robust mechanisms to ensure a smooth flow of information between educational institutions. It also requires a clear mutual understanding of responsibilities. The "sending" institution holds crucial insights into the learner, making them ideally positioned to lead transition planning. However, this collaboration is "as much a matter of trust and professional relationships as it is of data-sharing" (ibid., pp.15-16), what Zinger et al., (2019) refer to as complex "second order barriers" (pp.577-593), such as teachers' beliefs, values, self-efficacy, and attitudes⁷.

Mutual respect seems to underpin this distrust. Louis and Marks (1998) found that when teachers respect professional learning communities, they set higher expectations for their students, which can lead to improved academic performance. Moreover, the presence of a supportive network of peers and educators allows students to receive the necessary assistance to reach their learning goals effectively. As teachers work together and share best practices, the overall quality of classroom pedagogy improves, enhancing the learning experience for students (as cited in Matheson and Windle, 2017).

Hopwood et al.'s (2016) study gives some insight into transition and perceptions of responsibility. Their study of twelve Year 6 and 7 teachers found that a few of these

⁷ Zinger et al., (2019) investigated the hurdles faced by teachers in implementing classroom changes, identifying two categories: "First order barriers" and "second order barriers". First order barriers, linked to the school environment, encompass logistical factors like access and time. Zinger et al.'s focus was on technology integration; the applicability of these categories extends to teachers navigating transition contexts as well.

primary teachers did nothing to prepare their students for transition other than accommodating the post-primary schools and what they wanted, while the post-primary teachers stated that it was the post-primary's responsibility to design and organise transition programmes. In Ireland, Smyth (2016) found that variations in how the primary school prepared their students both academically and socially impacted the students' transition. O'Brien's (2004) sample of 6th class teachers believed that the emphasis in primary school on the development of the whole child was in itself preparation for post-primary school (2004).

In the UK, issues like apparent mistrust between primary and post-primary schools and a lack of clarity and understanding of the shared information are identified as reasons for the suboptimal handling of information transfer from primary to post-primary schools (OFSTED, 2016). Lance (1994) suggested that "teachers do not automatically refer to their pupil's case records when teaching them for the first time in the same way that doctors are trained to do. Teachers suspect their colleagues' judgements and prefer to rely on their own diagnosis" (p.47, as cited in Capel et al., 2004).

According to Smyth (2020), primary schools play a crucial role in imparting foundational literacy and numeracy skills necessary for successful participation in post-primary education. Additionally, engagement with primary school subjects sets the tone for future academic intentions. However, earlier research by Smyth et al., (2004) also revealed that less than a third of teachers considered the primary school syllabus as a strong foundation for their subject in First year. Geography and Irish teachers were less likely to agree compared to History, English, and Mathematics teachers. The study identified a lack of cohesion between certain primary and post-primary curricula, which was later addressed through curriculum alignment in specific subjects (see Chapter 4).

Galton et al.'s (1999) observed negativity in classroom comments made by post-primary teachers to work conducted in primary in the ORACLE study. More recently Strand, (2020) observed similar distrust between primary and post-primary teachers in informal comments regarding the work of post-primary teachers, but Sutton (2000) cautions against fostering a culture where educators make critical remarks about the other schooling sector (as cited in Hawk & Hill, 2004). In their paper 'Transition traumas, traps, turning points, and triumphs: putting student needs first', Hawk and Hill (2004) describe negative comments about post-primary schools predominantly coming from primary teachers or adults which pre-transition students have overheard. These comments often highlight the challenging aspects of the transition, such as increased homework, the need for better organisation, higher expectations for teachers, stricter rules, and more. Though not necessarily intended as criticism, Hawk and Hill point out that students may interpret these comments as criticisms of themselves, post-primary teachers, or the post-primary system. Marshall & Hargreaves (2007) also note similar findings that "pupils receive no explanation as to why a certain activity is no longer valued, or on which new criteria they are to be judged" (p.76).

Conversely, comments by post-primary teachers that question previous learning can also contribute to this divide. Ward (2001) provides an example where a pupil mentioned having already covered certain material to the teacher, only to find the teacher responding "but this time you'll do it properly", thus communicating distrust (as cited in Hawk & Hill, 2004). Sutton (2000) refers to this as a 'culture of blame' that can exist between primary and post-primary teachers, which, as Chambers (2012) discovered, fosters a sense of distrust toward the previous learning.

Galton et al., (2003) found that primary teachers expressed some resentment towards spending time on ‘bridging units’ as a means of ensuring curriculum continuity. In a study of 17 Bristol post-primary schools and their feeder schools, Sutherland et al., (2010) referred to primary and post-primary teachers as “teachers from two cultures” (p.6). They claim that this characterisation highlights a lack of both trust and a common language, which could hinder a smooth transition process. They also noted that primary teachers expressed concern about their limited involvement in the transition process and the development of students after they transferred to post-primary school (ibid.).

Braund (2009) and Strand (2020) also observed similar distrust from post-primary teachers of the assessment grades given to students by primary teachers. One teacher remarked that some educators were cautious about relying solely on this information. In another study involving 25 post-primary Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teachers in Germany, Chambers (2018) found that while grades were transferred without qualitative comments from primary schools, post-primary teachers had mixed responses about whether they desired more detailed information. Some feared that additional details might lead them to “pre-judge” students (p.191) and expressed a preference for making their own assessments of students’ abilities during the initial weeks.

Additionally, Prendergast et al.’s (2019) study revealed interesting attitudes about who should be responsible for knowing about each other’s curriculum. In open questions, 16% of primary teachers independently suggested that primary teachers should know more about post-primary, while 8% of post-primary teachers independently put forward the idea that post-primary teachers should know more about primary (n=248 for primary teacher responses; n=125 for post-primary teacher responses). Hopwood et al., (2016) findings imply similar inclinations. They found that all primary and post-primary teachers

suggested that familiarity (by teachers at both levels) with curricula, sharing of resources and consistency in the teaching and learning programmes would benefit transition practices. However, CPD on transition was preferred by all primary teachers but just over half of the post-primary teachers. While CPD is a valuable source of information on transition, it is essential to recognise that it is not the sole provider. The following section provides an overview of the various influences that can potentially interact to develop knowledge for a teacher in the context of educational transitions.

2.5.5 Influence and sources of teacher knowledge on transition

Hawk and Hill (2004) argue that the more a teacher understands a student's experiences and background, the more effectively they can build upon the students' strengths, affirm their abilities, and guide them toward the next stage of learning. This understanding becomes even more critical during the transition from primary to post-primary school.

Little is known, however, about where and how teachers attain knowledge on transition (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019; O'Connor & Flynn, 2021). While transfer documents in schools aim to facilitate the passing of vital knowledge from one school to another (and among teachers), research shows that awareness of this knowledge is lacking or the information is not adequately communicated (Prendergast et al., 2019; O'Connor & Flynn, 2021). Yet where and how teachers attain information varies. To gain an understanding of the sources of this knowledge that could ultimately inform professional development practices, the following offers insights into where and how teachers develop professional knowledge.

While some teachers do acquire knowledge through more structured ways, others follow a Deweyan belief that knowledge is actively constructed through experiences. Schulman (1987), for example, categorises teacher knowledge into three distinct categories: Pedagogical knowledge (PK), content knowledge (CK), and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). These categories led to the identification of seven key knowledge domains for teachers⁸. These domains stress the importance of teachers being well informed about various aspects about their students, prior learning, educational objectives, curriculum, pedagogical approaches in primary schools, effective learning strategies for their students and a comprehensive understanding of primary school structures and the broader educational context.

Moreover, teachers' knowledge and identity are intertwined with their personal, physical and psychological dimensions. Blömeke and Kaiser (2017) propose three distinct categories - personal, physical, and psychological. These align with Davis' (2011) realms of a teacher's persona - physical, psychological and social (Figure 2.6). Her research findings, although not explicitly focussed on teacher knowledge, offer valuable insights into the diverse factors that can influence teachers' professional identities and acknowledges the intricate interplay between personal, social, and situational (classroom) dimensions.

⁸ Content knowledge; General pedagogical knowledge; Curriculum knowledge; Pedagogical content knowledge; Knowledge of learners and their characteristics; Knowledge of educational contexts; Knowledge of educational ends, purposes & values.

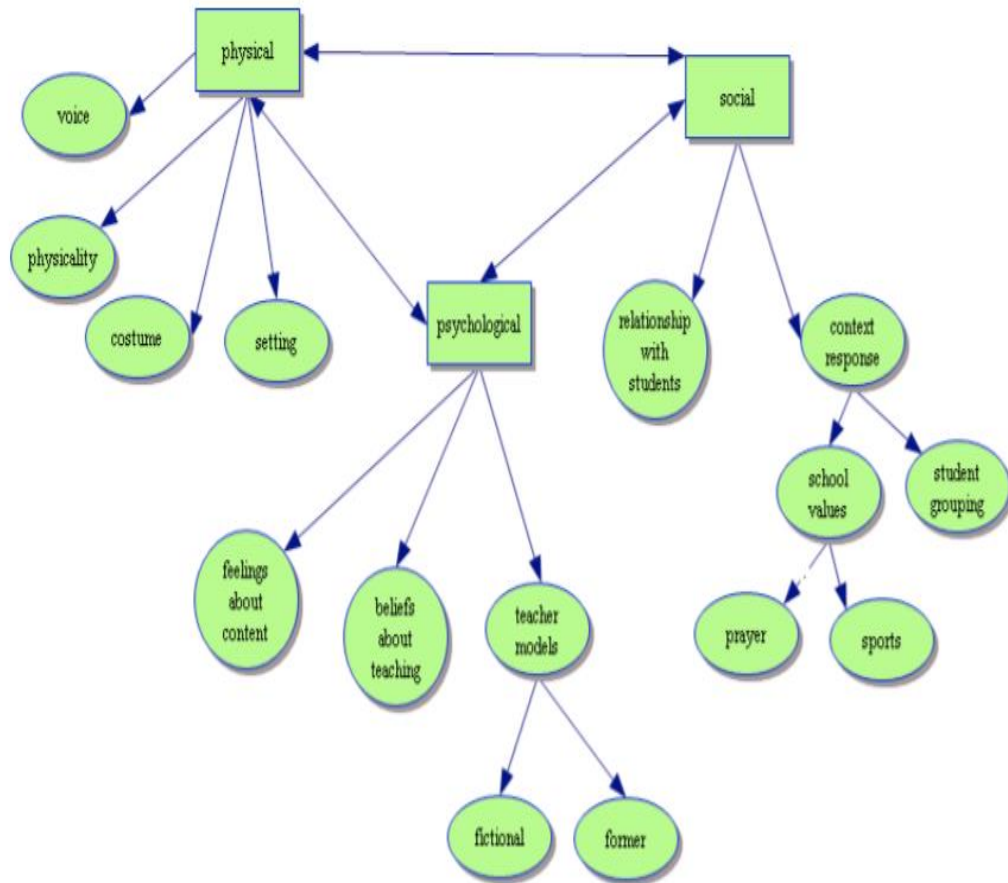


Figure 2.6 Realms of the teacher's persona (Davis, 2011).

Many agree with this. For example, Evans (2010), highlights that professional development often occurs “implicitly in often unanticipated situations and in unrecognised ways” (as cited in Matheson and Windle, 2017, p.29). This organic process of learning and reflection intertwines theoretical concepts, personal experiences, beliefs, and practical professional experiences (Toom, 2017). Similarly, Maskit (2011) identifies three areas of influence—informational, professional, and psychological factors (Table 2.3). These factors further illustrate the complexity of individual teachers’ experiences and identities, ultimately shaping their knowledge of the transition process.

Maskit (2011) Influences on teachers		
Informational factor	Professional factor	Psychological factor
• Teacher's age • Teacher's experience	• Work and teaching proficiencies • Work and commitment • Self-perception • Perception of teaching as a profession • Attitudes towards their students • Give-and take relationships towards students	• Teacher's emotional state • Their concerns • Their preoccupations • The relationship between the individual's personal data (such as chronological age) and professional development

Table 2.3 Influences on teachers, Maskit (2011).

Different researchers categorise the *sources* of this knowledge differently. Shulman (1987), for example, categorises the sources of teachers' knowledge into four areas:

1. Scholarship in content disciplines. This includes knowledge derived from academic disciplines relevant to the subject matter being taught.
2. The materials and settings within the institutionalised education process: These include the resources such as textbooks available within the formal education system.
3. Research related to schooling, social organisations, human learning, teaching and development: This involves insights gained from scholarly research in education and related fields.
4. Wisdom gained from practical teaching experience: This refers to knowledge acquired through hands-on teaching experience in real life classroom settings.

Buehl and Fives (2009) note that Schulman's sources do not consider personal knowledge or experience. By contrast, Richardson (1996) does emphasise personal knowledge, experiences, and schooling as important sources of teacher knowledge. This perspective aligns with Vygotsky (1978, p.809), who views teachers' knowledge development as a dynamic and socially constructed process shaped by interactions with others and by continuous reflection.

In summary, while teachers gain professional knowledge through structured ways, the personal, psychological and the professional have considerable influence on this knowledge.

2.5.6 Section 4 Summary

The transition from primary to post-primary education faces challenges due to communication gaps, differences in understanding, and disparities in policy and practice. Common understanding of terms and learning expectations is vital. Effective collaboration, professional development, and trust-building between primary and post-primary teachers can help bridge the gaps. Teachers' knowledge of transition is crucial for successful student progression. Teacher knowledge, shaped by personal, situational, and social factors, influences this process. While cross-sectoral collaboration between schools is essential, disparities in policy and practice can also hinder successful transitions. Equipping teachers with necessary knowledge and support is crucial for a positive learning environment and a successful transition to post-primary education.

2.6 Section 5: Research gap and rationale

This section explores the gaps that are present in research in relation to transition and teachers, and how this study aims to fill this gap.

2.6.1 Overview

The review of literature in this chapter has highlighted important aspects within the control of teachers that can improve students' transition from primary to post-primary. While international studies have explored transition experiences from the viewpoint of students, limited attention has been given to understanding teachers' knowledge and perspectives in Ireland. The rationale for this study, therefore, lies in addressing the

identified gaps in Irish research on educational transitions, particularly those relating to the perspective of teachers. This research aims to provide a broader cross-subject perspective on teachers' knowledge about primary education and their understanding of the transition process. The relevance of this study extends to initial teacher education in Ireland because ITE programmes as described by the Teaching Council guidelines are meant to incorporate knowledge on both primary and post-primary education. This is outlined in Chapter 4, Section 4.3. Such knowledge could aid smoother transition for students. Furthermore, this research holds international significance, particularly for European countries with similar educational structures and transition points.

2.6.2 The perspective of teachers

Transition research has gained significant international attention since the 1970s in the UK, the US and Australia. However, these studies have predominantly focussed on examining transitions from the viewpoint of students' experiences leaving limited exploration of teachers' perspectives (Hanewald, 2013; Hopwood et al., 2016; McCoy et al., 2019; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). For instance, Hanewald's (2013) review of 37 studies revealed that only two investigated transitions from the perspective of teachers. Similarly, Jindal-Snape et al., (2020) noted that while some studies collected data from parents and professionals, very few explored the experiences of teachers themselves. A limited number of studies incorporated data from all three stakeholders: children, parents, and professionals. Other reviews also highlight the scarcity of studies focusing on teachers' perspectives, with Spernes (2020) identifying only one research study on social and emotional issues from teachers' viewpoints. This researcher's study contributes insights from teachers' perspectives, complementing both national and international research.

2.6.3 Research gap in Irish context

In Ireland specifically, research on transition was limited until the late 1990s but has since increased. Longitudinal studies such as GUI and CSL have played a vital role in revitalising the exploration of educational transition. Although recent Irish transition research has seen growing activity regarding teachers' knowledge, understanding, and efficacy (Prendergast et al., 2019; Harbison et al., 2019; O'Connor & Flynn, 2021; Kaur et al., 2022) these studies and reviews are mainly focussed on STEM education, possess small sample sizes, and do not provide a comprehensive overview across subjects. (See Appendix 3.4 for Table of a selection of studies conducted within an Irish context since 1998, indicating the sample sizes and areas of focus. While the table does not aim to be exhaustive, it highlights the diverse range of studies undertaken in an Irish context, their sample sizes and method.)

While these studies have renewed the focus on educational transitions nationally, it is important to acknowledge that much of the research cited in relation to Ireland relates to outdated curricula. It is important to interpret findings in studies pre-2010s that reference curricular continuity with caution, as curricula have since undergone significant changes. The aim of this study, therefore, is to provide current empirical evidence on transition and teachers within the context of more recent curriculum changes.

By examining transitions, we are not only set to understand the present best practice requirements and challenges of transition, but we are also equipped with practitioner knowledge and skills that future-proof against changes to the curriculum. The data and findings from my study aim to enhance existing transition knowledge and support the development of future transition programmes so that “key policy initiatives are developed to make education systems future-ready” (Murchan & Johnston, 2021, p.4). For instance,

changes in the primary school curriculum, like introducing foreign languages, can have a notable impact on how languages are taught in secondary education. This is evident in Courtney's (2017) longitudinal study, which explored students' attitudes and motivation during the transition. The UK study involved 26 learners of French (aged 10-11) and spanned 12 months. The findings indicate that a sudden change in teaching methods can have a detrimental effect on learner attitudes and motivation during the early stages of secondary education in the UK. Given this example of fostering collaboration in curriculum, pedagogy, and practice between primary and post-primary levels becomes paramount in Ireland's education system. Considering that many studies tend to concentrate on Maths and Science, my research contributes valuable insights from a cross-subject perspective to the existing body of research.

2.6.4 Research and the concept of transition

While it is widely accepted nationally and internationally that teachers should have knowledge of each other's curriculum (Teaching Council Guidelines, 2017; Hall et al., 2018; Prendergast et al., 2019; O'Connor & Flynn, 2021; Hopwood et al., 2016; Evangelou et al., 2008; McCormack et al., 2014, etc.), evidence within an Irish context is limited regarding the level of knowledge, where this knowledge comes from, and its usefulness. O'Brien (2004) noted the absence of major investigations into the transfer issue in Ireland. Similarly, the GUI study's Report 1 observed that most previous studies in Ireland were small in scale and often focussed on specific categories of children, particularly those who are marginalised or facing difficulties. The GUI report does not extensively address the perspective of teachers or management, except for acknowledging the potential contribution of further analysis of parent-teacher interaction, teacher-student interaction, and school practices to teacher training and educational policy. This

researcher's study fulfils this potential for further analysis by investigating the extent of post-primary knowledge of transition among post-primary teachers and the sources of this knowledge.

2.6.5 Relevance for professional development

The importance of teacher roles in facilitating smooth educational transitions is well-established. Hopwood et al., (2016) identify adequate teacher support as one of the essential three key methods necessary for the transition process. Hanewald (2013) emphasises the need for teacher educators to incorporate transition programmes and strategies into their courses to equip graduate teachers with the skills and knowledge to “mediate the pressures faced by some students during transitions” (p.62). However, Jindal-Snape et al., (2020) point out that previous research has not adequately examined the training received by student teachers in this crucial aspect (p.1258).

In the Irish context, this topic holds particular significance for initial teacher educators. O'Brien's (2004) findings underscore the critical role of second-level teachers in helping students settle into their new schools and navigate the academic challenges of the system. The study recommends comprehensive training and support at both pre-service and in-service levels to enable teachers to engage fairly, compassionately, and professionally with students. The scope is there to work with student teachers too. O'Connor and Flynn's (2021) study suggests that nearly 100% of student teachers are assigned First-year class groups during their professional placement. However, Hall et al.'s (2018) report on the embedding of the 2014 changes to initial teacher education (ITE) in school placement lacks clarity regarding the extent to which post-primary student teachers teach across Junior and Senior Cycle classes. Furthermore, there is a lack of available data on what level of contact student teachers have with First-year students.

There is also limited research on how post-primary teachers access and learn about primary education. The significance of understanding teachers' existing knowledge and identifying and addressing knowledge gaps cannot be overstated. Research confirms that teachers play crucial roles in facilitating a smooth transition, and the more they know about each other's programmes, the better they can address individual students' needs and support them through the transition (Hawk & Hill, 2001). Smyth et al., (2004) recommend the development of common components in pre-service education for primary and post-primary teachers, as well as integrating information about both levels into initial and continuing training for teachers. However, O'Connor and Flynn's participants did not recall receiving any input on this topic during their initial teacher education. This knowledge gap becomes evident in a Scottish context as well, where Jindal-Snape and Cantali (2019) found that post-primary staff primarily learned about facilitating transition through staff meetings, discussions with peers and headteachers, online resources, research on effective practice, and experiential learning. Nonetheless, it is essential to note that the sample size in this Scottish study was small, and the professional staff involved had specific roles related to transition.

A comprehensive understanding of teacher roles and knowledge gaps in educational transitions is crucial for developing effective teacher training programmes and supporting students through their academic journey. This research addresses a lack of clarity in the extent of post-primary knowledge and involvement and how they access and learn about primary education.

2.6.6 Research and international relevance

This study contributes not only to the understanding of educational transitions from teachers' perspectives but also holds value for European countries with a similar educational structure and transition age (around 12/13). The European countries

mentioned in the Eurydice 2019 report (highlighted in pink in Appendix 2.1) share a single core curriculum and undergo a transition from level 1 to level 2 during students' education, making findings relevant for comparison purposes. In addition, the study will add vital evidence to the discussion on teachers' understanding of the concept of transition, an area that requires additional research internationally and nationally (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021; Downes., 2016).

2.6.7 Section 5 Summary

This section identified gaps in research related to educational transitions from the perspective of teachers, especially in the Irish context. While prior studies have focussed primarily on students' experiences during transitions, there is limited exploration of teachers' viewpoints, particularly across a wider range of subjects. This study aims to fill this gap and provide valuable insights. It emphasises the importance of understanding teachers' knowledge gaps and their role in facilitating smooth transitions, especially in the context of curriculum changes. The research also holds international relevance for countries with similar education systems and transition ages and contributes to the broader discussion on teachers' understanding of the conceptualisation of transition.

2.7 Conclusion

By providing updated findings and addressing the gaps in existing research, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of educational transition both nationally and internationally. To achieve this, the study focuses on the following research questions:

- What knowledge do post-primary teachers possess regarding transition, the process, pedagogical approaches, practices, and the curriculum within primary schools?
- How is the policy landscape in Ireland structured to enhance teachers' capabilities in facilitating the transition of students from primary to post-primary education?

To address these questions effectively, a mixed methods research design has been developed. The following chapter outlines the chosen methodology, provides justifications for the selected methods, and explains how they align with the research questions. Reference will be made in Chapter 3 to the theories and frameworks discussed in the literature review, ensuring a well-informed and cohesive research approach.

3 Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This research aims to fill the gaps in existing literature as identified in Chapter 2 concerning the transition from primary to post-primary education. The objective is to deepen our understanding by collecting insights from documentary sources and teachers themselves. The evidence collated will facilitate the improvement of the transition process in Ireland, contributing to the advancement of both theory and practical applications in this field. This chapter presents an overview of the research approach and methodologies applied in the study.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1 introduces the research questions and their underlying objectives. It defines the researcher's philosophical stance (ontology and epistemology) and places both the researcher and the research subjects within the framework of social constructivism. Section 2 provides a more detailed explanation of the chosen research approach. It outlines the research design, methodology, and methods selected, and justifies the use of an exploratory sequential mixed methods study over other potential approaches. This section also addresses ethical considerations, the study's reliability, and its limitations. Section 3 delves into the research process undertaken in this study. It elucidates how qualitative and quantitative methods were employed, and describes the processes undertaken in sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures. This chapter is supported by information in Appendix 9.2.

3.2 Section 1: Ontology, epistemology, and methodology

3.2.1 Research questions and approach

Two main research questions have emerged as the focus for this study. These are:

Research question 1: What knowledge do post-primary teachers possess regarding transition, the process, pedagogical approaches, practices, and the curriculum within primary schools?

Research question 2: How is the policy landscape in Ireland structured to enhance teachers' capabilities in facilitating the transition of students from primary to post-primary education?

Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that “the manner in which one asks the research question is important, because it determines to a large extent the research methods that are used to study it” (p.41). Blaikie (2009) identified eight research objectives, each associated with a specific type of question. These objectives were matched with the research questions of this study (Table 3.1). This alignment demonstrates that the research questions predominantly align with an exploratory and descriptive theoretical approach.

<i>Research Objectives</i>	<i>Associated question types</i>	<i>RQ1</i> <i>What knowledge ...?</i>	<i>RQ2</i> <i>How is the policy...?</i>
<i>exploration</i>	What might be happening? In what way?	x	
<i>description</i>	What is happening? What people? In what way?	x	x
<i>understanding</i>	Why?		
<i>explanation</i>	Why?		
<i>prediction</i>	What is likely to happen?		
<i>change</i>	How can it be different?		
<i>evaluation</i>	What has happened?		
<i>assessment</i>	What? Why?		

Table 3.1 Cross-reference of research questions to Blaikie, 2009; 2013.

3.2.2 Research overview

Creswell (2013) sets out three levels that influence the choice of methodology: the general, practical, and procedural aspects. This researcher introduces a fourth dimension: the personal. The methodological direction of this study is guided by the researcher's pragmatic worldview. As expressed by the pragmatist John Dewey (1930), "the self is not something ready-made, but something in continuous formation through choice of action" (p.351). This principle applies not only to the researcher but also resonates with the research itself.

Every teacher possesses distinct experiences and knowledge (Chapter 2, Section 2.5). Consequently, this study must not solely focus on what is learned, but also on the teachers as professional learners. To achieve this, the research needs to be examined from diverse angles, resulting in a mixed methods research (MMR) approach. MMR embraces the pragmatic worldview, which accommodates multiple truths and recognises the distinctive perception of the world for each participant. It acknowledges that knowledge is a product of experience and collaborative efforts.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the foundations of this study and encapsulates the research methodology employed. The researcher's approach to this study is grounded in pragmatism. Within this pragmatic framework lies the belief in numerous coexisting realities, fostering an insight that knowledge is collectively shaped through interactions. Hence, a methodology that endeavours to amalgamate a multitude of viewpoints is the researcher's preferred choice for this study. The next section provides more detail of each tier of the pyramid, as relevant to this specific study.

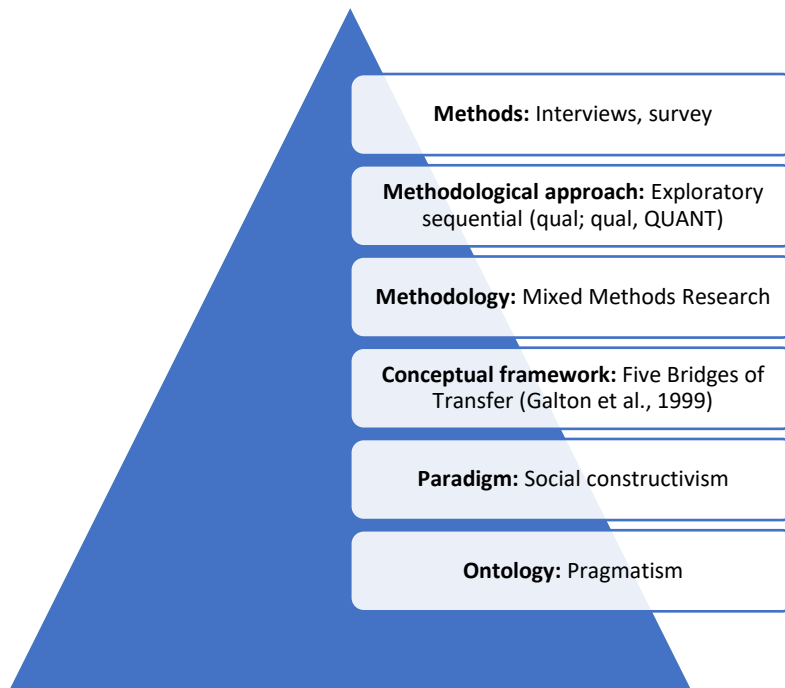


Figure 3.1 Representation of the philosophical and methodological foundations.

3.2.3 Worldview: Researcher as a pragmatist

Because the semantics of ontology can cause confusion, it is important to clarify terms. In this study ‘worldview’ (as preferred by Creswell, 2009) is used in the same way as Crotty’s (1998) use of “epistemologies and ontologies” or as Lincoln et al.’s (2011) use of ‘paradigms’ (Creswell, 2009, p.5)

This researcher’s rationale for pragmatism is based firstly on initial personal reflection. Dewey states “only reflective thought ... is truly educative in value” (Dewey, 1920; 2004 p.3 as cited in Thomas, 2013, p.23). In reflecting on what is personally important, I listed all the words that I believe describe my view on life. When inputted into an online wordart generator, the illustration of the wise owl was created (Figure 3.2). The image of the owl was a personal choice, as owls “tap into our intuition and inspire us to make decisions based on our internal guidance system rather than someone else’s” (David, 2022). As can be seen through the choice of words, the words highlight and confirm that this researcher has an innate drive to find practical solutions to problems.



Figure 3.2 Word art collated by researcher (Murray, 2019).

To understand the worldview arising from this intuitive response and how it could drive the research design, the researcher compared different worldviews using statements - pragmatism, positivism, subjectivism, critical theory, and constructivism – that were sourced and collated from Creswell (2014), Crotty (1998), Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) four paradigms, and the inquiry questions of DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2016). These are collated and presented in Table 3.2 where the response of the researcher to these statements is colour coded. (Green indicates agreement; orange, potential agreement; and red indicates that this is not a prominent belief.) As evident from this task, this researcher identifies with three worldviews: pragmatism, constructivism, and transformative worldviews.

Worldview statements

Statements to consider	
There are multiple truths	Pragmatism; transformative constructivism/interpretivist. Subjectivism; Critical theory;
Finding a solution is the most important thing	Pragmatism
I am flexible in terms of the approaches I take to solve a problem	Pragmatism
I like to be engaged with and within the community	Pragmatism; transformative
I like to create change	Pragmatism; transformative
Reality needs to be interpreted to understand underlying events and meanings	Constructivist/interpretivist
There are multiple interpretations of a situation	Constructivism/interpretivist
Reality and knowledge are created by individuals in groups	Constructivist; transformative
I like to question authority	Critical theory; transformative
There is one truth.	Positivism
Reality can be measured	Positivism
It all depends on how you see a situation. It's a matter of perspective	Subjectivism
Reality is what we perceive it to be	Subjectivism
Power plays a significant role in creation of knowledge	Critical theory; transformative
I regularly critique power structures.	Critical theory; transformative

Key: Possibly	Key: Yes	Key: No

Table 3.2 Worldview statements.

Note: Statements based on a summary of DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz (2016); Crotty (1998); Mertens (2007) collated by researcher.

Further inquiry into the ontology and epistemologies of these possible categories highlights certain similarities and differences as illustrated in Figure 3.3. While they all share a belief in multiple realities or truths, and a focus on change, the difference, however, lies in the epistemology where truths and human process are influenced by a particular context and used to solve problems within these contexts (Cohen et al., 2017). To be transformative in nature would suggest a focus on social justice, power relations and substantive change (Mertens, 2007; Cohen et al., 2017). According to Mezirow

(1997) transformative learning involves changing habits of minds and points of view that are formed by our frames of reference that are usually a result of culture or primary caregivers. Although this researcher is driven to solve a problem, and the implementation of a solution necessitates change, this change does not seek to be transformative in this sense. The participants were invited to consider their perspectives on transition. The survey did not, however, seek to transform their practice or worldview. This is not to say that participation in the study would not have potentially informed their practice, but this was not its explicit intention. The study's intention was explorative rather than transformative.

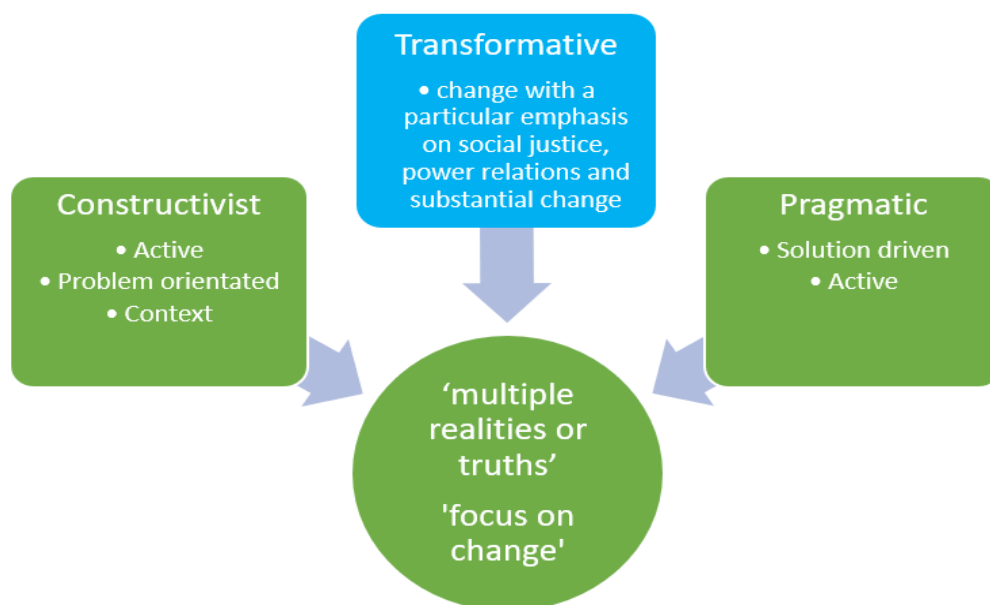


Figure 3.3 Similarities and differences in worldviews.

3.2.4 Joint worldviews: Pragmatism and constructivism in conversation

Some researchers embrace dialectical pluralism, a perspective that recognises the positive aspects of multiple paradigms (Mertens, 2012; Johnson, 2017). Dialectical pluralism allows for collaboration among researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders to create practical solutions while embracing differences and intellectual

tensions (Johnson, 2017). In this study, a dialogue exists between constructivism and pragmatism.

John Dewey argues that true philosophy must have practical significance and address real human issues. It should actively contribute to solving problems and shaping human behaviour, rather than being a passive exercise in inquiry or thought. Pragmatism asserts that philosophy emerges when practical problems arise, emphasising a solutions-oriented approach (as referenced in Cohen et al., 2017). In contrast, constructivists actively seek, select, and construct their own perspectives within sociocultural contexts and interactions (ibid., p.23). Both paradigms acknowledge the existence of multiple realities. Consequently, this researcher aligns with both pragmatism and social constructivism, and both paradigms inform the research methodology. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) suggest that pragmatists study what interests them and is valuable to their field of work, which applies to this research.

3.2.5 Paradigm: Social constructivism

This research is founded on the premise that knowledge is created through social interaction, interpretation, and understanding (Vygotsky, 1962). It embraces the idea that every educational experience influences subsequent ones (Dewey, 1938;1997, as cited in Cantley et al., 2021), which is a fundamental tenet of social constructivism. The commonalities among various constructivist theories can be summarised as viewing the learning environment as a space for “experimentation and dialogue, where knowledge is contextualised within problems to be discussed and solved” (Adams, 2006, p.245). Knowledge creation involves forming internal mental models or representations of external structures, and these constructs are influenced by personal beliefs, cultural

background, past experiences, and language. They are further shaped through interactions with others, explicit teaching, and the modelling process (Doolittle, 2014).

In this research, the framework of social constructivism underpins the overall design, and the research methodology aligns with Doolittle and Hicks' (2003) six principles of constructivist learning. These principles, in turn, guide the choice of research approaches and methods employed (see Table 3.3)

Six principles of constructivist learning (Doolittle and Hicks, 2003)
1. The construction of knowledge and the making of meaning are individual and social active processes. 2. The construction of knowledge involves social mediation within cultural contexts. 3. The construction of knowledge is fostered by authentic and real-world environments. 4. The construction of knowledge takes place within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge and experience. 5. The construction of knowledge is integrated more deeply by engaging in multiple perspectives and representations of content, skills, and social realms. 6. The construction of knowledge is fostered by students becoming self-regulated, self-mediated, and self-aware. (as cited in Doolittle, 2014)

Table 3.3 Six principles of constructivist learning (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003).

Kelly and Cordeiro (2020) outline three fundamental methodological principles that form the foundation of a pragmatic research approach. These principles encompass (1) a focus on generating practical knowledge, (2) the acknowledgment of the interplay between experience, understanding, and action, and (3) the perception of inquiry as an experiential journey. Figure 3.4 visually illustrates how these three core methodological principles align with this study, where the research process itself becomes an experiential journey for the researcher. This concept of 'dialectical pluralism,' as described by Johnson (2017) as "the acceptance and expectation of diversity in virtually all areas of inquiry" (p.1), naturally lends itself to a mixed methods research methodology.

Pragmatism and this study

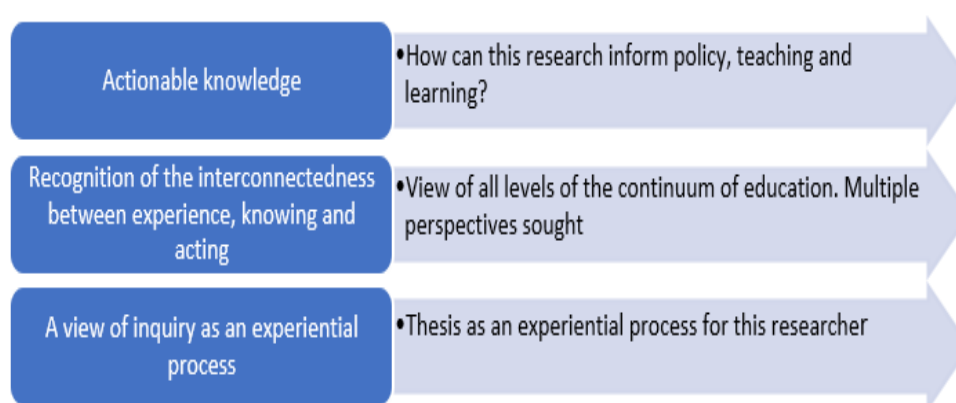


Figure 3.4 Core methodological principles of this study and pragmatism.

3.2.6 Summary

This section has explained the rationale for the philosophical approach to this research and described the philosophical foundations of the researcher and the research. Situated in pragmatism and rooted within an understanding of knowledge as socially constructed, the following section presents the research approach and methodology of this study.

3.3 Section 2: Methodological approach

3.3.1 Overview

Section 2 presents the methodological approach employed in this inductive research study. The study employs a Mixed Methods Research (MMR) incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods. This section begins by outlining the chosen research design, methodology, and methods while providing justification for the selection of an exploratory sequential design mixed methods approach over alternative approaches. Given the exploratory nature of the design, an inductive approach is adopted. Figure 3.5 offers an overview of the research design, and the section commences by examining MMR as the selected research method.

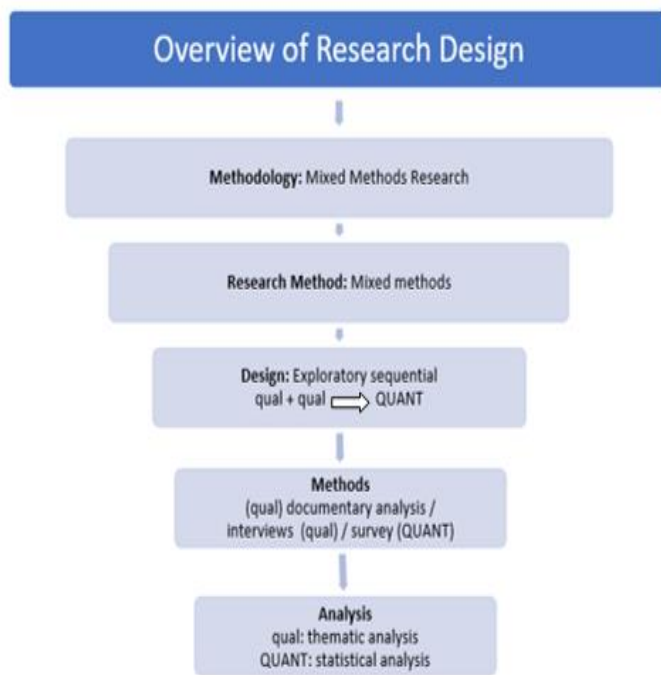


Figure 3.5 Overview of research questions and methods.

3.3.2 Mixed methods research (MMR)

Definition within this research

MMR began to be used in research in the late 1980s and 90s, and since then many different terms have been used to describe this approach, such as quantitative and qualitative methods, multimethod, mixed research, or mixed methodology (Creswell, 2009). Recent writings, such as the SAGE Handbook of Mixed Methods in the Social & Behavioural Sciences (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2021) and SAGE’s Journal of Mixed Methods Research, and others tend to use the term mixed methods (Bryman, 2006; Creswell, 2015). Four varying perspectives on MMR are described by Creswell & Tashakkori (2007). Table 3.4 presents these perspectives of MMR as a methodology, method, practice and paradigm. This study adopts MMR as the research *methodology* as defined by Creswell & Tashakkori’s understanding (as identified in Table 3.4 via **Green shading**). However, in this research, MMR is not only used as a methodological approach, but also as a research method as defined by Creswell & Tashakkori (2007). This study employs both qualitative and quantitative methods.

How MMR can be used? As a	Characteristics
Method	This study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods (surveys to interventions). In this way it can be called MMR.
Methodology	A distinct methodology that combines worldviews, RQs, methods, inferences, and conclusions; MMR combines multiple truths and realities; the unique nature of the world for each participant and the understanding that knowledge is created through experience and collaboration.
Paradigm	This focusses on only this aspect: coming from a pragmatic worldview, MMR combines multiple truths and realities; the unique nature of the world for each participant and the understanding that knowledge is created through experience and collaboration.
Practice	Mixed methods procedures in research. Using mixed methods within a study. Not based on worldview or questions solely.

Table 3.4 Realms of MMR (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007).

Note: Green shading highlights the definition of MMR within this research.

3.3.3 Rationale for choice of MMR

The rationale for choosing this methodology was based on the following three reasons.

1. Precedents: Systematic literature reviews (SLR) that span over 20 years indicate that mixed methods research is used predominantly in studies (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019; Hopwood et al., 2016). However, it must also be noted that these SLRs point to the fact that both types of methods and sample sizes are varied; a factor that has caused researchers who have conducted SLRs on transition to question comparability across studies. Within an Irish context, the most comparable Irish studies in terms of topic also employ MMR. Specifically, O'Connor and Flynn's (2021) study on teachers and transition employs an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. (See Appendix 3.2 for an overview of some of the Irish focussed research on transition and their use of MMR as their methodological approach).

2. Nature of study: To avoid what Blumer (1969) refers to as "a tendency to move straight into research without an adequate understanding of the sector of social life being

investigated” (as cited in Blaikie, 2000, p.73), exploratory mixed methods was chosen over explanatory or descriptive. This decision to use MMR stemmed from the under researched nature of the topic of transition and teachers’ source of knowledge in general (Jindal Snape et al., 2019; O’Connor & Flynn, 2021).

3. Multiple views and purposes: Stromquist (2000) argues that no single research method guarantees a comprehensive understanding of the ‘truth’. This perspective is reinforced by Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2005), who suggest that MMR emphasises the commonalities between different philosophical and epistemological approaches rather than differences. As this study is grounded in pragmatism, which embraces the existence of multiple truths, MMR serves various purposes within it.

Onwuegbuzie, Collins and Frels, (2013) identify seven purposes of MMR as outlined in Table 3.5. As evident in this table’s green shaded boxes, this study primarily overlaps with four purposes: complementarity, developmental, compensation, and diversity. Although MMR can also serve as corroboration or by function, verifying survey findings with interview data, this is not its primary goal in this study and is viewed as a secondary benefit. As noted in column 4, parents as stakeholders are not included in this study and therefore, the study does not give a complete insight into the topic. Cohen et al. (2017) differentiate between the supplementary and complementary nature of MMR. Within this study, using MMR complements data rather than supplements it. In terms of diversity, the inclusion of a survey allows more diversification in sample.

Purpose	Rationale	This study	Comments
Complementarity	Used to gain complementary views about the same phenomena etc.	Interviews with students and teachers followed by survey with teachers	
Completeness	MMR designs used to ensure a complete picture of a phenomenon is obtained.		Study is not complete - does not include parents
Developmental	Questions for one strand emerge from the inferences of a previous one as in sequential mixed methods.	Interviews inform survey	
Expansion	MM are used to explain or expand upon the understanding obtained in a previous strand of the study.		Suggests a focus on why... study focuses on what
Corroboration/confirmation	MM used to assess the credibility inferences obtained from one strand.		Will allow for a certain amount of triangulation.
Compensation	MM enable compensating for the weaknesses of one approach by using the other.	Small samples for interviews compensated by larger surveyed sample	
Diversity	Used in the hope of obtaining divergent views of the same phenomena.	Interview sample limited. Survey offers diversity of background, subjects, age, location etc.	

Table 3.5 Purposes of MMR. (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013)

3.3.4 Exploratory sequential mixed methods

Creswell & Plano Clark (2003) categorise MMR into four types: (1) sequential explanatory; (2) sequential exploratory; (3) sequential transformative; (4) concurrent triangulation, concurrent nested, or concurrent transformative. This study aligns with the exploratory sequential mixed methods approach, where the results of the initial method inform subsequent ones (Creswell, 2013). In this study, Phase 1 refers to a documentary analysis of relevant educational policies. Phase 2 involves qualitative data collection and analysis, while Phase 3 involves quantitative data collection and analysis that builds upon the findings of Phase 2.

Exploratory and explanatory methods are essentially opposites, differing primarily in the priority given to each strand. These are illustrated through colour-coding in Figure 3.6. In the exploratory design (Green), quantitative data takes precedence. This is opposed to explanatory (Blue) where generating qualitative data takes precedence and the qualitative seeks to explain the results. This choice was intentional and driven by two main factors described earlier: it avoided the tendency to move straight into research without an understanding of the sector under investigation as described by Blumer (1969). Secondly, as stated in Section 1 of this chapter, this research is informed by the researcher's pragmatic and social constructivist worldview. An exploratory sequential design sees knowledge as socially constructed. In this sense the documentary analysis of Phase 1 offers insights into general educational context while the informative role of Phase 2 acknowledges different views and feeds into an informed quantitative survey.

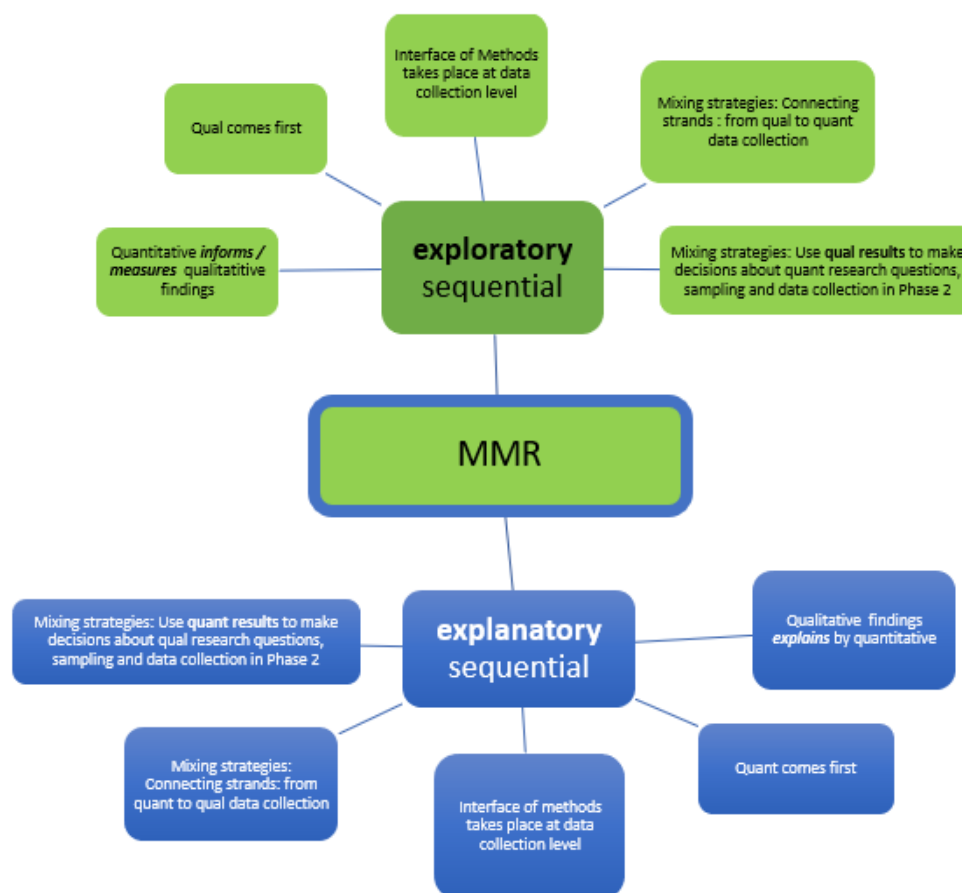


Figure 3.6 Mixed Methods Research: Explanatory and exploratory sequential.

3.3.5 Review of methodologies in transition research

Literature reviews on education transition indicate that there is a predominance of transition studies in Australia and the UK. Yet the majority of reviews point to the varied nature of research methodology on transition, to the extent that authors of systematic literature reviews warn of making general assumptions based on the research due to the variety of research methods used, variations in methods, sample sizes and length of studies (Jindal-Snape et al., 2020). The variety in research focus, research approach and research design are described here.

Focus

The focus of educational transition research has been on the student rather than the teachers. Hanewald (2013), Hopwood et al., (2013), Topping (2011), Jindal-Snape et al., (2019) cover the years from 2000 to 2018 in their systematic and thematic reviews. Of the 37 reviews in Hopwood et al. no single study deals with teachers only. Darmody (2008) is one of the only listed studies to predominantly focus on teachers over students or parents. In the review by Spernes (2022) of studies on social and emotional development, only 1 of 29 considered teachers' perspectives, while Kaur et al., (2022) found that 11 of the 120 articles in Maths and Science transition involved teachers only.

Research design

Table 3.6 shows the variety of research designs recorded in five literature reviews on transition. The majority are longitudinal. Other research designs are difficult to categorise due to insufficient information in reviews.

Overview of Research designs referenced in literature reviews on <u>transition</u>								
	Review period	Total no. of papers reviewed	Longitudinal	Cross sectional	Case Study	Intervention Designs	Ethnographical	Others
Kaur et al. (2022)	1990-2018	120	65	55	Not evident	Not evident	Not evident	Not evident
Hanewald (2013)	2005-2011	37	Not evident	Not evident	Not evident	Not evident	Not evident	Not evident
Galton & Symonds (2014)	1978-2013	104	78		Not evident	Not evident	4	23
Jindal-Snape et al. (2019)	2008-2018	96	46	44	5	6	2	Not evident
Spærnes (2022)	2009-2018	29	20		Not evident	Not evident	Not evident	Not evident

Table 3.6 Overview of research designs in studies on transition.

Research approach

While the majority of research focusing on students uses qualitative methods, quantitative methods seem to be preferred for generating data on teachers according to the literature reviews on primary to post-primary transition research (see Table 3.7). Kaur et al., (2022) found that 70% of their articles (69/120) between 1990 and 2020 in Maths and Science used a quantitative research approach. In Hanewald's review 15 of 37 papers used mixed and an equal number used quantitative approaches. Galton and Symonds (2014) also found that 54% of their reviewed articles used a quantitative research approach.

Overview of Research approaches referenced in literature reviews on <u>transition</u>					
	Review period	Total no. of papers reviewed	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed
Kaur et al. (2022)	1990-2018	120	21	69	30
Hanewald (2013)	2005-2011	37	7	15	15
Galton & Symonds (2014)	1978-2013	104	15	56	11
Jindal-Snape et al. (2019)	2008-2018	96	39 papers use focus groups/ <u>interview</u> 55 papers use <u>surveys</u> Difficult to ascertain if used as part of a MMR or not.		
Spærnes (2022)	2009-2018	29	5	23	1

Table 3.7 Overview of Research approaches in studies on transition.

Note: Other research methods are not included in this table.

In comparison to studies within an Irish context at that time, a snapshot illustrates that Irish research mostly use MMR (see Appendix 3.4). While longitudinal studies are currently ongoing in Ireland (GUI and CSL), smaller research studies tend towards MMR research. Of studies that specifically focus on teachers that are referenced in this study, no preference is clear (see Table 3.8).

	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed
Darmody (2008)			x
Hopwood et al. (2016)	x		
Prendergast et al. (2019)		x	
Chambers (2018)		x	
Strand (2020)	x		
O'Connor & Flynn (2021)			x
McCauley (2010)		x	

Table 3.8 Overview of Research designs in studies on teachers and transition.

3.3.6 Other possible research designs

In light of the aims and questions of this study, other methodologies were considered for efficacy. Action and Design-based research, which typically involve intervention strategies, were deemed unsuitable since this study aimed to delve deeper into the subject matter rather than implement interventions. Longitudinal studies were also ruled out due to time constraints.

Considering the limitations posed by time and potential access challenges due to COVID-19 restrictions during the research period (2020-21), methodologies like ethnography, which require on-site observations, were not feasible. Among the viable options, case study emerged as a potential choice.

Observational aspects associated with traditional case study research were not practical in this context. However, while there are distinctions between MMR and Case Studies, there are overlapping areas between them.

Hitchcock & Hughes (1995) provide a set of characteristics associated with case studies (as cited in Cohen et al., 2017). Table 3.9 sets out the alignment of this study with Hitchcock and Hughes' case study characteristics. The green highlighting indicates that there is some alignment but not full alignment and therefore, case study is not an appropriate tool. Both can serve as methodologies, research designs, or methods themselves (Cohen et al., 2017). They share a common purpose centred around exploration. For instance, Yin (2009) identifies 'exploratory' as one of three potential outcomes for a case study, suggesting its compatibility with larger scale surveys for testing. While there are chronological similarities in terms of exploring events related to transition in primary and secondary sources, the main difference, however, lies in the core objectives.

Two key points of divergence lie in the depth of analysis and the richness of the narrative. The richness primarily emanates from qualitative data, a characteristic not unique to case studies but inherent in various qualitative or mixed methods studies. In terms of focus, this study primarily centres on the perceptions of multiple groups, – namely teachers, students, and management – on the topic of transition. The traditional case study approaches typically favour a focus on single group or phenomenon, seeking an in-depth understanding.

Furthermore, the primary aim of this research is not to depict individual cases but rather to explore and gain insights into the broader topic of transition. Case studies often emphasise causality, posing questions like 'how' and 'why.' Although this study includes 'how' questions in its research questions, the emphasis on 'why' is not as strong. As a result, MMR was chosen as the preferred methodology, design, and method for this research.

Case study compared to this study

Case Study research	This researcher's study	Comment / clarification
Concerned with a rich and varied description of events relevant to the case	NO	
Provides a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case	YES	but only in so far as it describes related events linked to transition in primary and or secondary sources
Blends description with analysis of events	NO	
Focusses on individual actors or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perceptions of events	YES	but only in exploratory interviews.
Highlights specific events that are relevant to the case	NO	
Researcher is integrally involved in the case; case study may be linked to the personality of the researcher	NO	
An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report	YES	in so far as it relates to qualitative exploratory interview decisions

Table 3.9 Case study compared to aims of this researcher's study.

Based on Hitchcock & Hughes (1995).

3.3.7 Sampling

The sampling frame: Post-primary teachers to include those who are currently in ITE post-primary programmes and NQTs. All subjects.

Sampling strategy: This mixed methods research (MMR) study employs non-probability techniques. The sampling strategy is illustrated in Figure 3.7 where both convenience and snowballing sampling are predominant for both Phases 2 and 3. For Phase 3, targeted sampling was also employed through direct emails to post-primary schools.

However, it is important to acknowledge that convenience sampling can give rise to concerns about the representativeness of the sample and, consequently, the more general applicability of the findings. As noted by Cohen et al. (2017), volunteers, while well-intentioned, may not necessarily represent the broader population. Additionally, the involvement of the researcher's personal contacts as participants might create a sense of obligation. Nevertheless, non-probability sampling methods were employed with full awareness of their limitations in representing the wider population (Cohen et al., 2018).

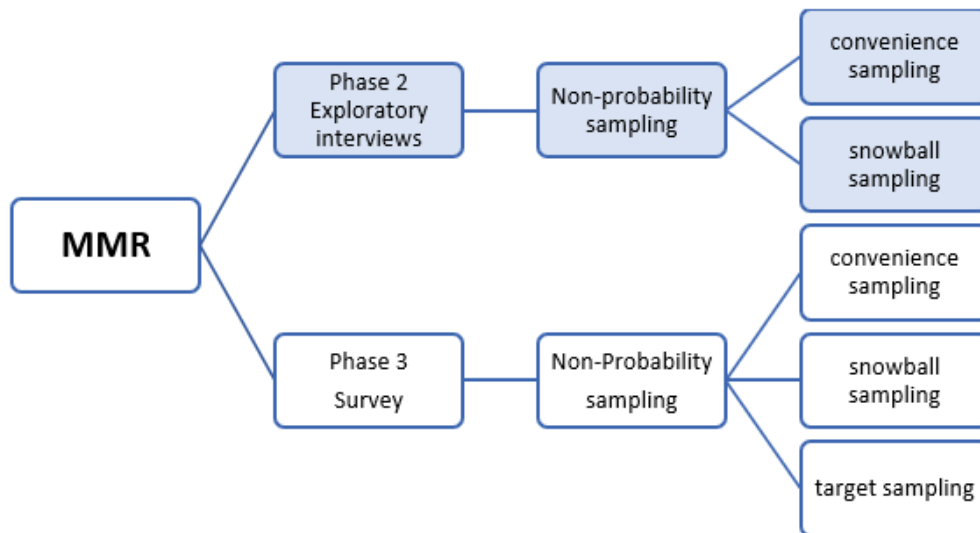


Figure 3.7 Overview of sampling strategy.

Population of sample: According to the Teaching Council there were 49,886 registered teachers at post-primary in Ireland as of September 2023⁹. They also state that there are approximately 5,500 student teachers annually registered and 3,684 NQTs registered (Teaching Council, 2023).

3.3.8 Methods

The term ‘method’ refers to various systems of data collection and is similar to how researchers use terms like ‘tool’ or ‘instrument’ (Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, data is primarily collected through qualitative methods of interviews and quantitative methods of a survey.

This mixed methods research (MMR) employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, including document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and a subsequent survey. Figure 3.8 provides an overview of the research process and the chosen methods. As illustrated, the research process moves from review of literature

⁹ Figures at the time of sampling were slightly lower.

which included an analysis of policies, to data generation (Phase 2 and 3) through interviews and a national survey. At each Phase, the data was analysed before continuing.

The choice of these methods is not solely based on precedent in transition research, but rather on the flexibility and suitability they offer, aligning with the idea that research design should cater to the research's many purposes. The MMR approach emphasises pluralism and adaptability to fit the research's specific needs, rather than rigidly adhering to a predefined design (Cohen et al., 2017).



Figure 3.8 Overview of research design.

Document analysis

Document analysis involves a structured process for assessing documents, which can include both physical print and digital materials (Bowen, 2009). Similar to other qualitative research methods, document analysis necessitates the thorough examination and interpretation of data to understand its significance, to enhance comprehension, and generate empirical insights.

Bowen (2009) outlines five distinct ways in which documents can be used in research:

- Documents serve as a backdrop, providing context and setting the stage.
- They introduce new questions that may need exploration.
- Documents offer supplementary data to complement existing information.
- They act as a tool to monitor changes and developments over time.
- Documents enable the cross-referencing of information with other data sources.

In the context of this study, documents are used to gain insights into the historical origins of educational transitions. They allow the researcher to trace or track the focus on transition in the educational field over the past five decades. The selection method chosen centres on events related to educational transitions. The analysis of documents encompasses a process of skimming (surface-level examination), reading (in-depth scrutiny), and interpretation. This process incorporates elements from both content analysis and thematic analysis. In the reading and understanding of these documents, the approach will adhere to Scott's (1990) four criteria of authenticity, credibility, typicality, and significance.

Semi-structures interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the preferred interview method over structured or unstructured interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) and LeCompte and Preissle (1993) both categorise semi-structured interviews and group interviews within the broader category of interviews. While focus groups were initially considered as an alternative, the decision to conduct interviews was made for several reasons.

The interviews are designed to gather individual contributions rather than collective perspectives (Bloor et al., 2001; Finch and Lewis, 2003, as cited in Cohen et al., 2017). Given that the sample is not representative, the size is small, and participants have diverse experiences, focusing on individual viewpoints was deemed more appropriate than trying to capture a collective perspective. This decision was further supported by other considerations.

1. A Pre-pre-pilot conducted as part of the Year 3 Research Methods assignment revealed several issues, including challenges in grouping participants, the nature of questions asked, participants' reluctance to criticise each other's teaching, and the importance of adhering to Finch et al.'s (2003) five-stage process, regardless of familiarity with participants¹⁰.
2. Post-focus group notes indicated that the role of facilitator of groups sat uncomfortably for me. However, I had received compliments on my interviewing technique from a colleague during one of the D.Ed. sessions, which made me feel more comfortable in the role of one-to-one interviewer.

¹⁰ Finch et al., (2003) Five stages: Stage One: Scene setting and ground rules; Stage Two: Individual introductions; Stage Three: The Opening Topic; Stage Four: Discussion; Stage Five: Ending the discussion. (See Table 3.17).

3. A pilot focus group involving three students revealed that students were more inclined to respond to structured Q & A sessions rather than freely contributing to the discussion. One-on-one interviews were preferred by teachers due to confidentiality and logistical challenges. The approach to conducting interviews remained consistent, with each participant given equal opportunity to express their opinions. Additionally, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed restrictions on the research process.

Surveys

Groves et al., (2011) describes a survey as a “systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) entities for the purposes of constructing quantitative descriptors of the attributes of the larger population of which these entities are a member” (as cited in Jansen, Corley & Jansen, 2007, p.2). An electronic survey is described as “as one in which a computer plays a major role in both the delivery of a survey to potential respondents and the collection of survey data from actual respondents” (ibid.). While relatively new in 2007, it is now one of the principal mechanisms in communication. In developing a survey five questions similar to those in the section on Sampling need to be addressed. These include design frame, a sampling frame, a design, the mode of delivery and whether it is a once off or an ongoing survey (Groves et al., 2011). This study is a once-off electronic survey aimed at post-primary teachers (both in-service and pre-service teachers). The rationale for its use in the study is to gain a wider understanding of the knowledge of post-primary teachers in general on the subject of transition.

The completed survey instrument will also become a significant contribution to this study as it is specifically researched, piloted and developed to focus on transition. Careful attention in its planning and development is undertaken by addressing considerations

during the planning and designing stage of a survey as raised by Rosier (1997) and by Ruel et al., (2015) (as cited in Cohen et al., 2017). Rosier's 11 planning considerations include clarification of research questions, operationalising the research questions, sampling, strategies, pre-piloting and piloting the survey, data collection practicalities and conduct, preparation, analysis and reporting. Roel et al.'s 12 considerations also include consideration of response rates, non-responses and attrition, data entry and cleaning etc.

3.3.9 Reliability and validity

In order to ensure reliability and validity, a number of actions were undertaken. These included internal and external measures and ranged from personal reflexivity to use of an Expert Group and talk-through protocols. Limitations of this study are described under Section 3.6.

External validity

External validity, which concerns the applicability of findings to different contexts or studies, is an important consideration raised by researchers and within this study (Aastrup & Halldorsson, 2013; Roe & Just, 2009, as cited in Fusch et al., 2018). Because of the international relevance of the transition topic, the methods employed in this study have to be adaptable to various contexts. Thus, the framework of the Five Bridges is well-established, and publication of the research in peer-reviewed journals will further bolster external validity. However, as stated in Chapter 1, Section 1.6, the framework is not used uncritically, and is used with an awareness that *a priori* themes could offer a limited perspective. Awareness of this was constant throughout the study. Finally, as presented in Table 3.10, the research findings can be categorised into the generalisation categories outlined by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009). Column 3 indicates the application within this

study. The final category serves as a reminder to avoid bias but is not explicitly used for generalisation purposes.

Overview of generalisation of findings as per Onwuegbuzie et al's (2009) categories		
Categories of generalisation	Definition: Making generalisations , inferences, or predictions on data ...	Identified in this study
External statistical generalisation	... obtained from a representative statistical sample to the population from which the sample was drawn	survey
Internal generalisations	obtained from one or more representative or elite participants	Use of expert group
Analytic generalisations	...applied to a wider theory on the basis of how selected cases 'fit' with general constructs	Conceptualization of transition as change and use of five bridges of transfer in analysis
Case-to-case transfers	Making generalisations or inferences from one case to another	Researcher's awareness
Naturalistic generalisations	Making generalisations based on personal experiences Used to avoid generalisation based on biased experiences of the researcher	researcher's diary

Table 3.10 Five categories of generalisation (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Measurement tools

While every effort was made to ensure the validity of the survey data, it is important to acknowledge that using the five-point Likert scale in the survey instrument may have resulted in clustering of responses around the midpoint. Originally designed with a 7-point Likert scale, discussions during talk-through protocols of the instrument's development indicated a preference for a more condensed scale. Therefore, particular attention was given during the data analysis stage to identify any concentration of responses around the midpoint.

Reliability assessment

This study was conducted with in-service and pre-service teachers. As referenced in Chapter 1, statistical tests (t-tests or chi-square tests as appropriate to the data type) were conducted to determine whether the responses from each group were statistically

significantly different. These were reported as one group if no statistically significant associations were identified.

Avoiding researcher bias

Chapter 1 revealed a starting bias, acknowledging that, anecdotally at least, a discontinuity between primary and post-primary sectors existed. Bekhet & Zausniewshi, (2012) and others argue that Mixed Methods Research (MMR) inherently provides diverse perspectives on a topic, which helps to reduce research bias to some extent (as cited in Fusch et al., 2018). While the chosen methodology and methods would help to avoid bias, it was crucial to formulate specific activities to mitigate potential bias, especially in Phase 2 where it was important to prevent a potential ‘Hawthorne effect’ (Roethlisberger and Dickenson, 1939, as cited in Thomas, 2013). Described as a phenomenon that is observed when individuals in a study change their behaviour because they know they are being studied, in this study the Hawthorne effect could lead to more of an interest in the topic of transition than normal (Thomas, 2013).

Acknowledging positionality

Positionality plays a significant role in shaping the trajectory of this thesis. Drawing from my dual roles as both a parent and a teacher educator deeply engaged in initial teacher education, I bring with me preconceived notions regarding the state of transition. In recognising the potential impact of these preconceptions on the research process, it became imperative to proactively address and mitigate any inherent biases. This endeavour was crucial to safeguard the integrity, reliability, and validity of the research outcomes. This acknowledgment demonstrates my self-awareness and reflexivity, indicating an understanding of how my positionality may shape my approach to the research topic. To mitigate this, personal reflection, use of an Expert Group and critical

friends were engaged throughout the process. While it must be acknowledged that despite proactive measures, it may be possible that some biases may have persisted, however, I believe a considerable number of strategies were in place to result in minimal bias.

Mitigating such bias involves taking proactive steps to minimise the influence of personal perspectives on the research process and outcomes. In my case, I emphasised the importance of mitigating bias to ensure the reliability and validity of the research process.

The following activities were implemented to alleviate potential researcher bias.

- I maintained a personal D.Ed diary for pre-and post-interview reflections.
- My supervisor acted as a guardian against bias.
- Member checking was employed at each stage.
- There was ongoing engagement with members of Expert Group throughout the process.
- During the piloting phase for both interviews and surveys, measures were taken to prevent biases such as using positive language, tone, or leading questions that might influence participants in line with Thomas (2013). A list of vocabulary and phrases to avoid when engaging with participants was created and adhered to, thus preventing experimenter-expectancy effects. (See Appendix 3.3).

Triangulation

Denzin (1970; 1978) defines triangulation as employing multiple external methods to analyse the same empirical events (Denzin, 2006, as cited in Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2018).

Denzin proposes four ways to triangulate data sources for enhanced validity and objectivity, outlined in Table 3.11. This MMR study employs data triangulation and methodological triangulation, where student and teacher interviews in Phase 2 inform Phase 3 quantitative methods. There is also triangulation in the mixed methods used in this study as the qualitative and quantitative methods are different but yield

complementary insights. Additionally, the design considered Onwuegbuzie et al.'s (2009) categories of generalisation as illustrated in Table 3.10.

Four types of <u>triangulation</u>	Suggested usage	In this study
Data triangulation	Suggested use for co-relating people, time, and <u>space</u>	Different people; different perspectives; different ages
Investigator triangulation	For correlating the findings from different researchers in a study	
Theory triangulation	Suggested for using and correlating multiple theoretical strategies	
Methodological triangulation	Suggested for correlating data from multiple data collection methods	Interviews, document analysis, survey

Table 3.11 Four types of triangulation (based on Denzin, 2006).

Reliability and interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews as a data generation method gives rise to potential bias because interviews, as social encounters (Atkinson, 2015; Loxley, 2010), can generate unreliable data. Atkinson (2015) suggests that interviews have limitations, offering limited insight into the complex dynamics of everyday social life. He argues that true understanding requires “participant observation” and a focus on “social interaction” and “discourse practices” (as cited in Hammersley, 2017). Loxley (2010) characterises them as ‘role-playing’ situations, where participants may be more passive than in typical conversations.

Hammersley (2017) rightly contends that the term “interview dialogue” can be misleading (p.483). However, it is important to recognise that all interactions have their rules. Both interview dialogues and classroom interactions are examples of Atkinson’s ‘performative actions’. Although Atkinson’s exclusive focus on discourse interaction is extreme, it does have implications for how data is used and interpreted (Hammersley, 2017). Loxley and Hammersley’s insights on interviews informed both the interview schedule’s planning and the subsequent analysis. During the study’s planning phase, a list

of potential probes, prompts, and checks was compiled. The interviews were recorded to monitor variations in tone and other aspects. Video recordings, prior to deletion, were also used to consider body language and visual cues.

Validity

Specific steps were taken during data collection to enhance study validity. An online survey was selected to ensure widespread participation and higher return rates. These questionnaires were designed to function well across various electronic devices for improved accessibility. In the data analysis phase, measures were in place to maintain validity. The survey was structured to ensure respondent anonymity, mitigating potential bias from a 'halo effect'. Statistical techniques were used to determine appropriate sample sizes and analyse the collected data. As the study progressed to the data reporting phase, additional precautions were taken. The interpretation of results was done without selectivity to ensure impartial reporting. The reporting process prioritised addressing research questions accurately and presenting findings precisely.

Expert group

The role of an Expert Group (EG) was to provide advice on the content of the national survey. The EG was formed using non-probability sampling and as such it is acknowledged that the group chosen did not represent the broader population (Cohen et al., 2018). Members of the EG were consulted both before and after the survey's design, and a summary of the findings was shared with the group. The selection process for the EG followed the guidelines proposed by Ivlev et al., (2015):

- Understand the tasks to be addressed by the expert team.
- Identify the fields of activity related to the tasks.
- Determine the proportion of experts from each field.
- Specify the number of experts needed and create a list.

- Secure the experts' agreement to participate.
- Finalise the list of experts.

In the formation of an Expert Group, purposive sampling was employed with the overarching objective of bringing together diverse stakeholders to discuss and evaluate the survey. As Ball (1990) suggests, purposive sampling is suitable for accessing knowledgeable individuals (cited in Cohen et al., 2018, p. 219).

Properties of an expert group	
Column 1: Professional competence	Column 2: Professional competence assessment
1. Impartiality	1. The number of projects in the field where an expert took <u>part</u>
2. Creativity	2. The expert's experience in the subject field
3. Conformism	3. Scientific and methodological research
4. Team spirit	4. Scientific degree
5. Concern in participating in topic <u>area</u>	(Pavlenko & Tolbatov, 2014)
6. Degree of participation in the problem solving	
7. Communication skills	

Table 3.12 Properties of an Expert Group.

While Ivlev et al., (2015) propose seven properties for selecting an Expert Group (Table 3.12, Column 1), this study followed the four criteria suggested by Pavlenko and Tolbatov (2014) in Column 2 as a guide for forming the Expert Group. This choice was influenced by the EG's advisory role rather than hands-on involvement and the limited number of interactions required.

The final Expert Group comprised five members, as some individuals possessed expertise in more than one of the four competencies outlined in Column 2:

- A post-primary school principal and teacher with 35+ years of experience, actively engaged in Initial Teacher Education (ITE).
- A primary Deputy Principal with over 30 years of experience, currently teaching 6th class.

- A member of the NIPT responsible for delivering Transition workshops to NQTs, also a primary school teacher.
- A former Senior Inspector with the DES.
- A member of the National Parents Council who conducts seminars on transition.

3.3.10 Ethics

Marshall and Rossman (2016) as cited in Cohen et al., (2017) describe ‘virtue ethics’ as concerning “relationships, and researchers have to consider their relationships with participants, stakeholders, sponsors, the research community, individuals, groups, the institution and so on...” (p.113). The ethical considerations are both procedural and virtue ethics.

Procedural: Ethical approval and anonymity

As adults and under-18s were involved in this study, Level 2 ethical approval was sought and received on 21st July 2021 from TCD Ethics committee. This researcher has also completed the Epigeum Research integrity training to inform practice. All procedural requirements were adhered to, and images of consent forms and Participant information Leaflets are provided for reference in Appendix 3.5. For participants between the ages of 12 and 18, a specifically written information leaflet was provided that was written in accessible language, and a guardian was present during the interviews. An overview of procedures is given in Figure 3.9.

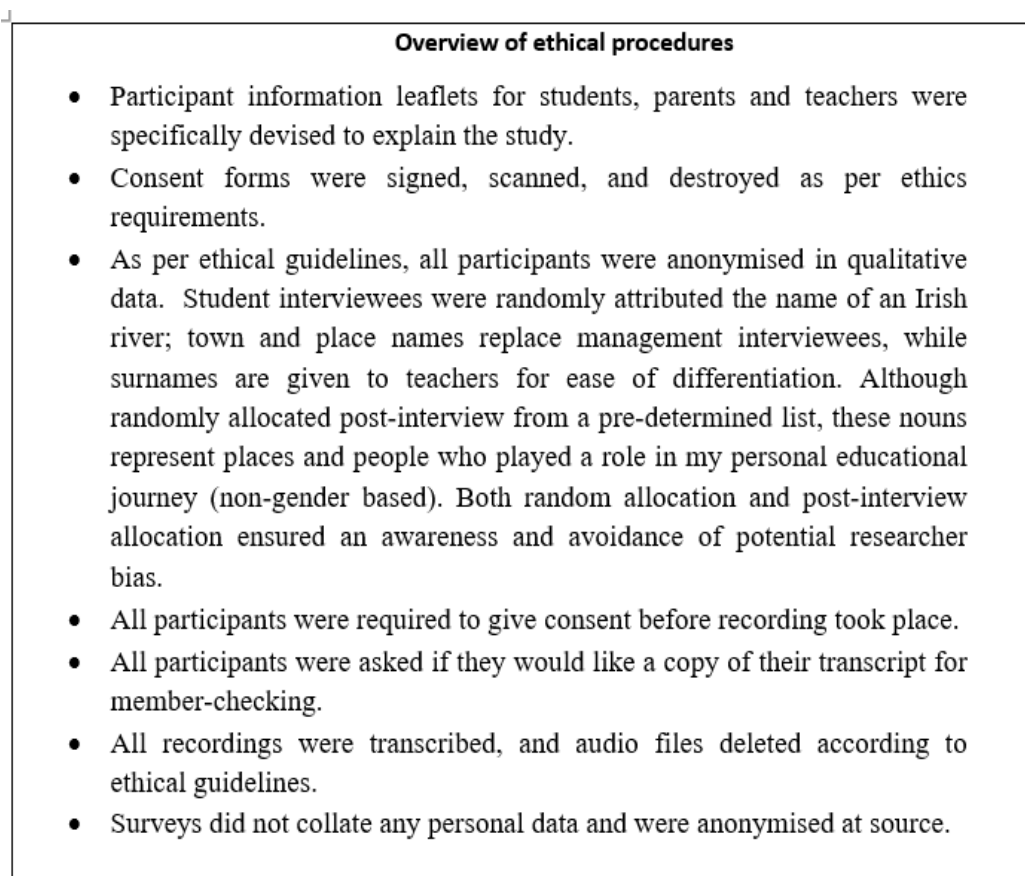


Figure 3.9 Overview of ethical procedures.

Ethical considerations and power relations ¹¹

When a researcher is personally acquainted with their participants, the familiarity can introduce the potential for power dynamics and subjectivity, which may pose challenges for reliability of findings. Bachrach and Baratz (1970) define bias and power as a system of prevailing values, beliefs, rituals, and institutional procedures (referred to as ‘rules of the game’) that consistently and systematically benefit certain individuals and groups while at the same time disadvantaging others. Those who gain advantages from this system find themselves in an advantageous position to safeguard and promote their vested concerns (as cited in Lukes, 2005). However, participation in this study was voluntary, and the participants could withdraw, not answer or choose not to participate. As Kvale

¹¹ The following was discussed in a D.Ed. submission in May 2020 by the researcher. The issue still stands and is therefore repeated here with minor modifications.

(2006) states, the interview subjects have “counter control” (p.485). In the case where the participants are former students or very close friends, participation could be construed as ‘power’ and/or ‘coercion’. They may feel obliged to take part. Participation, however, is not contrary to the interests of the participants. For teachers, it is linked to their professional practice.

The interviews also took place within an atmosphere of trust. Gleshne and Peshking, (1992) state “trust [as] the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make” (as cited in Kvale, 2006, p.482). In this study, trust had been developed external to the interview in the cases where the participants were known (through prior contact and/or personal relationships). Where participants were not known to the researcher, the ‘snowballer’ had extended their trust in the researcher to engage others. However, to stem any potential issues of power and control, participants were presented during the interview with questions that allowed them to object as per Latour’s (2000) “pragmatic conception of objectivity” (as cited in Kvale, 2006, p.488). Such questions included ‘would it surprise you if...’ or ‘would you say that ...?’

3.3.11 Section 2 Summary

This section has focussed on the rationale underpinning the choice of mixed methods research in this study. The rationale for choosing mixed methods is based on precedents in similar studies on transition, the under-researched nature of the topic, and the need for multiple perspectives. The exploratory sequential design is chosen over other options due to its alignment with the research goals and worldview. The next section explores specifics of how the MMR design and methods were deployed in this study.

3.4 Section 3: This study

3.4.1 Overview

There are three phases to this study. An overview of the phases and sample for each phase is illustrated in Figure 3.10 below.



Figure 3.10 Overview of research phase, participants and sample sizes.

When designing this research, I considered the key considerations outlined by Greene et al., (2008) in the context of mixed methods research. These considerations encompass the research's scope, paradigm, the interplay between different research types, their priority within the research process, and the timing of their implementation.

The research is structured into three distinct phases: Phase 1 involves investigating the research gap through document analysis and literature review; Phase 2 entails exploring the topic from the perspective of stakeholders through interviews, and Phase 3 encompasses the use of information from Phase 2 to comprehend the post-primary teacher's situation within a broader context through the development and administration of a survey. This extensive survey dataset focuses on teachers and student teachers' perspectives. Given the scope of this doctoral study, it was not feasible to include an explicit focus on student perspectives within the research questions. This is certainly an area for future work in the field as noted in Chapter 7. The following section outlines these research methods and is supplemented by additional tables and figures found in Appendix 9.2 for reference.

3.4.2 Phase 1: Literature review and documentary gathering

To investigate research question 2, two main approaches to document analysis were employed. Historical analysis was employed to delve into the historical context and evolution of the phenomena under investigation. By scrutinising primary and secondary sources such as Government publications, websites, this approach reconstructed historical narratives and offered insights into the broader socio-cultural contexts shaping the research topic. Content analysis was also used, enabling the quantification and categorisation of the document content to unveil underlying patterns, themes, and trends. Through the integration of these analytical approaches, a comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding was achieved, enriching the interpretation and findings of the study.

Sourcing

Library searches were conducted using databases such as EBSCOhost, ERIC, TARA, and RIAN. Specific keywords and Boolean phrases were used to refine the search. To ensure comprehensive coverage, keywords were cross-referenced using an online thesaurus. Additionally, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established, as detailed in Table 3.13. To maximize research coverage, bibliographies and references from relevant studies were cross-checked. The results were categorised into four groups: empirical studies, literature reviews, policy documents/reports, and discussion papers. These searches were conducted periodically throughout the thesis writing process.

Key words		Inclusion criteria	Exclusion
Transition Transfer Post-primary Junior to senior school Secondary Second level	Language	English language	Other languages
	Timeframe	1970 - present	Pre 1970
	Requirement	Peer-reviewed articles	Non-peer reviewed articles
	Topic	Primary to post-primary transition Mainstream transitions	Non-educational transitions Pre-school to primary (unless in Ireland) AEN (unless within Ireland) Transitions from second to third level
	Format	Books, journal articles, Literary reviews, policies, reports etc.	Book Reviews; non-published theses etc.

Table 3.13 Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Document analysis

Empirical research specifically linked to an Irish context was gathered, and the most frequently referenced citations within Irish research were categorised as per Appendix 3.4. This list is not exhaustive but provides an overview of the timeframe of research conducted and the researchers involved.

The research process involved identifying and searching for key terms such as ‘transition,’ ‘transfer,’ ‘continuity,’ and terms specific to different educational levels like

‘post-primary,’ ‘second level,’ ‘secondary,’ and ‘primary.’ While documents mentioning transitions from pre-school to primary and post-primary to further education were considered, the primary focus remained on post-primary education.

Historical analysis: In total, there have been three major changes to primary level, in 1971, 1999 and 2023, and at pre-school level in 2009. As stated in Section 1, document selection was based on educational developments that impacted transition from primary to post-primary. The most relevant change to post-primary level that impacts on transition is the implementation of the new Junior Cycle in 2015 and the resulting individual subject specifications. Changes at senior level and changes from the Intermediate Certificate to the Junior Certificate of 1989 are not focussed on here as their impact on the current state of transition is outdated. From the perspective of ITE and CPD, relevant documents from the Teaching Council since 2011 and references to CPD providers also form the basis for this analysis. An overview of inclusion and exclusion criteria is documented in Table 3.14.

Thematic analysis was conducted using pre-defined themes based on the Five Bridges of Transfer framework, following the six steps outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006) (see Table 3.18). Each document underwent individual analysis using these pre-established themes. Initially, references were categorised according to their respective themes, followed by a comparison and contrast across the documents. Subsequently, content analysis was performed using frequency lists to identify recurring terms such as ‘transition’, ‘continuity’ and ‘transfer’ and ‘progression’ which enabled the emergence of underlying patterns within the data. The documents were also examined for references to each educational level, for example, primary documents to Junior cycle and vice versa. The findings of the documentary analysis are presented separately in Chapter 4.

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Refined list
Location	Ireland	Documents for countries outside of Ireland	• 1971 Primary Curriculum • 1999 Revised New Primary Curriculum • Aistear • Framework for Primary (2023) • Framework for Junior Cycle • Specifications for Junior Cycle subjects • Teaching Council Guidelines for ITE providers (2011, revised, 2017, • Céim (2020), • Droichead, (Cosán) • Agencies: NIPT; NCCA; PDST; NCSE, NPC, ESRI, CSO
Format	• Policies and documents relating to curricula, • frameworks in primary and post-primary to include curricula, frameworks, Guidelines etc. • Government Acts, • relevant circulars pertaining to transition. government and agency websites pertaining to transition such as NIPT, NCCA, NCSE, Education centres etc.	Non-grey literature	
Timeframe	Post 1971 to 2023	Pre-1971	
Language	English	Irish, and other languages	
Source	Government publications, DES, NCCA, Teaching Council, NCSE, CSO, European commission, ESRI, NPC, PDST, JCT	Anything not relevant to transition an Irish context	

Table 3.14 Inclusion and exclusion criteria for policy document analysis.

3.4.3 Phase 2: Qualitative data generation (interviews)

Qualitative sampling (Students)

Convenience (C) and snowball (S) sampling were used. The ratio of C : S for students was 10 : 16 as illustrated in Figure 3.11 and related table below. Contact was made through two main ways – (1) Family and (2) friends. In total, 12 were not known, while 14 were known to the researcher.

C v S n = 26	Convenience	Snowball
Family	5	12
Friends	5	4
Total	10	16

Figure 3.11 Student participant sampling overview.

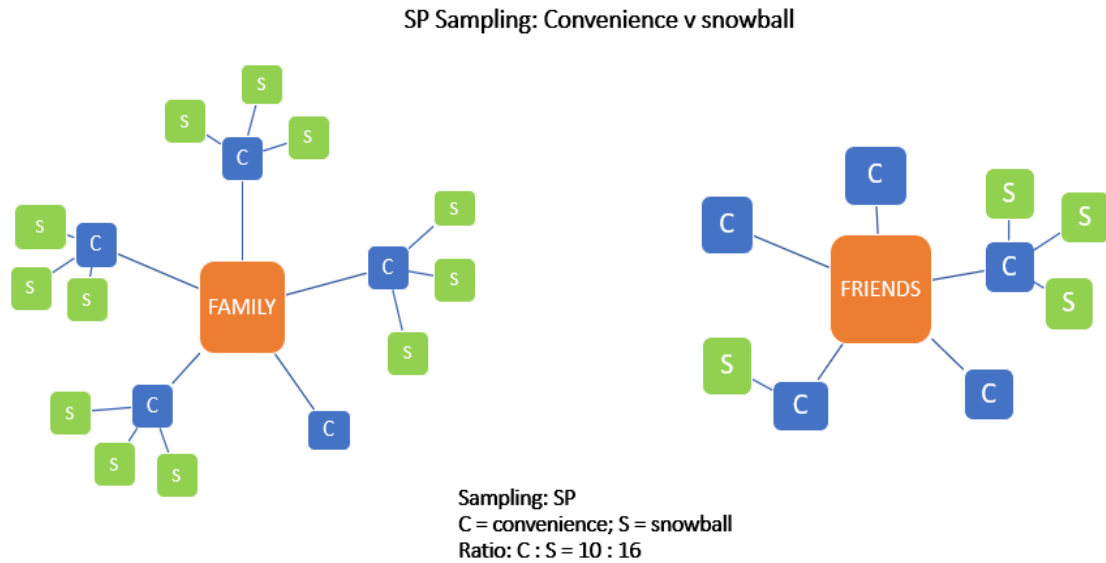


Figure 3.12 Student participant sampling overview

A total of 26 interviews were conducted, with four parents providing their input during these interviews. Using both sampling methods, 14 of the participants were classified as familiar to the researcher, while the remaining 12 were unknown. These participants were distributed across 21 distinct families. The remaining individuals were siblings, of which four out of five attended different post-primary schools than their interviewed sibling. See Appendix 3.7 for more details.

Qualitative sampling (Teachers)

Convenience (C) and snowball (S) sampling were used. The ratio of C:S was 4 : 1 as illustrated in Figure 3.13 below. Contact was made through three main ways – (1) personal contacts (Family, & friends), (2) generic invite through WhatsApp groups and (3) professional contacts. Overall, 35 participants were approached. There was an overall 97% positive response. Only 1 participant did not reply, while 3 wished to postpone and one did not show up at the agreed time.

	Convenience	Snowball
Family & Friends	6	4
Online groups	5	1
Professional contacts	13	1
Total	24	6

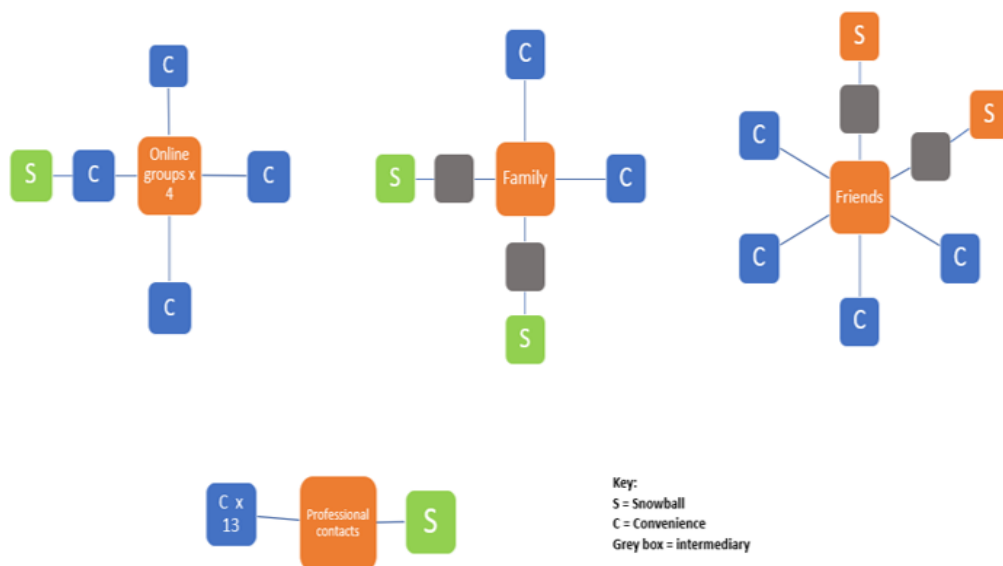


Figure 3.13 Representation of sampling methods for Phase 2.

Sample profile (Phase 2 Students)

The sample included an equal gender split of 13 males and 13 females with representatives across all year groups (see Table 3.15). Among the primary schools that they went to, the majority (10) were coeducational, while most of the post-primary schools (11) were single sex (six all-boys and five all-girls), with five being coeducational. The transition often involved moving to or from single-sex schools. Additionally, most participants were currently in the Junior Cycle, with 14 of the 26 participants having undergone the transition pre-COVID-19, and one still in primary school.

Year	6 th class	1st	2nd	3rd	4 th / TY	5 th	6 th
Male		1	3	3	1	5	0
Female	1	2	5	3	1	1	0

Table 3.15 Overview of student participants and stage of education.

Regarding their position in their respective families, there was an even distribution of participants as eldest, middle, or youngest. However, there was a notable 3:1 ratio favouring participants who did not have siblings attending the same post-primary school during their transition. Nonetheless, all participants experienced the transition with at least one classmate from their primary school.

Location

The location of participants was primarily Dublin-based with 16 participants located within four postal districts in South County Dublin. The remaining ten participants were in five counties across Leinster, Connacht, and Munster. In total the participants represented 17 different primary schools and 16 post-primary schools divided into nine rural and eight urban primary schools. The post-primary schools, however, are weighted towards more urban locations (10) than rural (6). Only one of these post-primary schools outside of Dublin was city-based (see Appendix 3.7).

School size

The breakdown of participants to school size as per DES breakdown is illustrated in Appendix 3.6. Most primary schools are medium sized while the post-primary schools were large. In terms of national representation for information purposes only, the participant schools represent circa 2% of primary schools in the 200-299 category and almost 4% of the 500 plus categories of post-primary schools.

Sample profile (Phase 2, Teachers)

The sample included 30 post-primary teachers, with 22 females and eight males. These teachers represented a minimum of 26 post-primary schools, which were different from the schools attended by the Phase 2 interviewed pupils. The teachers’ experience spanned from 1 year as an NQT to over 30 years, with an average experience of more than 15 years in teaching (refer to Figure 3.14).

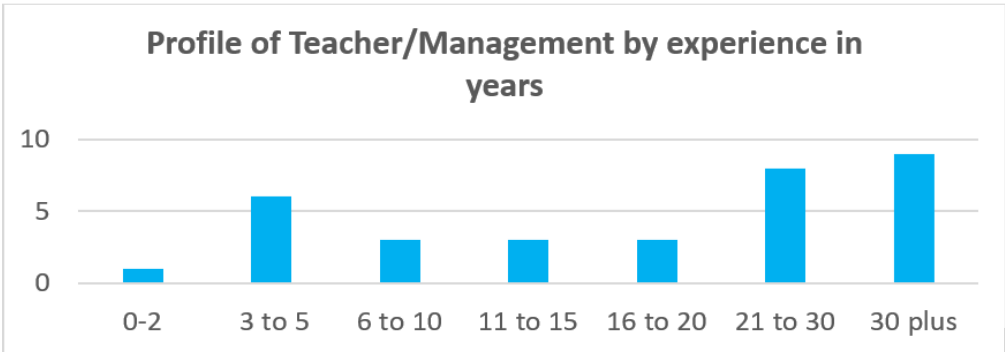


Figure 3.14 Profile of Stage 2 teacher and management participants by years of experience.

School size, location, and makeup (teachers)

The teachers come from different post-primary school sizes, (See Appendix 3.8). Eighteen teach mainly in schools with a student population of over 700. This aligns with the Phase 2 student sample where the majority transferred to schools of 700+ students (see Appendix 3.7). It must be noted that one school sits in the lower category of 100-199. This is a Gaeltacht school and as such is an individual case. However, the school is included here as, within Phase 2, three participants experienced transition between Gaelscoileanna, with one moving from a Gaelscoil to a Gaelscoil; one from an English-medium primary school to a post-primary Gaelscoil and one went from an English-medium Primary to a Gaelscoil primary to an English-medium post-primary. The study, however, does not focus on difficulties associated with transitioning to and from different language-medium schools.

Location-wise, the schools were mainly within the greater Dublin area but went as far north as Drogheda and as far south as Wexford. In terms of gender distribution, the majority taught in single sex schools (47% all girls; 14% all boys; 39% mixed). This is similar to the profile of the student participants in Phase 2 where almost three-quarters of participants attended single sex schools. As previously stated, the role of school gender in relation to transition is not the focus of this study. It is included here for information purposes and is highlighted in discussion where necessary.

Roles of teacher participants

All roles that would be expected to be part of the transition process (subject teacher, Year head, first year tutor, deputy principal, principal, and AEN), except that of guidance and Home-School Community Liaison (HSCL), are represented in the interviews. However, guidance and HSCL teachers were both approached to test and run-through the survey before it was launched. These 30 post-primary teachers comprise 12 Principals/Deputy Principals (including teaching principals) and 18 post-primary teachers of varying subjects. Five participants (Hegarty, O'Reilly, Finn, Dunphy and O'Dea) are, or also have been First Year, Year Heads in the last two years.

Teaching subjects

The subject specialisms of the teachers interviewed were not limited to core subjects of English, Irish and Maths. In fact, Geography, History and Science teachers were specifically targeted as these were the subjects that the student sample cohort perceived as being very different to primary school (in terms of content or preparedness). (See Figure 3.15 for subject specialism overview.)

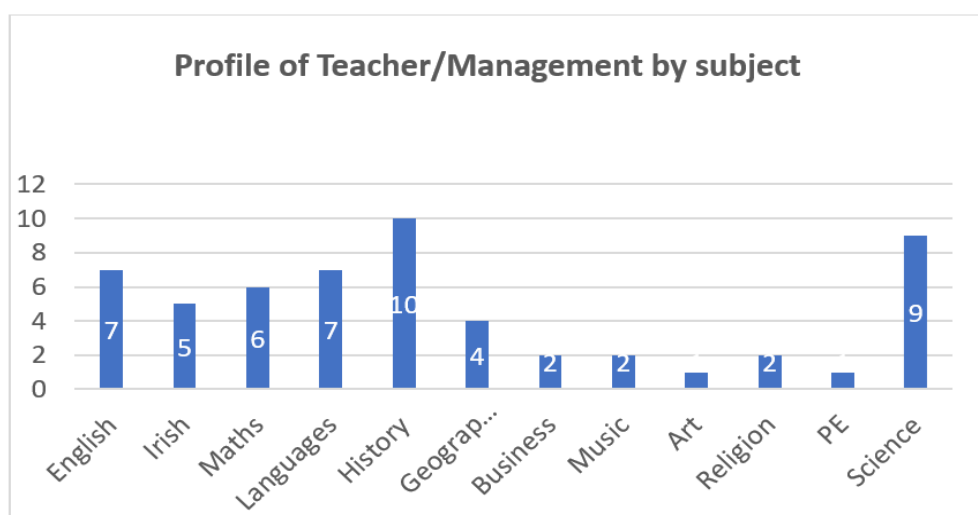


Figure 3.15 Profile of Stage 2 participants by teaching subjects.

Teaching experience

In total, these 30 teachers have teaching experience in over 45 different post-primary schools, which, based on estimates from the participants, link with almost 350 feeder schools. (350 refers to a combined estimate of feeder schools to the school the teacher is currently in. Overlap of feeder schools could occur in this data, but due to the geographical coverage of the teachers interviewed, this would be minimal). This potentially means that the participants in Phase 2 provide experiential information on over 60 post-primary schools across student and teacher interviews.

3.4.4 Qualitative methods: Semi-structured interviews

In total 26 student and 30 teacher/management interviews were conducted. An overview of the interview process is given in Table 3.16.

Overview of semi-structured interviews		
	Phase 2 Students	Phase 2 Teachers/management
Interview type	Semi-structured	Semi-structured
Length	30-40 minutes	45-55 minutes
Medium	Online	Online
Platform	Teams/zoom	Teams/zoom
Language	English	English

Table 3.16 Overview of semi-structured interviews.

Format of interviews

Interviews were conducted online and benefited from the points raised by Stewart & Shamdasani, (2017) which include a reduction in lead-in time and flexibility and timesaving for both participants and researcher. They also allowed for easier access to a more geographically spread sample. No major limitations due to technical issues were experienced.

Phase 2 student interviews were conducted online via TEAMS during the months of November 2021 and January 2022 and lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. Teacher and management interviews were conducted between May and June 2022 and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. They were recorded and transcribed. Questions (for interview schedules see Appendix 3.6) were sent in advance to the participants, and these questions explored areas within the Five Bridges of Transfer (Galton et al., 1999). All participants were asked and agreed to be contacted again should the need arise.

Interview procedure

The interview procedure followed the steps listed in Table 3.17 under ‘Format of Interviews’ and were generally akin to Finch et al.’s (2003) five stages of a focus group: Stage One: Scene setting and ground rules; Stage Two: Individual introductions; Stage Three: The Opening Topic; Stage Four: Discussion; Stage Five: Ending the discussion.

Format of Interviews (Finch et al., 2003)
The interview followed these steps: 1. Welcome and introduction. 2. Explain research and purpose for interviews. 3. Explain recording. Choice to have video off. Start recording. 4. Explain how the session will run. 5. Invite first name sharing where applicable and general information. 6. Go through questions (not necessarily in order). 7. Thanks, and conclusion.

Table 3.17 *Format of Interviews, Finch et al.'s (2003).*

Interview schedule (Students)

The interview schedule was initially drafted using previous surveys used in other studies on transition such as Prendergast et al., (2019), O'Brien, (2004) and Bagnall et al., (2020). The Five Bridges of Transfer were used as a framework for the questions. There were three iterations of the interview schedule. The reviewers included a student teacher, a teacher educator and a second level student.

Pilot (Students)

A pilot focus group involving four individuals of the same age group was conducted and, while it was not recorded, the researcher maintained contemporaneous notes capturing questions and detailed answers. However, due to the online nature of the medium, and age group's tendency towards basic answers rather than engage in in-depth discussions, it was decided to move to semi-structured interviews for subsequent data collection with this age group.

Interview schedule (Teachers)

The interview schedule was similar to that of the first set of interviews with minor modifications. For example, certain aspects of students' contributions on subject

continuity and discontinuity, would be deemed to be of interest. Therefore, in Phase 2 interviews with teachers and management the perceptions of students were included as a question phrases ‘would it surprise you that...’.(See Appendix 3.6 for interview schedule.)

Interview pilot and rollout (Teachers)

The questions underwent a pilot phase, reviewed by three individuals knowledgeable in education, often referred to as ‘critical friends’. One of their comments addressed an initial issue on questions referring to information transfer: “**Bureaucratic...** I’m so sorry, but I really don’t understand what you’re asking about here, what is meant by “information transfer between primary schools about students’ attainment in your subject”?...” Based on their feedback, adjustments were made to the questions for clarity. For instance, that previous question became ‘Can you describe how information on students is transferred...?’. Subsequently, the interviews were conducted online via TEAMS in May and June 2022, each lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines. Participants were provided with the interview questions in advance, and the discussions explored various aspects related to the Five Bridges of Transfer framework (Galton et al., 1999). All participants consented to the possibility of being contacted again if necessary.

As Fusch, Fusch and Ness (2018) have pointed out, researchers can sometimes become engrossed by data collection, overlooking the potential benefits of casual conversation to gather information more effortlessly. Therefore, it was essential to adopt an interview style that fostered a friendly and conversational atmosphere. Using a semi-structured approach allowed for a balance between structured questions and the freedom to explore specific points (Thomas, 2013).

During interviews, I occasionally provided affirmation or made supportive comments to reassure participants that their insights were valuable and aligned with the thinking of others. This approach aimed to alleviate their potential guilt about deficient knowledge on the topic and encouraged open and candid discussion. These actions were deliberate.

Online interviews were chosen due to the constraints imposed by COVID-19. While online and face-to-face interviews have obvious differences in format, eye-contact etc., there are notable advantages to using the online medium, as highlighted by Stewart and Shamdasani (2017). These benefits include reduced lead-in time, flexibility, timesaving for both participants and the researcher, and broader geographical reach. Moreover, all interviews were recorded to prevent misunderstandings or misquoting later during transcription or review stage. However, online interviews necessitate technical requirements, such as broadband width and familiarity with online platforms, which were not encountered as issues.

3.4.5 Qualitative data analysis

Process of analysis: Thematic (*a priori* themes)

Thematic analysis using *a priori* themes of the Five Bridges of Transfer was conducted following the steps of Braun & Clarke's (2006) six steps for thematic analysis (Table 3.18).

Six steps for thematic analysis - Braun & Clarke (2006)	This study
Step 1: Become familiar with the data, Step 2: Generate initial codes, Step 3: Search for themes, Step 4: Review themes, Step 5: Define themes, Step 6: Write-up.	Listening, transcribing, reading; re-reading A priori themes of bridges used. Colour-coded in transcripts Reviewed and re-analysed. Emergent themes noted.

Table 3.18 Six steps for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Following transcription, the qualitative data analysis in Phase 2 followed a structured process based on the Five Bridges of Transfer framework and Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis: (Examples are available in Appendix 3.9).

- Step 1.** Manual analysis was chosen over digital tools like Nvivo to foster a deeper comprehension of the data. Each interview was reviewed at least five times.
- Step 2.** Data was categorised using *a priori* themes related to the Five Bridges of Transfer and the colours as shown in Figure 3.16 were used throughout for coding purposes. Expected information for each theme was compiled to create a code memo.

A priori themes



Figure 3.16 A priori themes.

- Step 3.** The data was colour-coded for each bridge, and relevant references within interviews were manually highlighted. Coding was tested initially in two interviews.
- Step 4.** References to each bridge were added to the code memo, and transcripts were re-examined. Emergent themes were noted.
- Step 5.** Initial subthemes were identified under each *a priori* theme for qualitative analysis.
- Step 6.** The findings were then documented.

This process ensured a rigorous and systematic analysis of the qualitative data within the established framework.

The same process was followed for analysis of the free text data submitted by respondents in the survey. Throughout, emergent themes that were additional to the bridges were recorded. Between each data generation phase, a ‘Data-generation reflection’ was conducted to consider any implication on the next phase and is included in Chapter 5, Section 5. Finally, St. Pierre & Jackson (2014) caution researchers about the potential for thematic analysis and coding that can result in the over identification of patterns, even in cases where none are present (as cited in Cohen et al., 2017). This consideration guided the approach taken in conducting the current analysis.

While the primary analysis approach for interviews is thematic analysis rather than discourse analysis, particular attention is given to frequently used words or phrases that may be suitable for meta-analysis. This involves identifying instances where word choice may reveal underlying attitudes, perspectives, or levels of knowledge. Additionally, non-verbal cues are examined to gain insights into attitudes, and word frequency is explored as a potential means of conveying specific viewpoints or assumptions.

3.5 Phase 3: Quantitative data generation (survey)

3.5.1 Quantitative methods: Survey

Survey process, timeline, and structure

An online survey was designed based on the exploratory interviews in Phase 2. The survey was generated by inductive methods. An overview of the survey is presented in Table 3.19. Survey questions were generally based on the interview schedules of Phase 2 and followed the format of the Five Bridges of Transfer and drew on the policy analysis outlined in Chapter 4. Although the survey did not directly inquire about policies, references to key policy documents were strategically included within questions to assess participants’ familiarity with them.

Overview of Survey	
Question types	Open and closed question types. Dichotomous. Likert scale for opinion. Free text for individual responses.
Sections	Section 1: Profile - You and your school. Section 2: Communication between schools. Section 3: Social and emotional supports/initiatives. Section 4: Pedagogy and curriculum continuity. Section 5: Managing Learning. Section 6: Teachers and transition.
Length	15-17 minutes
Medium	Online
Platform	Qualtrics
Language	English
Ethics	Opening page consent

Table 3.19 Overview of quantitative survey.

Survey development and piloting

The steps in the creation and checking of the survey are illustrated in Figure 3.16. Created using Qualtrics, piloting was conducted through talk-through protocols and discussion with members of the Expert Group and critical friends; technical testing was performed by using different digital platforms. In total there were 10 drafts.

Survey process and timeline



Figure 3.16 Survey process and timeline.

The steps were as follows:

1. All interviews from Phase 2 were analysed. A draft survey was created on Qualtrics. This draft was based on the analysis of Phase 2 and incorporated issues that arose and phrases from interviews as appropriate. The survey also incorporated questions from Prendergast et al., (2019) study to allow for later comparison.
2. The structure of the survey aligned with the Five Bridges model and included an initial section that allowed a profile of the respondents to be created. The structure followed the interview schedule with additions based on analysis of Phase 2.
3. To ensure a good response rate and survey completion, question types were mainly closed with some opportunities offered for open responses. No requirement to complete questions, other than for consent, was included. As the survey targeted both pre- and in-service (qualified) teachers, some questions were directed only to particular participant groups using the “Skip” functionality in Qualtrics.
4. The survey was piloted by 10 members comprising the Expert Group and teachers using think-aloud protocols. These included representatives of the Expert Group, members from NIPT, the National Parents’ Council, subject teachers, and representatives from DES Inspectorate. Roles of HSCL, Guidance or a management representative from an Educate Together school were not represented in Phase 2 interviews. Therefore, efforts were made to include these voices at this stage. Each ‘pilot’ read-through resulted in new versions. In total, there were 10 iterations of the survey. Enhancements were made primarily to content, format and length. The penultimate draft was piloted by two critical teacher friends.
5. A technical pilot to ensure functionality across devices was carried out by three volunteers. Their responses were deleted.

6. The national survey was launched on November 28th, 2022, and was open for three weeks.

3.5.2 Quantitative data analysis

All survey questions and interview questions had been mapped to the *a priori* themes prior to generating data. This allowed for clarity in cross-referencing during analysis. Statistical analysis was conducted through Qualtrics^{xm}. Descriptive statistics were generated using Qualtrics (means, standard deviations etc.). Relationships between variables were explored using cross-tabulation and Stats IQ functions. Inferential statistics such as chi square tests were carried out to test association between variables where applicable. Results were organised according to the *a priori* bridges and presented as descriptive analysis in Chapter 5. Thematic analysis using *a priori* themes was conducted on free text entries.

3.5.3 Quantitative sampling

The target population is post-primary teachers and student teachers of any subject in Ireland. The target population comprised both pre-service and in-service teachers to allow for a comparison in analysis (see Chapter 3, Section 3.37). Additionally, the exploratory interviews raised issues relating to student teachers and their interactions with first-year students. Therefore, they are included in the target sample. Given the novice status of pre-service teachers, it was expected that their awareness of issues in relation to transition would be somewhat less developed than their in-service counterparts. In order to address this in the data analysis, statistical tests (t-test, chi-square as appropriate to the data type) were used to determine where the responses of the two participants groups were statistically significantly different (see Section 3.3.9). Where the responses for the two participant groups were statistically significantly different, the results are reported

separately. Where the results of the groups are not different, they are reported as one group. The results are also included in Appendix 5.0.

Sampling strategy

The following steps to ensure sample distribution were undertaken:

1. Distribution to personal contacts to expand the survey's reach (approx. 80 distributed onwards yielding 160 approx. responses).
2. Email was sent to all 700+ post-primary schools in the 26 counties asking them to share the survey with their staff. Emails were also sent to all ITE providers asking them to share the link with their student teachers. A targeted social media campaign via LinkedIn/Twitter was also launched (over 800 contacts) with post-primary teachers. The latter resulted in the highest response rate.

The survey was open for three weeks. After a strong initial response from convenience and snowballing, an increase in responses was noticed after a focussed LinkedIn campaign (outnumbering respondents from targeted emails to schools). In total, 475 respondents consented and 460 completed the survey. (See Table 3.20). 370 were in-service post-primary teachers fully registered with the Teaching Council which equates to almost 1% of the total number of post-primary teachers in Ireland in 2022. 90 respondents were either NQTs or student teachers. Most questions were answered in all responses. The n value therefore changes.

Overview of recorded responses in survey	
Number of recorded respondents' consent	475
Number of respondents who completed the survey	460
Number of respondents who identify as post-primary fully registered teachers with the Irish Teaching Council	370
Number of respondents who are not (fully) registered with the Irish Teaching Council	90

Table 3.20 Overview of recorded survey responses.

3.5.4 Sample profile

This study was conducted with in-service and pre-service teachers. In total there was 475 respondents, though not all answered every question, which accounts for the varying 'n' number in the data. The following gives a breakdown of their profile.

Gender

Of 461 respondents, most (352) are female. The 74% figure of female respondents closely matches the overall percentage of female teachers at this level in Ireland (68.9% as per OECD, 2021). However, the number of male respondents (105 - 22%) falls below the OECD's male teacher percentage of 31.1% for the second level in Ireland. The remaining 4% preferred not to say or identified as non-binary.

Teaching status of respondents

370 respondents were in-service post-primary teachers registered with the Teaching Council. This equates to almost 1% of the total number of post-primary teachers in Ireland in 2022. Over 90 respondents self-categorised as NQTs, student teachers (pre-service) or unqualified teachers. Most (59) of the pre-service respondents were in the under 25 age group. Further analysis of the 90 unregistered respondents reveals that 84 are student teachers/NQTs, 2 have no teacher qualification, 2 have foreign education qualifications, 1 is involved in school administration and 1 is a former teacher whose TC registration has lapsed.

Age of respondents

The majority of the 461 survey respondents fell into the 46+ age category, mirroring the distribution of registered teachers in Irish post-primary (see Figure 3.17). Among the respondents in the under-25 category (78 respondents, 16%), this mostly comprises pre-service/not fully registered teachers, including PME/NQTs.

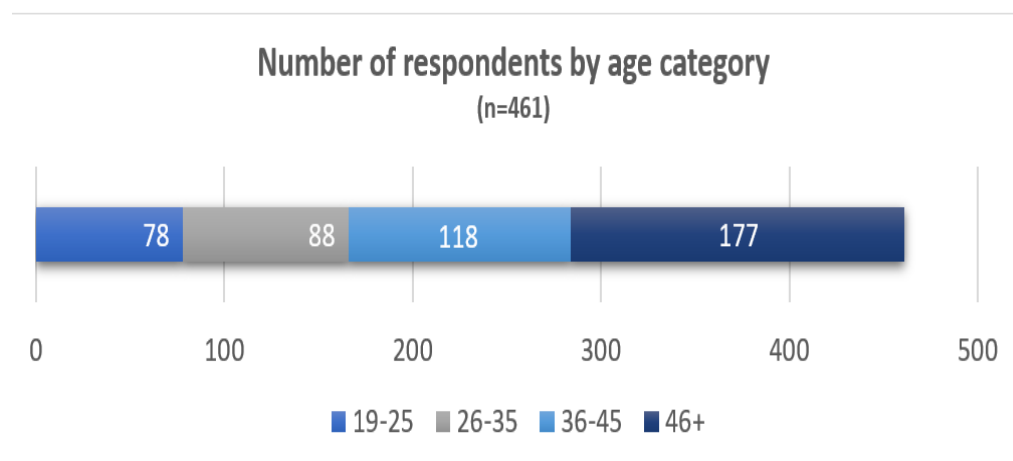


Figure 3.17 Profile of survey respondents by age.

Type of teaching qualification

More than 203 of 465 respondents have completed a one-year postgraduate diploma in education, 126 have completed or are pursuing a two-year programme, and 12 have completed a concurrent teaching qualification as illustrated in Figure 3.18). Among those with a Bachelor of Science background, 88 have followed the degree with either a one- or two-year teaching qualification, though the exact distribution is not specified. Furthermore, 36 respondents mentioned that they entered the teaching profession through alternative routes. Some clarified that they entered as guidance teachers rather than through traditional teaching pathways, which means they are not fully registered with the Teaching Council.

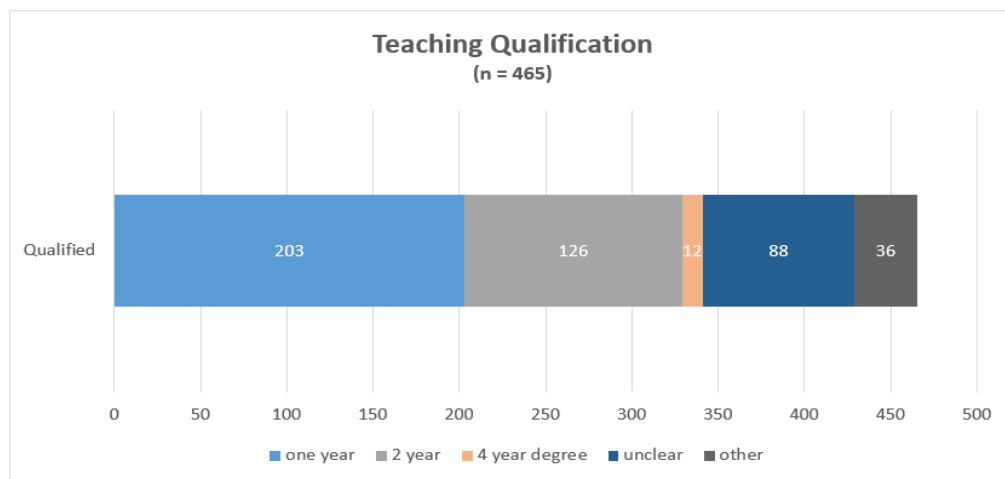


Figure 3.18 Profile of survey respondents by teaching qualification.

Teaching experience of respondents

102 of 434 (21%) reported having between 21 and 30 years of teaching experience. On average, there are 108.5 respondents distributed across the four categories of experience. As presented in Figure 3.19, there are slightly fewer respondents in the categories with 10 years and below. Out of the 140 respondents in the 21 to 30 years plus category, 38 have over 30 years of experience. While 84 respondents identified as student teachers, 85 reported having 1-2 years of experience; the difference may be due to one respondent who identified as unqualified.

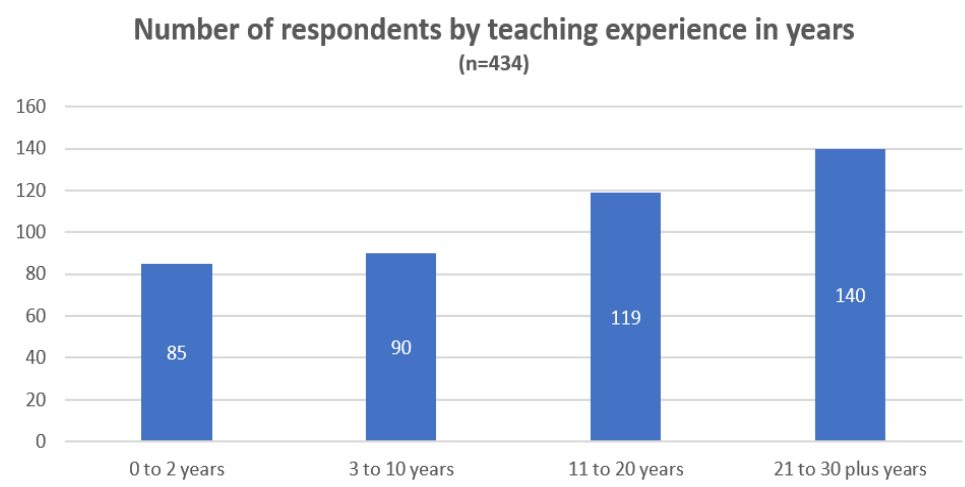


Figure 3.19 Profile of survey respondents by years of experience.

Respondents' subject specialisms

Teachers were asked to list the subjects they teach. According to curriculumonline.ie, there are 36 curricular subjects divided into five subject groups at the Leaving Certificate level: Languages, Science, Business Studies, Applied Science, and Social Studies (see Appendix 3.10). These five categories were used to categorise the subject specialisations of the respondents. However, since the subjects Physics/Chemistry and Home Economics belong to two curriculum groups, this analysis includes Physics/Chemistry in the Science group and Home Economics in the Applied Sciences group. The breakdown of subject specialisations among survey respondents (see Figure 3.20) shows representation in all categories.

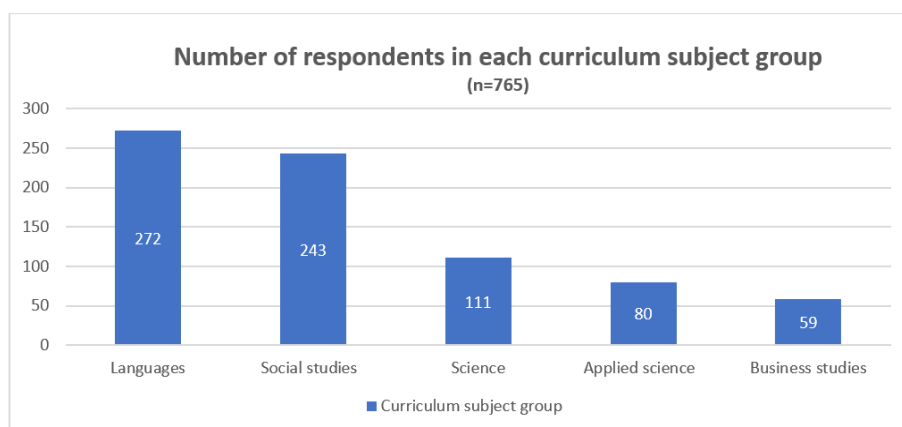


Figure 3.20 Profile of survey respondents by teaching subject categories.

While all subject categories are represented, there is a minority of specific subjects within these categories that are not included. Out of the 36 subjects, all are represented by survey respondents except for Latin, Greek, Arabic, Russian (in the Languages group), and Physics/Chemistry (in the Science group). The responses indicate survey participation (albeit minimal in some cases) from teachers of all subjects in the Social Studies, Business, and Applied Science categories. (See Figure 3.21 for breakdown of subjects). AEN/SEN and guidance teaching, although not included in these syllabi groupings, were indicated as subjects taught by 29 and 15 respondents, respectively.

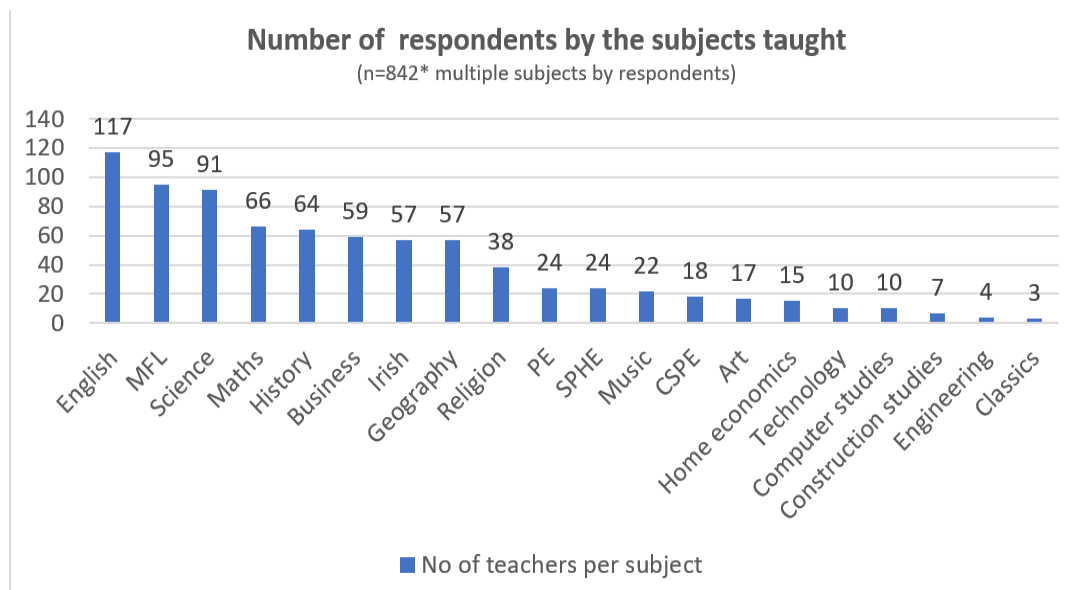


Figure 3.21 Profile of survey respondents by specific teaching subjects.

Note: n=842 includes guidance and AEN.

Respondents' role in schools

357 fully registered respondents indicated their roles within their schools (see Appendix 3.10). Some respondents hold multiple roles in their schools, resulting in a total of 482 responses. These roles encompass a wide range, including school chaplain and Year Head for different year groups. Notably, four out of the 18 respondents who mentioned being Year Heads for other year groups specifically noted their previous roles as first-year Year Heads. (See Figure 3.22.)

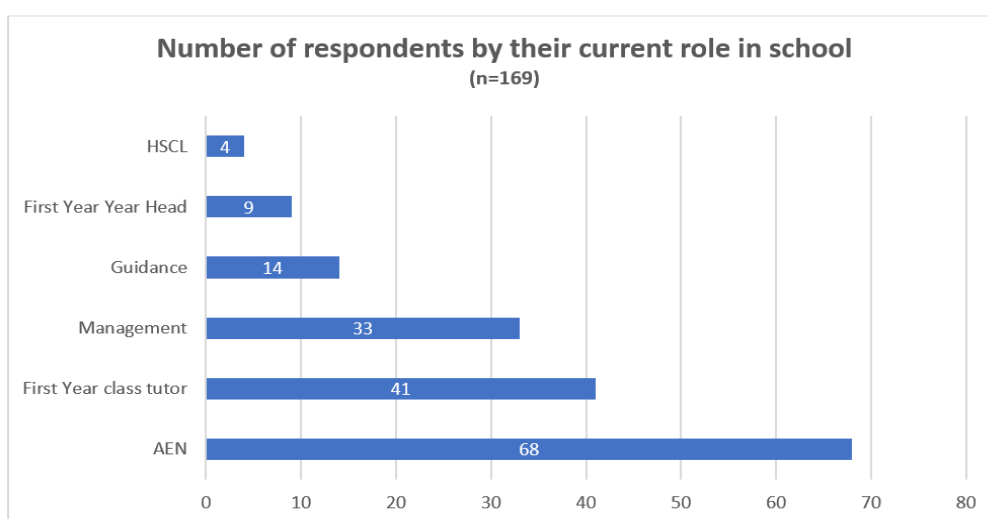


Figure 3.22 Profile of survey respondents by role in school.

Teaching contact of respondents with First year pupils

389 (88%) of 441 respondents stated that they have taught first years in the last three years. 52 (12%) replied that they had not. 34 did not respond to this question. 371 (95%) of these 389 indicated that they are currently teaching first years (the remainder may not have first years currently but have taught them in the past three years).

Number of contact hours with First year pupils

Most respondents indicated that they had between three and four hours contact teaching time with First year pupils per week. Only 1 student teacher reports not teaching first years, while the average number of hours for student teachers with first years is just over four hours. 102 (90%) of the 36-45 age category respondents teach First years. 82 (98%) of the 26-35 age category respondents teach First years and 69 (93%) of the 19-25 age category respondents teach First years (See Appendix 3.10).

Overview of respondents' school locations

The majority of respondents describe their school location as either a large town (139, 34%), small town (137, 32%), or suburban (113, 26%), with only 39 (9%) identifying as rural.

In terms of geographical distribution 274 (68%) of teacher respondents are from the Dublin and Leinster region, which broadly aligns with the fact that the Dublin area accounts for 25.9% of post-primary schools nationally, while Leinster accounts for an additional 25.1% of schools in Ireland. Munster represents 14.7% of post-primary schools nationally and is reflected by 69 (16%) of all respondents. Connacht, which accounts for 13.9% of post-primary schools nationwide, has 41 respondents (9.3% of the total). 16 Ulster respondents make up 3.7%, while Ulster accounts for approximately 6.9% of post-primary schools nationally based on 2020 figures (732 schools). Overall,

the distribution of responses broadly aligns with the distribution of post-primary schools in the provinces, suggesting representativeness. However, the survey did not identify specific schools within these regions.

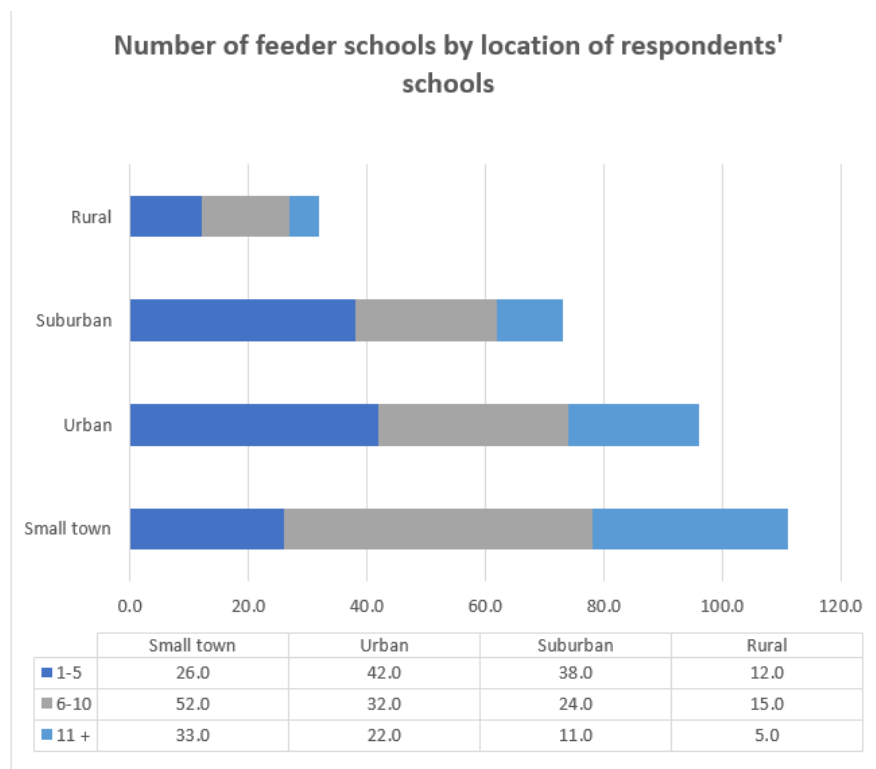


Figure 3.23 Location and number of feeder schools

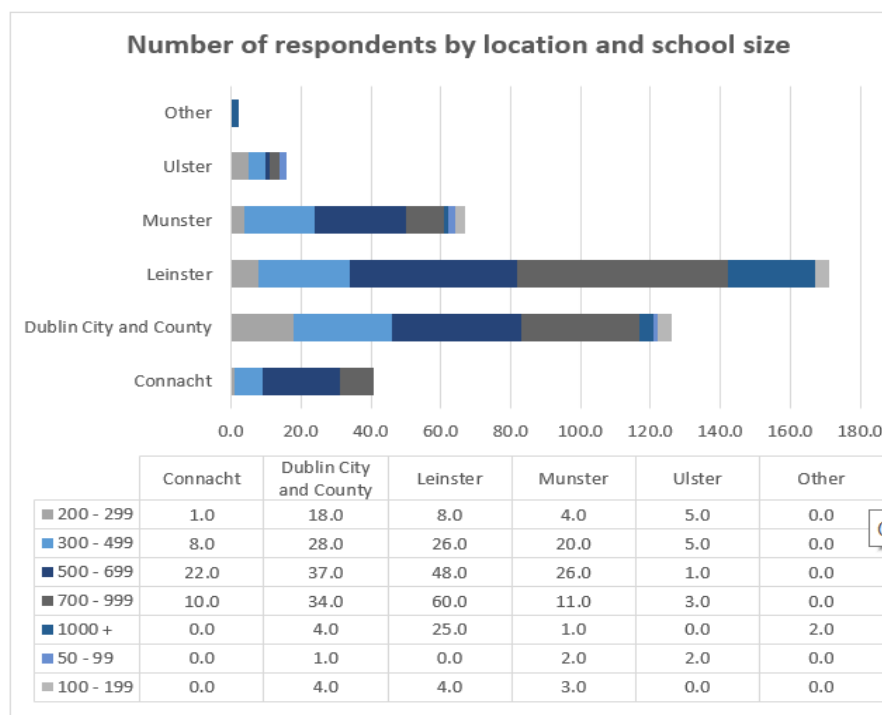


Figure 3.24 Respondents by location and school type.

School type

Most respondents described their school as a Voluntary Secondary School (196/426). 97 describe their school as a Community College, 63 as a community/comprehensive school, 20 as an ETB, and 21 as an Educate Together school. However, ‘others’ also included references to Education and Training Board (ETB), DEIS (Delivering Equality in Schools) and Gaelscoil, (Irish-medium language schools) and different forms of patronage, suggesting some confusion over the categorisation of their school¹². In terms of school type, the majority (259 or 54.5%) teach in mixed-gender schools, while 73 (15.4%) and 85 (17.9%) teach in all-boys’ and all-girls’ schools, respectively.

School size

As illustrated in Figure 3.24 most respondents indicate that they teach in schools in the 500 to 1000 size category.

School status

Most respondents’ schools are non-DEIS schools (129 schools from 429 respondents are DEIS). Additionally, 25 respondents teach in Irish medium post-primary schools. Most of the respondents teach in non-fee-paying schools, with only 41 out of 429 indicating that they teach in private schools in Ireland.

Number of feeder schools

As illustrated in Figure 3.23, most respondents mentioned that their post-primary schools typically receive students from between six and ten primary feeder schools.

¹²As of 2022, there are 21 Educate Together post-primary schools, 252 ETB schools (<https://www.etbi.ie/about-etbi/post-primary-education/>) and 378 voluntary secondary schools (<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/ireland/organisation-upper-secondary-education>).

3.6 Limitations

Cohen et al., (2017) describe educational research as a process “in which there are typically trade-offs between what one would like to do and what is actually possible” (p.3). The following outlines certain limitations of the study.

Framework

While the use of the Five Bridges as a structural device for this thesis has its benefits (see section 2.2.7) its usage could have created a tunnelled view for this topic on the outset. However, as stated in Chapter 2, this framework was not used uncritically in addressing the subject comprehensively. This restricted perspective enabled me to acknowledge the constraints and, subsequently, to explore alternative avenues of thought. Consequently, the concept of the Three Ts of Transition emerged (see Sections 6.8 and 7.3).

Mixed methods research

It is important to recognise that MMR designs come with certain challenges and limitations. These challenges include the amount of time required for implementation, the substantial amount of data which requires time to generate, collate, analyse and evaluate, and the need to make decisions about data selection and focus (Creswell et al., 2013). However, automatic transcription, online surveys and online communication saved time in this study. Other limitations of MMR (and of exploratory research) such as smaller sample sizes, variables in data that may not be representative etc., are acknowledged and addressed where possible within this study. (For example, by the inclusion of a national survey.)

Survey scale development

As referenced in Section 3.3.9, scales used in surveys have several limitations that can impact the validity and reliability of the collected data. Firstly, the fixed number of response options offered by scales can constrain respondents, potentially causing them to oversimplify their nuanced opinions or attitudes. Therefore, a free text option is provided for most questions. Moreover, response bias is a common issue, manifesting as tendencies to choose the midpoint or consistently select extreme options, both of which can distort the accuracy of responses. Respondents may also interpret questions differently and this can lead to inconsistencies in how individuals perceive and use scale categories. The choice of scale anchors, which define the endpoints of the scale (e.g., strongly agree to strongly disagree), can impact how respondents perceive and use the scale with some tending to use the midpoint. Attempts to mitigate against such bias included multiple talk-through protocols.

Hardesty and Bearden (2004) stress the importance of analysis of any new item pool. As this survey was a new instrument, it required the expert analysis. The Expert Group played a crucial role in the analysis of this instrument, which underwent ten rounds of refinement. Their input was invaluable in ensuring clarity of instructions, the appropriate number of items, suitable scale instructions, and an effective display format, among other considerations.

Lastly, the length of scales can be a factor, as longer scales with numerous response options can be mentally taxing for respondents and may result in respondent fatigue, affecting the quality of responses. The length of the survey could have been a major limitation. Despite efforts to streamline the survey for brevity, it still required an average

of 15-17 minutes to complete. This may have reduced completed surveys. However, these limitations were addressed as far as possible during the development stage of the survey.

Limitations to sampling techniques

While the limitations associated with convenience and snowball sampling methods have been referenced previously, it is important to acknowledge that employing randomised sampling could have resulted in a more diverse sample. However, by sharing the survey link through social media platforms, particularly LinkedIn, the sampling process extended beyond mere convenience and snowballing. In doing so, the effort was made to mitigate the constraints inherent in these sampling strategies.

Subject sample size

It is important to note that the distribution of respondents across different subjects taught may not accurately represent the entire population of subject teachers. Consequently, findings specific to each subject should be interpreted with caution. Future research should aim to validate these results and ascertain their broader applicability.

Focus

It is important to recognise that this research focuses solely on the transition from an Irish primary school to an Irish secondary school. Therefore, it does not account for variations in education systems across different countries or regions.

Perspectives

In general, there are certain limitations that apply to a doctoral study, namely that data generation and analysis and coding, while discussed with a supervisor, is mainly an individual task (Fereday & Muir Cochrane, 2006). However, check-ins with an Expert Group as well as continual self-reflection and discussions with my supervisor endeavoured to mitigate this factor as far as possible.

Personal limitations

Conflicting personal and professional interests have impacted this study. Juggling family responsibilities, life events, and part-time employment inevitably influenced its progress. This challenge is more pronounced when pursuing a degree while being a part-time educator and a mother to teenagers. Regarding potential conflicts of interest, the study could have faced problems if students from my PME course or those I taught in post-primary schools were participants. To avoid this, a deliberate choice was made to exclude such participants.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed explanation of the chosen methodology and methods used in this study, offering a clear rationale for adopting a Mixed Methods Research (MMR) approach. The research design choices align with the pragmatic philosophical perspective of the researcher. Additionally, this chapter has comprehensively described the selected methods of semi-structured interviews and quantitative surveys, and has outlined the entire data collection process, from piloting to analysis. Ethical considerations and methodological limitations have been carefully addressed. The next chapter presents the findings obtained from the documentary analysis of Phase 1.

4 Chapter Four: Transition documentary analysis findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the research question ‘How is the policy landscape in Ireland structured to enhance teachers’ capabilities in facilitating the transition of students from primary to post-primary education?’ To explore transition support within Irish educational policies and curricula, a comprehensive documentary analysis was conducted (Phase 1) as outlined in Chapter 3, Section 3.5. This chapter presents the findings of the documentary analysis which involves an examination of the historical shifts in policies, collaborative approaches, and the evolving roles of responsibility. (See Appendix 4.1 for a list of the documents and agencies referenced in this chapter.)

Over the decades, Irish educational policies have undergone significant changes, with a shifting focus between primary, post-primary, and pre-school education, akin to the swing of a pendulum, as described by Walsh (2016). Efforts have been made to align policies and curricula across educational levels, pointing to the importance of a seamless educational journey for students. This chapter describes how policy formations have embraced stakeholder collaboration, aiming to bridge the gap between different stages of education. The shifting roles of responsibility for transition within the educational system, notably vested in principals, highlight the importance of well-defined and inclusive leadership in coordinating continuity and smooth transitions to facilitate student progression. This chapter also illustrates how professional development initiatives have given specific attention to addressing the transition needs of students who have additional education needs, those in schools with DEIS status, and student teachers in initial teacher education. However, cross-sectoral training and professional placements in ITE are yet to become common practices for post-primary consecutive ITE programmes. This analysis traces these threads of change within key transition-related policy documents.

Specifically, the analysis centres around policies that directly impact transition at primary and post-primary levels. The implementation of the new Junior Cycle in 2015, including individual subject specifications, holds particular significance in this regard. However, changes at the senior level and those that occurred in the shift from the intermediate certificate to the Junior Certificate of 1989 are considered outdated and, as such, are not the primary focus of this analysis. Regarding ITE and CPD, relevant documents from the Teaching Council since 2011 and references to CPD providers are also considered.

To contextualise transition within Ireland's evolving educational policy and curricula landscape, the chapter is divided into two sections: Section 1 traces transition in relation to curricula changes at the primary and post-primary levels, specifically the 1971 and 1999 primary curricula, Aistear, and the 2015 Framework for Junior Cycle. Section 2 examines the topic through the lens of changes in Initial Teacher Education and considers current policies and developments within a broader European context. This chapter concludes with a summary of the document analysis and the elements that are relevant to this study. An overview of the main developments as they relate to this study are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Overview of timeline of changes in relation to transition

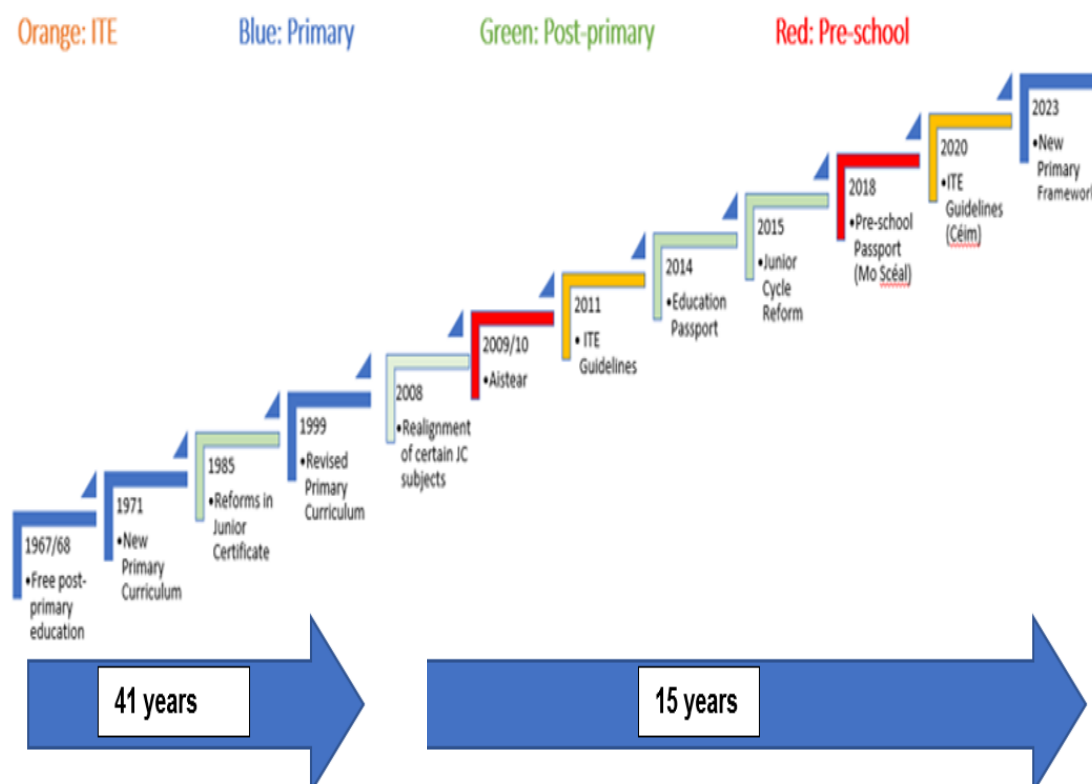


Figure 4.1 Overview of timeline of changes in relation to transition.

4.2 Section 1: ‘Transition’ in curricula documents

4.2.1 Transition and developments in primary education

When presenting the findings of analysis on transition support in Irish educational policies and curricula, it is essential to consider historical developments that laid the foundation for subsequent changes. The introduction of free second-level education was a significant milestone, as it led to increased movement from primary to post-primary, and as such initiated a discussion on transition within an Irish context. However, rather than building upon the earlier reforms in post-primary education of the early 1960s, the curricula reforms initiated by Minister Colley in 1965 focussed on primary education. The review and unpublished draft report entitled ‘Towards a White Paper in Education’ by the Department of Education in 1967 played a crucial role in shaping these reforms.

This eventually led to the implementation of the new primary school curriculum, *Curaclam na Bunscoile*, in 1971 (Government of Ireland, 1971a; 1971b) which remained in place until 1999. For primary schools and teachers, this curriculum allowed for greater flexibility in relation to the selection of content and methodologies and decision-making at school level (Walsh, 2016). Continuity of content and pedagogy became important, and the curriculum promoted such continuity in teaching methods and content both between classes and beyond. Its aim was to ensure that ‘the child’s education should be an organic development and should not involve a significant change of method and matter for him in passing from one stage to the next, from one class to the next or from the primary to the post-primary school’ (Government of Ireland, 1971b, p.13). However, even though these students would ultimately enter the post-primary system, the level of consultation on this continuity with post-primary stakeholders was minimal. As noted by Walsh (2022) there is little evidence of the draft policy being shared with post-primary stakeholders.

Critiques of the 1971 primary curriculum have surfaced on various fronts. Firstly, while continuity between primary classes is mentioned, alignment and continuity between primary and post-primary subject curricula is not addressed. This oversight, as highlighted by Walsh (2016), is particularly notable considering that both programmes were devised by the same department during a similar time period. This discrepancy may be rooted in the historical legacy of perceiving primary and post-primary education in Ireland as separate entities, as described in the Report of the Transfer Committee (Department of Education, [DES], 1982). Another criticism revolves around the curriculum’s inadequate references to available curriculum research and its weakly articulated theoretical framework (Walsh, 2016). One of the few references cited in the curriculum is the 1961 UNESCO publication, ‘World Survey of Education, III, Secondary Education’ where it describes education as ‘a continuous process that ... evolves with the

child's mental growth and interests' (Government of Ireland, 1971b, p.13). The introductory paragraph of the document clarifies its theoretical stance by asserting that education should reflect a society's philosophy and values (ibid.). However, it avoids delving deeper into a comprehensive theoretical framework. The document's introductory paragraph is very clear in its non-theoretical stance. Discontinuity between theory and practice is implied as a rationale for the lack of a theoretical framework.

General statements concerning the purpose of education have a tendency to lose their impact, not because they are false but because they are by their very nature incomplete. The theory they enshrine may be flawless in itself but its actual influence on practice in schools may at the same time be minimal. Yet the course of education cannot be allowed to become an empiric development. There are certain guidelines which it ought to follow and certain dangers which it ought to avoid. An outline of the purpose of education should reflect the philosophy of a society. The scale of values in a society will inevitably determine its educational aims and priorities. We in Ireland have our own scale of values. (Government of Ireland, 1971b, p.12)

The lack of emphasis on theory is not surprising in the light of the research focus of the time described by Alvarez (1984) who found no studies of change processes or of innovations in his review of educational research in Ireland from 1960 to 1980. The dominant topics in research at that time focussed on reading and bilingualism, evaluation and testing, and pupil's characteristics. While Alvarez does not reference transition specifically in his research, he does refer to the predisposition of Irish researchers to cite US and UK sources during that time.

Notably, the 1971 curriculum places the child at the centre of education, but it does so within the context of an Ireland influenced by economic, political, cultural, social, religious, and European priorities (Walsh, 2019). At that time, Ireland was preparing to join the European Economic Community (EEC), and most schools were still under the administration of religious orders. These contextual factors likely played a significant role

in shaping the curriculum's approach. As the document stated, Ireland had its 'own scale of values' (Government of Ireland, 1971b, p.12).

Despite facing criticism, the new primary curriculum of 1971 marked the beginning of a new era of collaboration between stakeholders and the Department of Education in curriculum development. However, it is noteworthy that observations and feedback from various interested parties had limited impact on the final draft (Walsh, 2016). The development of curricula transitioned from "policy as text" (Ball, 2016, as cited in Walsh, 2022) to a 'dynamic process where the curriculum is continuously negotiated and constructed at both policy and practice levels' (Elliot, 1998; Goodson, 1998, as cited in Walsh, 2022, p.2). Interestingly, despite this shift, the number of pages in the policies increased (Walsh, 2019). This raises the question of whether the apparent discontinuity between theory and practice in the document holds some merit.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, the primary curriculum stayed in place for almost 30 years and heralded an increase in the discourse on transition, and issues on transition and continuity began to slowly infiltrate documents over the decades. The terminology used in these documents also shifted (see Figure 4.2). On the left-hand side of Figure 4.2 the number of references to the terms 'continuity, transfer, and transition' that appear in five key documents are graphically illustrated. The 1971 document, for example, favoured references to 'transfer' (12) over 'transition' (2) or 'continuity'. Such textual references focussed on the transfer of skills such as language skills or handwriting, the transition to certain resources (such as squared paper) and the transition of the pupil to a stage when they no longer depend on questions to elicit a response. However, in this 1971 document 'continuity' is referenced in terms of continuity as the child moves from year to year and teacher to teacher in primary school. In later documents relating to pre-school and to

Junior Cycle reform of 2009 and 2015 respectively, references to students' previous and future experiences within the educational system become more apparent, as illustrated on the right-hand side of Figure 4.2. In Aistear (NCCA, 2009) primary school is referenced on 11 occasions, while the JC Framework references primary on six occasions. However, the 1971b primary curriculum document had no forward references to post-primary intermediate exams. A more forward-looking perspective is evident in the single reference in the 1999 revised primary curriculum, and new Primary Framework (NCCA, 2023) includes four references to Junior Cycle. A list of these references is collated in Appendix 4.2.

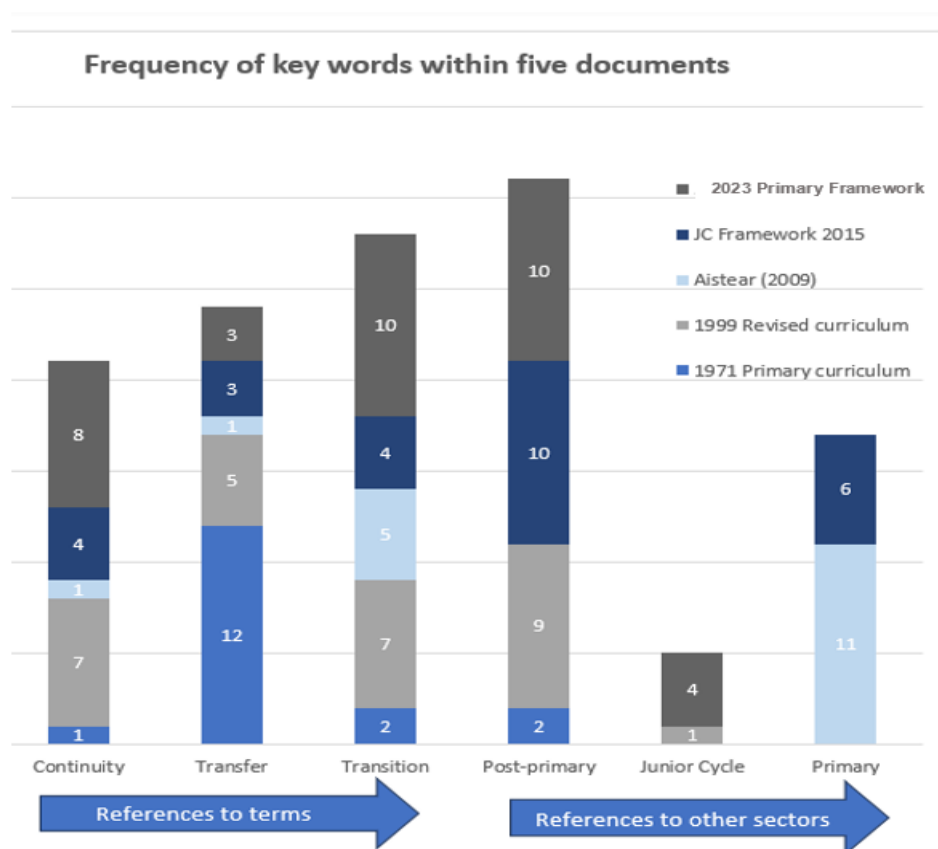


Figure 4.2 Document analysis 1 Frequency of key words within five documents.

The 1995 White Paper in Education acknowledges that transition from primary to post-primary brings challenges for students. It recognises that discontinuity in curriculum and pedagogy are challenges faced by students during transition. It acknowledges the

“difficulty for some students in gaining access to the first-choice school; differences in teaching methods and approaches; curricula which do not suit a student’s particular abilities and aspirations; being compelled to make subject choices, or choice of subject level, too soon and later facing unduly restrictive options” (DES, 1995, p.47). The 1999 curriculum document focuses on the importance of developing generic skills and abilities to ‘facilitate the transfer of learning to other curriculum areas and future learning situations’ (ibid., p.74). In terms of discourse, the term ‘continuity’ becomes associated with student ‘progression’ throughout.

This new revised curriculum of 1999 identified transition as one of 15 key issues. Although towards the end of the list of key issues, ‘Facilitating the transition from primary to post-primary education’ is the 14th key issue listed and is addressed within the document both separately and more specifically in relation to literacy and numeracy, lifelong learning, and students with additional needs. While transition as a ‘Key issue’ refers to ‘facilitating’ this transition, the more detailed reference refers to *preparation* for transition:

‘prepar[ing] children for engaging effectively with education at second level. The importance of this function is acknowledged in the general aims of the curriculum. The transition from primary to post-primary education represents a significant and challenging step in the child’s educational experience and may present difficulties for some children. Consistency of approach between the primary curriculum and junior cycle curricula, and the developmental nature of the learning experience they offer, should help to ease children’s progress from one level to the other. Furthermore, the detailed statement of content in the primary curriculum, and the assessment procedures inherent in it, will greatly assist in facilitating communication between teachers and schools at both levels (Government of Ireland, 1999, p.31).

The process of transitioning from primary to post-primary education is also integrated into the combined 5th and 6th class curriculum within this document, embedding its

importance. It is noteworthy that as of May 2023¹³, curriculumonline.ie does not offer any specific resources dedicated to this transition. Instead, schools rely on various programmes and resources on a case-by-case basis, considering individual student needs. Programmes provided by Tusla, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) are used to support children with special educational needs. Resources like Aspire (The Autism Spectrum Association of Ireland) are available to assist students with autism during this critical transition period. While there is no standardised programme exclusively focussed on preparing students for the post-primary level, schools tailor their approach based on the unique requirements of their students. The level of this engagement is both school and teacher dependent.

Despite this emphasis on continuity of approaches and experiences between primary and post-primary, collaboration at an official level seems less successful. Originally recommended in the 1982 Transfer Report, collaboration was to ensure that “every primary level syllabus committee set up in relation to a subject common to both primary and post-primary levels should contain representation of the post-primary sector; and the converse” (DES, 1982, p.90), collaboration seems to be at a minimum. Of the 12 committees that worked on this revised curriculum, there were no representatives from post-primary (Walsh, 2022, p.40). However, representatives from the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland, the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools, Irish Vocational Education Association, and the National Parents Council (post-primary) are listed as member of the Council of the NCCA (DES, 1999). It is difficult to

¹³ The following resources were fact-checked with a primary school Principal as of 22/05/23 as being referenced by their 5th and 6th class teachers. “Special Education Needs a Continuum. (DES). “My Thoughts About School”; “Transition to Post Primary” (HSE); “Moving to Secondary” (Lynda Measor); “Making the Move”, K.I. Al-Ghani & Lynda Kenward (for Autistic children moving to secondary); “Moving Up” John Stevenson; “Moving On.... Suggestions for teachers to support pupils with SEN moving from primary to secondary school” University of Cambridge University of Northampton; “Changing Schools” (NCSE); “Transition from Primary to Post Primary for Pupils with Special Needs,” (NDP/ DES).

ascertain what representation they had on the subcommittees (email communication with Walsh, T., May 2023).

Although collaboration appeared to be at a minimum during the development of the revised primary curriculum, a decade later, Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009), took a more inclusive approach by addressing the transition from pre-school to primary education. Linked to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) government scheme of up to 2 years free pre-schooling, it heralded an interest in early childhood transitions. The document refers to preparing the child socially and emotionally, through play, talk and routine with one of its aims and functions to enable the child to “handle transitions and changes well” (NCCA, 2009, p.17).

A decade and a half later, the Primary Curriculum Framework (DES, 2023) demonstrated a notable improvement in communication across sectors, building upon the inclusive approach seen in Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009). 44 primary schools, post-primary schools, and preschools from across the country took part in a Schools Forum as part of the planning and review process (NCCA, 2019). The relevant documents look back at pre-school and look forward to post-primary.

Development of information transfer documents

The period 2008 to 2023 experienced more educational change in the last 15 years than in the previous 41 years (1967-2009) as illustrated in Figure 4.1. Continuing the trend of improved communication and support for transition (and move from ‘curricula’ to ‘framework’) the 2010s saw the introduction of practical initiatives such as the Education Passport to facilitate the transfer of information between primary and post-primary schools. First referenced in the 1982 Committee Report on Transfer as a ‘School Record Card [that] should be seen as a valuable adjunct to the contact between primary and post-

primary teachers' (DES, 1982, p.86), the EP was introduced in 2014 to aid the transfer of information between primary and post-primary (NCCA, 2014). According to the NCCA, the EP promotes a 3-phase process between primary principals, post-primary school principals and parents. Its function is to provide personal, social, and academic progress of the child to inform future needs and inform pedagogic considerations (NCCA, n.d.). However, it was introduced as a *recommendation* rather than a *requirement*. This was changed to a requirement for all schools as per Circular 0027/2015 (DES, 2015). However, the description of the transfer as a 3-phase process ignores the contributions of the pupil to this passport, focussing instead on both primary and post-primary schools and the parents.

Assessment reports

The Education Passport (EP) itself includes an integral component known as the Education Passport Report Card, specifically designed for 6th Class. The NCCA provides Guidelines for teachers and primary principals in the completion of these report cards. The template is reproduced here for reference (Figure 4.3). This is the record card that is passed on to post-primary schools and which parents should receive at the end of the school year. It differs from the previous report cards in its use of assessment language. While all report cards contain formative and summative assessment in the form of STen results for Reading and Maths tests conducted in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes, the language of assessment is different. In younger class reports, the rating systems vary from stars to emojis, while the descriptors range from 'Experiencing significant difficulty' or 'some difficulty', 'managing comfortably', 'competent and capable' to 'highly competent and capable' (NCCA, 2020) However, the Education Passport 6th Class report goes some way to bridging the descriptor gap between primary and Junior Cycle. The template below (Figure 4.3) shows that the descriptors include evidence of progression e.g.

‘moving/working towards’. They also use the word ‘expectations’. However, they still differ notably from the Features of Quality used in assessment in the Classroom Based Assessments of the Junior Cycle, which span from ‘Exceptional’, to ‘Above expectations / In line with expectations’ or ‘Yet to meet expectations’. In addition, summative assessments in the form of standardised reading and maths tests are expressed in terms of STen scores, while the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement employs terms such as Distinction, Higher Merit, and Merit etc. to describe results.

Name: _____ Likes to be known as (if different): _____ Date of birth: _____ Parent(s)/guardian(s): _____ If your child has a plan to support learning, an extra tick is placed in the column marked 'P' beside any item(s) that relates to this plan. 'P' is used in place of the word 'plan'. Information shared about your child's learning reflects progress based on this plan.					Your child's learning In general, information shared about a child's learning reflects expectations based on the primary school curriculum objectives for 6th Class. 1 Working towards expectations 2 Meeting expectations 3 Ahead of expectations					Social, Environmental and Scientific Education <table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>P</td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>Science</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>History</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Geography</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>						P	1	2	3	Science					History					Geography																																				
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Your child's social and personal development 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Most of the time 4 Always					Mathematics <table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>P</td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>Understands and uses mathematical knowledge</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Understands and uses mathematical skills</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Uses knowledge and skills to solve problems</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table>						P	1	2	3	Understands and uses mathematical knowledge					Understands and uses mathematical skills					Uses knowledge and skills to solve problems					Standardised test scores <table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td colspan="3">STen Score</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>2nd class</td><td>4th class</td><td>6th class</td></tr> <tr><td>Maths</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>English reading</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Irish reading*</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> STen scores: 1-3 Well below average, 4 Low average, 5-6 Average, 7 High average, 8-10 Well above average. *Irish reading test for Irish language medium primary schools only.						STen Score				2nd class	4th class	6th class	Maths				English reading				Irish reading*															
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Report card completed on: _____

Figure 4.3 6th Class Report Card (NCCA, 2020)

As of January 2023, 12 reporting primary templates are available from the NCCA, for use from Junior Infants to 5th Class but only one version of the 6th Class EP report card is provided.

Building upon this movement towards improved communication and support for transition, efforts were made to facilitate similar transfer documents for the transition of

children from pre-school to primary education. The NCCA's Strategic Plan 2015-2018, along with various reports and audits on the transition process, such as '*Transition from pre-school to primary school: Learning from research, policy, and practice*' (O'Kane, 2016; O'Kane and Murphy, 2016a), resulted in the introduction of a similar concept in 2018 for transition from pre-school to primary. This initiative included 'passport' templates published by the NCCA under the title 'my story' or '*Mo Scéal: Moving from preschool to primary*'.

The NCCA's focus on the transition from preschool to primary school was driven by the impetus provided by *the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020* (DES, 2011). Just like the EP, 'Mo Scéal' aims to provide information about a child's strengths, interests, and challenges during this transition, although its use remains optional. Nonetheless, both the EP and 'Mo Scéal' are referenced within the JC Framework (NCCA, 2015) and in the Primary Framework (NCCA, 2023) as initiatives that support continuity and progression. Although they are often seen as documents for information transfer rather than transition, their clear purpose is stated as "enabling teachers to plan experiences that support children in progressing across the curriculum" and to build upon their past learning as they move forward into post-primary with "the foundation of their learning in primary and special schools [providing] a strong basis for their Junior Cycle experience" (ibid., p.31).

Supports and initiatives

There is a growing recognition of the importance of comprehensive programmes and initiatives to support students' smoother transitions within the education system. Several programmes and initiatives are currently available. As of 2023, there are 122 School Completion Projects, spanning 467 primary schools and 222 post-primary schools

(Tusla.ie, 2023). The One Book One Community (OBOC) literacy initiative, which has gained popularity in Ireland since the 2010s, involves selecting a book according to specific criteria and having both 1st year students and pupils in 6th class read it through collaborative efforts and shared resources (O’Brien.ie, 2013). The Meitheal programme operates as an anti-bullying mentoring programme in post-primary schools, where Senior Cycle students receive training to become mentors for incoming First Year students (Tusla, n.d). Another programme, the Belonging Plus+ programme, developed by the NCSE, addresses the social, emotional, and personal aspects of transition, along with the necessary learning and thinking skills for post-primary education.

However, the Primary Curriculum Framework (DES, 2023) has shown leadership in its attempts to progress the Continuum of Education in policy. ‘Transition and Continuity’ is listed as one of the eight Principles of Learning and Assessment.

Despite these developments it is remarkable that the consultation process for the Primary Languages Curriculum, which is expected to be released in 2025, does not reference transition, despite consultation processes being underway since 2018. The report on the consultation for Stages 3 and 4 of the curriculum does not include specific references to transition or the progression to post-primary education. Feedback noted in NCCA reports from participants drew attention to the lack of questions addressing transition:

Having recently completed the NCCA consultation on Junior Cycle English I filled out a section on links between the Junior Cycle and primary. I am astonished not to see a comparable section here; there isn’t a single question that addresses primary teachers’ familiarity with the secondary curriculum or asks their judgement about how the proposed changes will have an impact on children’s readiness to access the next step in their learning journey. (NCCA, 2018, p.91)

4.2.2 Transition in post-primary education

Before the 1980s, with the exception of the announcement in 1963 by Minister for Education Dr. P.J. Hillery that vocational and post-primary school students could sit the same state examinations, which was a significant development at the time, the attention on post-primary curricula reforms was limited. This changed in the 1980s when the focus of educational reforms shifted towards post-primary education, particularly to changes in the intermediate level and Senior Cycle. Continuity of education was one of the aims of the introduction of the new Junior Certificate in place of the Intermediate Certificate. The new JC programme aimed to “reinforce and further develop in the young person the knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies acquired at primary level” (DES, 1992). This Junior Certificate programme would stay in place with minor revisions until 2015.

Previous reform, as the 1982 Transfer Report states, was “undertaken in relation to the second level courses and to that university or other, which might follow, but not to that which came before...” (DES, 1982, p.9). While the report confirmed that “in so far as these recommendations concern pedagogy and pastoral care, it is to be understood that in many schools they are already the established practice” (ibid., p.84). They also note that most syllabi “articulate very well with each other” (ibid., p.87). Assessments were made that the primary and post-primary syllabi in Irish, Maths and Geography were “badly in need of better realignment” (ibid., p.87). The Report, however, did not advocate the use of bridging units that were growing in popularity in the UK at that time, as according to the Committee, more time was needed to assess the impact of transfer. This decision is logical given that the first cohort of pupils benefitting from 13 years of primary and post-primary education would only have been sitting their Leaving Certificate in 1980. Lack of curriculum continuity was also identified in later research between 2004-2009 by

Smyth et al., (2004; 2007; 2009). As a result of this research, a rebalancing of certain Junior Cycle subjects took place, partly to “line up each syllabus with changes in the primary school curriculum and with any changes at Leaving Cert.” (Malone, 2011, p.90).

Junior Cycle reforms

The emphasis on curriculum continuity persisted with reforms introduced in the Junior Cycle six years after the implementation of Aistear. The Junior Cycle Framework, published in 2015, was designed explicitly to “support continuity and progression in students’ learning experiences as they move from primary to post-primary school” (NCCA, 2015). This reform marked a notable increase in collaboration between the DES and the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), fostering “progressive principles such as curriculum coherence, teacher empowerment, constructivist pedagogy, and active student engagement in learning” (Gleeson, 2022, p.726).

Gleeson also points to the more inclusive and cooperative strategies in terms of policy formation stating that “the NCCA Council and its various committees are now informed by the wider education community engagement with relevant research, and collaboration with teachers and schools” (ibid. p.726). Such collaboration is visible in the document itself where ‘transition’ from primary to post-primary is referenced several times. This approach aligns with the Transfer Report of 1982, which highlighted the need for ‘a judicious blending of primary and post-primary school approaches’ to ensure success in the Intermediate Certificate Examination (DES, 1982, p.87).

The Junior Cycle Framework itself effectively addresses continuity by mapping the Key Skills promoted in the 1999 primary curriculum to Junior Cycle skills, and by embedding them within subject-specific learning outcomes. The document makes explicit references to primary-to-post-primary continuity within the Junior Cycle subject specifications, thus

ensuring a smooth educational transition for students. This integration of skills and learning outcomes highlights the importance of building upon students’ prior knowledge and experiences from primary education to enhance their learning journey at the post-primary level. In 2023, The Primary Framework (DES) reframed the Key Skills to align more clearly with those of the Junior Cycle (see Figure 4.4).

Primary Priorities	Framework for Junior Cycle Key Skills
Communicate well	Communicating
Be well	Staying well
Engage in learning	Managing myself
Develop thinking, learning and life skills	Managing information and thinking
Having a strong sense of identity and belonging	Being Creative
	Working with others

Table 4.1 Key priorities and skills of primary and Junior Cycle.

(Source: NCCA, 2017, updated 2019).

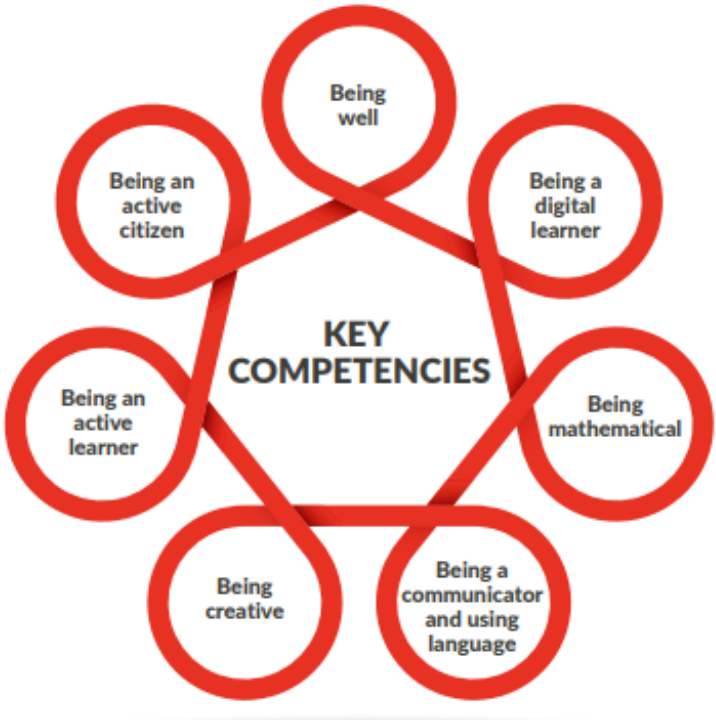


Figure 4.4 Key competencies, Primary Framework, (DES, 2023, p.8)

Transition in Junior Cycle subject specifications

The emphasis given to transition and continuity of education is further highlighted in the new subject specifications. Each Junior Cycle subject specification includes a prominent section called ‘Progression from primary to senior cycle’. Notably, English, as the pioneer subject specification, set the precedent by offering specific supports in the form of CPD and documents on the NCCA website, illustrating the progression for teachers. Supports were also available for Maths. While the noun ‘transition’ only appears in Junior Cycle subject specifications in the context of Transition Year or ‘transition to work’ (English specifications), it is essential to highlight that there are, on average, five to eight references to primary school in the subject specifications. Most JC specifications (except for Science) include a dedicated heading that explicitly relates to the primary school curriculum. Additionally, Science and MFL are the only specifications that explicitly refer to the learning of the subject in primary school in the ‘Rationales’ section, while Gaeilge stands out as more comprehensive with a specific reference to the students’ language learning journey from primary included under a title of ‘Overview of the course’.

4.2.3 Responsibility for transition

Responsibility for the transfer of information and transition of students from primary to post-primary has gradually shifted in the last 30 years but it is firmly placed with the schools and their management. Therefore, leadership is required. Most references to transition, transfer and continuity within this document refer to transfer of skills such as language skills or handwriting, transition to certain resources (such as squared paper) and the transition of the pupil to a stage when they no longer depend on questions to elicit a response. However internal continuity is also prominent and seen as a role of the

Principal, who “should ensure that, when the child is transferred to another class, this record card is handed over to the new class teacher” (ibid., p.268).

Ten years later the Transfer Report would recommend the appointment of a Transfer Advisor that would be a teacher other than the Principal or Deputy to take responsibility for this. Yet it would also state that “such problems as pupil transfer and parents’ difficulties should not be seen as the exclusive responsibility of the Remedial, Guidance or other specialist teacher [and that] any and every member of the staff may well have an extremely useful part to play to any given moment in a child’s formation” (DES, 1982, pp.86-87).

In the 1999 revised primary curriculum, responsibility for transition was specifically assigned to the primary principals, describing the monitoring of continuity as “one of the most important roles of the principal as a manager of curriculum” (DES, 1999, p.19). It is listed as one of ten such responsibilities of the role: “to co-ordinate the work of the various classes so as to ensure continuity and avoid unnecessary duplication or gaps in information, (ibid., p.19). These procedures include provisions for special needs, and “good communication between parents and schools.... [in order to develop] a shared understanding of principles of the curriculum, the learning goals of the school, and the approaches and methodologies it adopts. It will also facilitate easier transition from home to school and later from primary to second-level education” (ibid., p.22).

With regard to curriculum continuity, reference is also made to the role of the teachers in the revised document (DES, 1999). It states that “the detailed statement of content in the primary curriculum, and the assessment procedures inherent in it, will greatly assist in facilitating communication between teachers and schools at both levels” (ibid., p.31). Although not stated directly that it is the teachers’ responsibility, the document implies

an expectation of involvement in shared communication between primary and second level.

While Aistear looks to ‘key workers’ as playing a major part in the preparation of pre-schoolers for transition to primary school through talk, play, learning and managing skills (NCCA, 2009), the 2023 Framework for Primary focuses more attention on the teachers and the role they play in transition. The 2023 Primary Framework refers a number of times to agency in relation to teachers, describing them as ‘agentic professional [who] enact the curriculum by making decisions about what to teach, when to teach it, and how to sequence and pace learning. This includes decisions about the specific learning experiences to be provided, shaped by the children’s strengths, needs, interests, and individuality’ (ibid., p.20). This echoes the 1999 revised curriculum which emphasises, as a guideline rather than a prescription, flexibility for teachers regarding time allocation to certain subjects (DES, 1999). The need for communication between schools is stressed in the latest framework so that teachers can ‘plan experiences that enable children to continue to progress in their learning across the curriculum’ (ibid., p.30). The EP and *Mo Scéal* documents are referenced as supports to enable this continuity of experience and progression.

By comparison, no specific reference is made to teacher agency within the 2015 Junior Cycle Framework. Instead, school ‘flexibility’ is linked to ‘continuity’. Further references imply school and teacher responsibility and includes the following: “how they design their Junior Cycle programmes, particularly in the first year of the programme, will support students in experiencing a successful transition” (NCCA, 2015, p.9). The 2015 Framework also states that “schools will continue to have flexibility in deciding how they will make provision for guidance”, which is to include “framework principles such as

Continuity and Learning to Learn, key skills such as Managing Myself and a number of statements of learning” (ibid., p.25). While initiatives such as the EP were being introduced to ensure communication between primary and post-primary schools, contemporaneously, the DES published two separate versions of ‘Looking at our School’ (DES, 2022), one for primary and one for post-primary schools. This undermines the overall embracing of continuity.

Home School Community Liaison (HSCL)

Although developments have mostly occurred independently, progress in supports for students as they move to post-primary have been made. The introduction of DEIS marked the partial enactment of one of the recommendations from the 1982 Report of the Pupil Transfer Committee of ‘the appointment of experienced members of the school’s full-time staff as Transfer Advisors for pupils with various challenges, such as emotional, intellectual, social, physical, or other special needs’ (DES, 1982, p.81). Under DEIS, the Home School Community Liaison scheme aims to foster collaboration between parents, teachers, and community family support services to facilitate smooth transitions from primary to post-primary and beyond for pupils with DEIS status. As of 2023, over 966 primary schools and 235 post-primary schools have been designated DEIS status and benefit from this scheme, impacting students across all educational levels. Despite these improvements, the Educational Research Centre’s (ERC) evaluation of DEIS at the post-primary level (Weir & Kavanagh, 2019) indicates that while Junior Certificate retention rates have improved, significant gaps persist, largely attributed to income inequality. (An OECD review of the DEIS allocation programme was announced by Minister Foley in July 2023).

4.3 Section 2: Transition within the continuum of education

4.3.1 Céim to Droichead to Cosán (Step, bridge, path)

The year 2009 saw the launch of Aistear, but significant changes were also underway in the area of teacher education in Ireland, driven by recommendations from the Council of Europe on May 12th, 2009, which emphasised a focus on the continuum of education (Council of the European Union, 2009). In response, the Teaching Council, established under the Teaching Council Act, 2001, published its Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education in 2011, highlighting the importance of the three ‘I’s in teacher education: Initial teacher education, Induction, and In-career development. The policy was later revised in 2017, adding three more ‘I’s: Innovation, Integration, and Improvement (Teaching Council, 2011). The continuum of teacher education in Ireland encompasses Céim for ITE (The Teaching Council, 2020), Droichead for induction (Teaching Council, 2017), and Cosán (Teaching Council, 2016), for professional development.

It is worth noting that ITE in Ireland remains separate for primary and second-level teachers. Before the introduction of the 2011 guidelines, student teachers at post-primary level, typically completed a one-year postgraduate Diploma in Education after their initial subject degree, and their placement occurred in one second-level school only. At that time, there were only a limited number of three to four-year initial teacher education undergraduate courses with a discipline-specific focus, such as Home Economics, Art, Physical Education, or Science (Walsh & Dolan, 2009).

While the importance of transition and progression from primary to post-primary education is recognised in Céim, Droichead, and Cosán, the attention afforded to this aspect varies. The need for greater cohesion at all stages of the continuum is highlighted throughout the changes envisioned from 2009 onwards (The Teaching Council, 2011, p.

9). The initial guidelines for ITE providers in 2011 mentioned transition between primary and post-primary under the section on school placement, indicating that placement should “incorporate various teaching situations and school contexts across different sectors (primary, post-primary, further education), as appropriate” (ibid., p.13). However, this aspect was not mandated in either the original 2011 document or the revised 2017 version, leaving it to the discretion of programme providers.

The culture of the HEI should promote and facilitate a process of engagement between student teachers and staff, between students on the programme and with students on other teacher education programmes within and across HEIs. Cross-sectoral engagement between student teachers at primary and post-primary level should be encouraged (Teaching Council, revised 2017, p.22)

In terms of curriculum and subject knowledge, the learning outcomes for ITE providers in the original 2011 and revised 2017 revised documents are clear about continuity. They state that the graduate will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of ‘other education sectors and factors which may impact on pupil’s transition from one sector to another’ (Teaching Council, 2017, p.25) in addition to “current national curricula/syllabi in the relevant sector and an awareness of curriculum requirements in preceding and subsequent stages of learning” (ibid., p.26). In terms of a specific focus, the ‘Mandatory Elements of Programmes of ITE’ include Early Childhood Education (Primary)/Adolescent Learning (Post-primary) (ibid., p.14), but these are seen as separate to each level. Focus on subject continuity seems to be left to the subject specific pedagogies but is not specified.

In October 2020, the new standards for Initial Teacher Education in Ireland, known as Céim (Teaching Council, 2020), were published. These standards were partly informed by commissioned research into School Placement in Initial Teacher Education (SPITE) by Hall et al., (2018). Within Céim, references to ‘continuum’ over ‘transition’ or

‘continuity’ are prevalent¹⁴. Of note is that Céim allows for post-primary placement to be conducted in both primary and second-level schools, and conversely, for primary teachers to gain early years and post-primary experience as part of their placement. This approach echoes the recommendations made by the Transfer Committee in 1982, which suggested that “primary teachers should have at least a week of teaching practice in a post-primary school during each year of their training, and vice versa for post-primary teachers” (DES, 1982, p.90). However, this aspect is optional rather than mandatory, using the verb ‘will’ instead of ‘shall’ (Teaching Council, 2020, p. 18). The single reference to transition within this document, specifically mentions that teachers should understand factors that may impact pupils’ transition from one education sector to another (ibid.). While it is specified that the topic of transition may be addressed in Foundation studies, such as History of Education, it is not specified under Professional studies. In fact, both primary and post-primary levels are treated as separate entities in Céim, with ‘Professional studies’ directed towards the appropriate age group, ‘focusing on the pedagogy of subjects within the relevant curriculum or specification for each sector’ (ibid., p.5).

The emphasis, however, on transition between primary and post-primary is not prominent within PME handbooks or programme overviews¹⁵ (see Appendix 4.5 for list of ITE providers referenced). As of 2023, only one of six ITE¹⁶ providers of consecutive post-primary programmes ask students to conduct 14 hours of observation that are equally distributed between a primary and post-primary school. Most ITE consecutive post-primary programmes have passing references to primary education within foundation

¹⁴ 22 references to ‘continuum’, no references to ‘continuity’

¹⁵ Emails were sent to all providers. However, none returned the information request. Information is therefore collated from available information on websites. No information was available on Hibernia despite numerous contact requests. In addition, the content for modules was not always available or was being updated.

¹⁶ University College Galway

modules such as ‘History of Education’ or in specific ‘Educating Ireland’ modules, or within specific pedagogies. However, references within guidelines for subject pedagogy descriptors are few. While references to primary level occurs twice in relation to Maths pedagogy in subject descriptors, only one institution has references to primary education within other subjects - Music, English, Irish, language pedagogy and placement modules.

Alongside changes for ITE providers, there was a renewed focus on the supports and needs of newly qualified teachers during their induction phase. The introduction of the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) in 2012, followed by its roll-out to all newly qualified primary and post-primary teachers in 2013-2015, brought the area of transition between primary and second level into consideration. The ‘Transition from Primary to Post-Primary School NIPT Workshop’ was one of 12 workshop topics from the beginning of the pilot¹⁷ (Banks et al., 2015). Although 7 workshops were specific to post-primary NQTs, only three were cross-sectoral and available to both primary and post-primary NQTs. Despite the emphasis on collaboration between teachers, schools, and curricula in policy documents, the workshop on ‘Transition from Primary to Secondary’ was exclusively offered to post-primary NQTs. The workshop aimed to provide practical skills and strategies to support students’ transition from primary to post-primary classrooms and was facilitated by two teachers, one from primary and one from post-primary. While the topic of transition was not included on the list of workshop topic areas discussed in the review of the NIPT (Smyth, 2016), the workshop continued to be offered.

¹⁷ The topics covered in the pilot induction workshops are themed as follows: Working as a Professional; Planning and Preparation; Classroom Management and Organisation; Working with Parents; Child Protection; Assessment; Behaviour Management; Literacy; Numeracy; Differentiation; Gaeilge (primary teachers) / Transition from Primary School (post- primary teachers); Inclusion.

Two significant changes took place in teacher education in 2020. Firstly, the national induction programme was replaced by Droichead (Teaching Council, 2017) and, secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift to online delivery for workshops. The transition to asynchronous online workshops eliminated the opportunity for the valuable discussions and interactions that were a key feature of the former face-to-face workshops. The introduction of Droichead meant that these workshop modules were no longer mandatory for newly qualified teachers. Instead, NQTs are currently required to complete only one ‘Professional Learning Activity’. Many opt for the NIPT workshops to fulfil this requirement. This shift to Droichead emphasises school-based needs, and a focus on addressing teachers’ requirements as they embark on their careers (The Teaching Council, 2017). However, according to the DEEPEN report (Uí Choistealbha & Ní Dhuinn, 2021) on induction for newly qualified teachers on the Droichead programme, NQTs believe they need the least assistance when it comes to transitioning from primary to post-primary education, teaching the Irish language, and cultivating their teaching professionalism. No reason is given. However, the support teams responsible for NQTs feel that they themselves require additional support specifically in the realm of transition from primary to post-primary.

While the core themes of the workshops offered by NIPT, such as literacy, numeracy, and SEN continue to be offered, there has been an increased emphasis on workshops related to differentiation. According to data supplied by the NIPT (Cahir, 2022) in the academic year 2021-22, among the 1125 participants in post-primary workshops, only 166 or 15% opted for the SEN workshop. Feedback received by the NIPT indicated that 61% of participants found this workshop ‘very helpful’. Only 1% found it ‘unhelpful’. The least chosen workshop was Numeracy (n=112), while the most popular choice was ‘Assessment’ (n=195). Notably, a workshop on SEN that was only made available online

in January 2022 had already attracted 185 participants within six months. This clearly suggests that workshop preferences were influenced by their direct relevance to teachers' immediate needs during that period. This aligns with the support areas identified by NQTs in the DEEPEN report (Uí Choistealbha & Ní Dhuinn, 2021).

4.3.2 The continuum of Education and CPD

The Transfer Report of 1982 recommended both in-service and professional training for both primary and post-primary teachers around transfer, with the caveat that “should it not become a permanent fixture, the professional training courses for primary and post-primary teachers should include specific and adequate treatment of pupil transfer process” (DES, 1982, p.82). However, to date, transition to post-primary as a topic does not rank among the specific top delivered by national organisations.

Transition, as a sole focus, is not a specific topic that regularly occurs in post-primary CPD. Currently, teachers have access to CPD primarily through the JCT, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), and the Education Support Centres of Ireland (ESCI). For post-primary teachers who had qualified before the changes to Initial Teacher Education (ITE), transition had become a specific focus for professional development through the JCT between 2013-14 and was supported by on-site visits to primary schools by the JCT team (Sadleir, 2020). Teachers who did not avail of such CPD at that time would not have had specific exposure to the topic since.

Nationally, the PDST points out that transitions across the educational continuum are ‘an ongoing key consideration, and they carefully consider these key themes across all subject areas during the CPD design process’ (PDST, 2022). Additionally, subject-specific associations offer their own conferences and relevant resources. Attending such CPD

opportunities is the responsibility of the teachers, and they have the freedom to choose the sessions that align with their professional needs and interests.

Compared to the JCT or the PDST, the ESCI offers more flexibility in the topics on offer as they cater to the regional Continuous Professional Development (CPD) needs of their teachers. The ESCI comprises 21 full-time and nine part-time Education Centres, representing the interests of the Network as a whole, including Management, Directors, and Staff (ESCI.ie n.d.).

An overview of the CPD opportunities offered through ESCI is presented in Table 4.2. This information on scheduled event topics was collated using information on the ESCI website. The topics are categorised in the table according to subject and event title. This data indicates that, of the 364 advertised CPD sessions, between 15/12/22 and 27/11/23, the top four subject areas are Maths (29), History (23), English (17), and Irish (16). While only one session is specifically offered on the topic of transition and supporting students during the transition, it is aimed particularly at parents with children with additional educational needs. Another session (Mathematics: Coding - Series of Support Sessions for Teachers of Upper Primary & Junior Cycle, Galway, January 2023) focuses on the progression from primary to post-primary.

Nationally, this suggests that the topic of transition is not a top priority for CPD. However, at the regional level, collaborative projects between post-primary schools and their feeder schools are gaining prominence. One such project, as described by the Chair of the ESCI, was initiated in Maths between Laois and Kildare from 2018 to 2021. This project reported a valuable increase in communication, a highlighting of differences in terminology used in the subject area, and a mutual understanding between post-primary and their feeder schools (Kavanagh, 2022).

However, access to information on transition is not limited to CPD, through teacher organisations or ITE providers. The topic is addressed on the website for the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), which has considerable resources for school leaders and parents on transition, while the National Parents' Council (NPC) offer numerous webinars on the transition from pre-school to primary and from primary to post-primary for parents. Should the teacher be a parent or guardian, they would encounter the topic on a personal level.

Overview of ESCI sessions (15/12/22 to 27/11/23)									
Subject	Maths	History	English	Irish	Geography	Digital skills	Study skills / organisational skills	Science	Transition from primary to post-primary
Number of sessions nationally	29	23	17	16	9	7	6	1	1

Table 4.2 Overview of ESCI professional development sessions. (Murray, 15/12/22)

Source: <https://www.npc.ie/>

The landscape of professional development for teachers is, however, undergoing a significant transformation. On September 1st, 2023, four existing support services, the Centre for School Leadership, the JCT, the NIPT and the PDST merged to form 'Oide,' the new support service for teachers and school leaders. The organisation derived its name from the Irish word for 'teacher', reflecting its commitment to the educational community. The term 'Oide' itself is rooted in the epistemology of words like 'tutor,' 'instructor' and 'mentor', underlining its role in "guiding, providing learning advice, and enhancing teaching skills" for teachers at all levels, starting from induction (www.oide.ie/about/).

The mission of Oide underscores collaboration and coherence, aiming to ensure consistency in educational provision across the entire teacher learning continuum. Central to Oide's principles is the promotion of "an ethos of continuous and shared professional learning" and the organisation strives to create a culture of "reflection, inquiry, and purposeful collaboration" among educators, as stated in their Principles (www.oide.ie/about/). This approach is poised to foster meaningful collaboration across different sectors of education, aligning with Oide's vision for an integrated and supportive learning environment.

Several changes are currently evident in the provision of CPD through Oide, notably in the accessibility of events and courses for both primary and post-primary teachers, without regard to their specific sector. This inclusivity extends to the NIPT workshops, providing opportunities for professional development to educators across the board.

On a policy level, moving forward, continuity in progression and transition holds a high priority in the NCCA Strategic Plan 2022-2025. The plan highlights the significance of seamless transitions across the continuum of education, making it a strong focus of the document. Goal 1 of the strategic plan aims to 'develop innovative and relevant curriculum and assessment for inclusion, engagement, quality, progression, and continuity across sectors and across educational transitions' (NCCA, 2022, p.16)

However, a closer look at Goal 1 reveals a shift in the focus of transition from post-primary to further education and third level. For instance, SG1.8 aims to "broaden assessment arrangements and reporting within and at the end of senior cycle ... to support transition from school and other educational settings", while SG1.10 adopts a more general approach by aiming to "strengthen the focus on and promotion of effective

pedagogies and transitions to support progression in learning for all young people” (NCCA, 2022, p.16).

4.3.3 Policies

Numerous initiatives focusing on transition align with concurrent reviews of national policies and strategies. For instance, the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People (DES, 2011) mentions transition several times, indicating its importance. Similarly, The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 - Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF) (gov.ie, 2014) identifies ‘Strengthening transitions’ as a transformative goal, highlighting the need to develop and reinforce transitional links to support students. Despite the emphasis on social and economic benefits, there is also a focus on student wellbeing.

Additionally, the 2018 Action Plan for Education (DES, 2018) acknowledges the significance of providing guidance to schools during ‘critical points’ with Goal 1, Objective 1.4 specifically aiming to “improve the transition of learners at critical stages in the education and training system to include online reporting templates available for use by practitioners to improve the transfer of information about the progress and achievement of learners between all schools and state-funded ECCE settings” (p.22).

The influence of other educational systems and transnational organisations can be seen within an Irish educational context (Murchan & Johnston, 2021). For example, references to each other’s curricula within subject specifications and the embedding of key skills across primary and post-primary frameworks provide some level of cohesion, which Ní Dhuinn et al., (2021) point out is similar to approaches in other European countries (p.26). Such approaches align with the competences required by teachers for effective teaching

in the 21st century as outlined in Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications, (EU, 2009) and by OECD, (2018). For teachers these are:

- (1) Knowledge and understanding: ‘knowledge of students’ prior knowledge’ and ‘effective use of technologies in learning’;
- (2) Skills: ‘using teaching materials and technologies’, and
- (3) Dispositions: ‘dispositions to team-working, collaboration and networking; sense of self-efficacy’. (European Commission, 2009).

Regarding the transition from primary to post-primary education, alignment calls for teachers to possess a solid understanding of prior learning and a willingness to collaborate. In 2017, the European Commission published ‘Continuity and Transitions in Learner Development’ (European Commission, 2017, revised 2018). This document establishes ten guiding principles for policy development, emphasising learner development over the segregation of educational levels. The principles encompass early years, learner and parent choice, inter-institutional collaboration, teaching and learning methods, access and inclusion, sharing data, usage of different types of data, providing appropriate learning contexts, social and emotional support, and support for learners who were at risk.

The central theme of the document is placing the learner at the core of policy development, striving for inclusivity and flexibility, shared accountability, mutual trust and understanding, common aims and standards, alignment of budgets and decision-making structures. Additionally, “the capacity and role of school leaders in establishing a clear strategic vision and leadership are deemed crucial for guiding and fully supporting learners while effectively communicating with other practitioners and stakeholders” (ibid., pp.2-3). This approach underscores the importance of collaboration and

cooperation in fostering smooth educational transitions and creating an environment where learners can thrive.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed key policies in relation to the transition from primary to post-primary. The introduction of free education in Ireland in the 1960s created a need for a focus on transition in subsequent policies and documents. While references to transition and the role of the principals and the teachers in transition have increased over the decades, so too has the responsibility on the principals and schools for organising and implementing transition. However, with no structured framework for transition, there exists an over reliance on the expectation of best practice by ITE providers, teachers and schools. Efforts to improve collaboration between primary and post-primary at an official level are present. The documents support transition both in the language used and in its formation. Movement towards a collaborative approach to policy formation has resulted in increased alignment of policy, pedagogy and intended practice between primary and post-primary. In terms of professional development, while there is specific engagement with the topic of transition from primary to post-primary for students with additional needs, transition is otherwise threaded through, rather than the sole focus, of professional development opportunities. For post-primary ITE providers, provision of specific subject content is recommended but may not be specifically focussed on, and cross-sectoral training and professional placement is not currently the norm for consecutive ITE programmes. Yet, progress is evident and is happening against a backdrop of European initiatives in educational practice on transition.

Moving forward, the upcoming chapter presents the findings from the Phase 2 qualitative interviews conducted with students and teachers and the quantitative survey of Phase 3. Phase 2 findings play a pivotal role in the exploratory sequential research design of this study, as they directly inform the Phase 3 national survey of teachers. The results address the research question: ‘What knowledge do post-primary teachers possess regarding transition, the process, pedagogical approaches, practices, and the curriculum within primary schools?’ The combination of qualitative and quantitative data will provide comprehensive insights into the topic of transition and its implications for educational practice.

5 Chapter Five: Quantitative and qualitative findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative findings from the exploratory interviews with students and teachers of Phase 2 and the quantitative findings from Phase 3, a national survey of post-primary teachers. As an exploratory sequential mixed methods research study, the interviews in Phase 2 serve both to inform the quantitative data collection method of Phase 3, and also to offer a more in-depth understanding of transition from the perspective of students and from that of teachers. Transition from the perspective of teachers is an under-investigated area, and therefore, the interviews in Phase 2 give an insight into what Blumer (1969) calls the “social life being investigated”. Specifically, these findings address the question: What is the extent of post-primary teachers’ understanding regarding the transition process, encompassing pedagogy, practices, and curriculum?

This chapter is structured as follows. Sections 1 and 2 set out the findings of a thematic analysis using *a priori* themes of the Five Bridges of Transfer, of the exploratory interviews of Phase 2. The first set of interviews involves 26 students from 15 different post-primary schools (Section 1), and the second set involves 30 post-primary teachers, principals, and assistant principals (Section 2) respectively. Profile details for these participants has already been provided in Chapter 3 (Section 3) which presents the findings from Phase 3 data generation, an online survey of post-primary teachers (n=475). Within each section, the findings are presented according to the Five Bridges of Transfer previously described in Chapter 2, Section 1. Pseudonyms are used for all participants. A summary is provided in Section 5.4. (See Appendix 3.9 for coding schemes.)

5.2 Section 1: Qualitative findings (Student interviews, (n=26))

5.2.1 Bridge 1: Administrative

The Administrative Bridge refers to the transfer of information between primary and post-primary schools on an official level (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.7). From the perspective of student participants, their knowledge and understanding of this bridge would likely be limited to the Education Passport and to pre-enrolment assessments and formal interviews in their new school prior to enrolment. The interview questions explored students' understanding and experiences of moving from primary to post-primary. The findings are presented under the headings of Education Passport and Entrance assessments & interviews.

Education Passport

As described in Chapter 4, the aims of the Educational Passport are to share information on students' strengths, interests, and weaknesses across primary and post-primary schools. However, the majority of participants (24 out of 25) expressed that, to their knowledge, their post-primary teachers were unaware of the content of their EPs at the beginning of their first year. Only one participant (Corrib) mentioned the EP unprompted. Corrib, the only participant from a DEIS school, mentioned a positive experience of having strengths and weaknesses shared through the EP, while Moy noted the near impossible challenge of teachers knowing students due to high numbers in post-primary school.

Entrance assessments & interviews

Out of 15 schools attended by the interviewed students, 13 conducted entrance assessments, with nine taking place before entrance and four taking place in September. Only two schools did not hold entrance assessments; both were Gaelscoileanna (Irish

medium language schools). One of these schools held an Irish oral to assess language ability in the first week. No other entrance assessments were conducted. The other school held interviews through Irish pre-entrance.

The students did not appear to find these assessments particularly stressful or distressing. One participant, Lagan, linked the concept of teachers “knowing them” to the teachers being aware of their academic abilities via these entrance assessments. Moy, however, felt that the entrance assessments were too easy and did not provide a true sense of their abilities. Students commonly described these exams as “general” (Blackwater) or “easy” (Liffey). According to the students, the purpose of these exams was mainly to determine whether additional help or specific class placements were needed (Barrow, Brosna). In their view, these assessments primarily served as administrative tools for forming mixed-ability classes.

Eight students from five different schools stated that they had one-to-one interviews in the post-primary schools before September of First year (2 private, 1 Gaelscoil, 2 voluntary post-primary schools). Interview duration ranged from five minutes to one hour. For those transitioning to a Gaelscoil from an English-medium primary school (Tolka), an interview assessed Irish proficiency. Shorter interviews were considered as ‘meet and greet’ moments with the school (Brosna). Brosna highlights the positive impact of their interview with the principal, which made them feel connected to the school. Longer interviews were found useful, albeit a bit “scary” (Blackwater).

Summary

Most students have a positive outlook on transition, but they feel that important information about their strengths, weaknesses, and abilities is not communicated. They feel that teachers generally lack knowledge about their students, and they saw no evidence

that the Education Passport plays a significant role in their transition. regardless of when they transitioned (pre-COVID-19, during COVID-19, or post-COVID-19). Entrance interviews were seen as positive, while entrance assessments were viewed more as administrative than informative about individual abilities.

5.2.2 Bridge 2: Social & emotional

This Bridge refers to the social and emotional supports put in place by schools (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.7). The interviews explored how the student participants felt they were supported during the transition. The student participants were quite eager to talk about the social side of the transition but were not as forthcoming on the emotional side of dealing with transition. As a sense of connection to a school brings about fewer academic, social, and emotional problems (Waters et al., 2010), issues to do with connections with the school are included under this bridge. The findings are presented under six areas: School visits & open days, induction programmes, mentor systems & siblings, friendships & social groups, a sense of belonging and relationship with teachers.

School visits & open days

Many student participants mentioned attending open days or school presentations, whether virtual or in-person, which included brochures, meetings, and other activities to familiarise them with the school environment and facilities. Rural participants (Feale, Dargle, Foyle) often highlighted these events as significant occasions, with some even mentioning that they took a bus from their primary school to attend. In contrast, urban participants described school visits more casually, placing less emphasis on the event itself. It is noteworthy that urban students indicated that, in certain schools open days were limited to those who had already accepted a place and received invitations.

Additionally, some urban schools, regardless of type (private or voluntary secondary schools), did not offer open days due to high demand for available places.

In most cases, students went to see the post-primary schools. Representatives from the post-primary schools rarely visited the primary schools. This pattern held true even for students who attended primary school on the same campus as the post-primary school. All but one school attended by participants reported subject teachers from the post-primary school visiting them. The exception involved rural participants Dargle and Foyle, who attended the same rural school and described instances when post-primary school teachers directly visited their primary school, but they added that “they were trying to get us to go to that school”.

Induction activities

Sporting activities were widely discussed by participants, irrespective of school type or gender. Boyne, for example, emphasised how sports played a key role in making new friends. Bann noted that COVID-19 initially limited induction activities. None of the participants considered how induction activities cater for non-sporty students. However, one participant, Slaney, highlighted the importance of extracurricular activities in primary school for developing social skills and addressing the social gap some students may face in larger group activities during the transition.

While most participants found sports-related induction activities effective in building connections (Boyne, Blackwater, Lee), Suir expressed a different view, noting that some students still gravitated toward existing friends after these activities. Some participants also recognised the value of induction activities with their class tutor for building relationships and forming class groups (e.g. Maigue).

A few participants made suggestions that might further enhance interaction among different class groups. Feale, who transitioned from a small school to a much larger one, proposed allocating more class time for socialising (initially, at least) to help students get to know their peers. The need for emotional and social support was consistent across urban and rural contexts and across various school types, sizes, and gender compositions.

Structured induction was prevalent among all participants. These induction days lasted between one and three days. While most induction days were held around September, one school organised a sports camp during Easter prior to the academic year which the students enjoyed (Moy/Lagan). These programmes included team-building activities, sports camps, scavenger hunts, overnight trips, and shorter school days, facilitating social interaction and familiarisation with the school environment during the initial days.

Social mentor systems and siblings

Mentor systems, involving tutors, Year Heads, and older students, as well as participation in extra-curricular clubs, emerged as positive initiatives for participants. Tutor contact varied from brief daily interactions to weekly sessions. Participants like Barrow, Liffey, and Blackwater had a designated tutor but no dedicated tutor time, which they did not find advantageous.

Mentor systems involving older students (TYs or 5th years) were generally perceived positively. Mentoring activities ranged from Q&A sessions to assisting with logistics like navigation to classrooms or helping with lockers although slight differences between male and female participants were noted. Liffey, who is also a mentor in 5th year, provided an insight into the usefulness of this system in an all-boys' school. They described engagement with mentors as limited as the first years felt intimidated by older

students and “hardly ever” asked for help. By comparison, female participants were more inclined to praise their mentors (Lee, Slaney, Maigue).

Participants valued informal communication sources (such as siblings and older students) for insights into teachers’ personalities and behavioural expectations, and other practical information. Siblings played a role in successful social adjustment. Eight of the participants had siblings in the same post-primary school. While intentional interaction between siblings within school was minimal, older siblings were seen as reliable sources of information (Moy, Suir, Nore, Boyne). Only one participant (Suir) raised concerns about being pre-judged by teachers because of a siblings’ reputation.

Regardless of having siblings or not, students sought insider perspectives to navigate the new environment. Shannon, the eldest in her family, highlighted the significance of this preparation. Even those without siblings found value in such sources, as highlighted by Feale’s involvement in various clubs.

Friendship & social groups

The participants in this study started post-primary school with pre-existing friendships, typically in groups of three or more friends. This aligns with the GUI findings, which reported that 79% entered post-primary school with three or more friends (Williams et al., 2018). These friend groups can be categorised based on their outlook: some embraced diversity, some initially leaned on their friends for support, and some were eager to develop new social circles.

Participants like Feale, Corrib, Moy, and Lagan, who transitioned from small rural schools to larger post-primary schools outside Dublin, anticipated changes in their friend groups due to the diverse backgrounds of students at their new schools. Urban participants such as Maigue and Slaney had similar expectations. Maigue, for example, moved with

seven girls to a large mixed school, initially relying on her existing friends, but quickly formed new friendships. Using friendships as a support system, especially during unstructured times like lunch breaks, was a common theme. Some participants acknowledged using their existing friendships as a temporary safety net, a trend observed primarily among male participants like Lagan, Feale, and Liffey.

Sense of belonging

The importance of knowing what post-primary school students were going to attend revealed that many participants experienced a mental and emotional connection with their new school well before the actual transition. For instance, one participant shared her experience: “In 4th class, I found out which post-primary school I was going to, and it made a significant difference. I explored the school’s website to learn about sports and activities, considered the subjects I might choose. I started recognising the school uniforms in my area and got to know others who were also going to the same school. So, I felt like a part of the school even before officially joining it.” (Slaney)

Relationships with teachers

Student participants generally had a positive view of teachers and support provided during the initial transition months. Teachers were generally seen as understanding of challenges like lockers and late arrivals. However, most students complained about teachers not attentively listening to their concerns and sometimes lacking patience with students over books or giving answers quick enough in class. The students remarked on how teacher interactions and behavioural expectations varied between teachers, e.g. some passed out severe punishment for minor rule violations. Some students also felt that teachers did not know their names, unlike in primary schools where most students were known by name. These criticisms were often targeted at younger teachers who appeared more focussed on

the subject matter than on the students themselves. In terms of the transition duration, most students believed that the first term was sufficient to get used to the new environment.

Summary

Students were mainly positive about the social and emotional aspects of transition. Their schools had initiatives for bolstering emotional support and integration, including induction activities, which were often centred on popular sports. Informal interaction with older students was seen as valuable, and student-teacher relationships were generally positive, though some negatives were mentioned. Term 1 was considered the ideal timeframe for adjusting to the new environment.

5.2.3 Bridge 3: Curriculum

This Bridge refers to teachers' knowledge of curriculum issues, the related communication between schools and teachers, and any local initiatives in place to support curriculum continuity (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.7). From the perspective of student participants, the interviews explored whether students experienced continuity or discontinuity between the primary and post-primary curriculum across the different subject areas. The findings of this bridge first show how students' own subject preferences changed (or not) in the move from primary to post-primary. It then describes their engagement with the subjects and their perception of being prepared for these subjects in post-primary.

Curriculum continuity and subject preference

Participants were questioned about their preferred subjects, both in primary and post-primary school. While some like Tolka, who was in First year, had not yet established a subject preference after two months, others in First year (Fergus) could not explain their

newfound interest in business, while Mourne was not certain either, stating, ‘it’s not the subjects, rather just there are some other better classes than it’ (Mourne). Figure 5.1 illustrates participants’ favourite subjects in primary and post-primary school. As shown the most popular subjects in primary were Art and Music with core subjects such as Maths and English also liked. However, this changes substantially in post-primary school. While the preference for the majority of subjects (including core subjects of Maths, English and Irish) decreased, there was a large decrease in Art, and a notable decrease in PE and Geography. Preferences for History increased slightly. The most significant increase, however, occurred in the preference for Science.

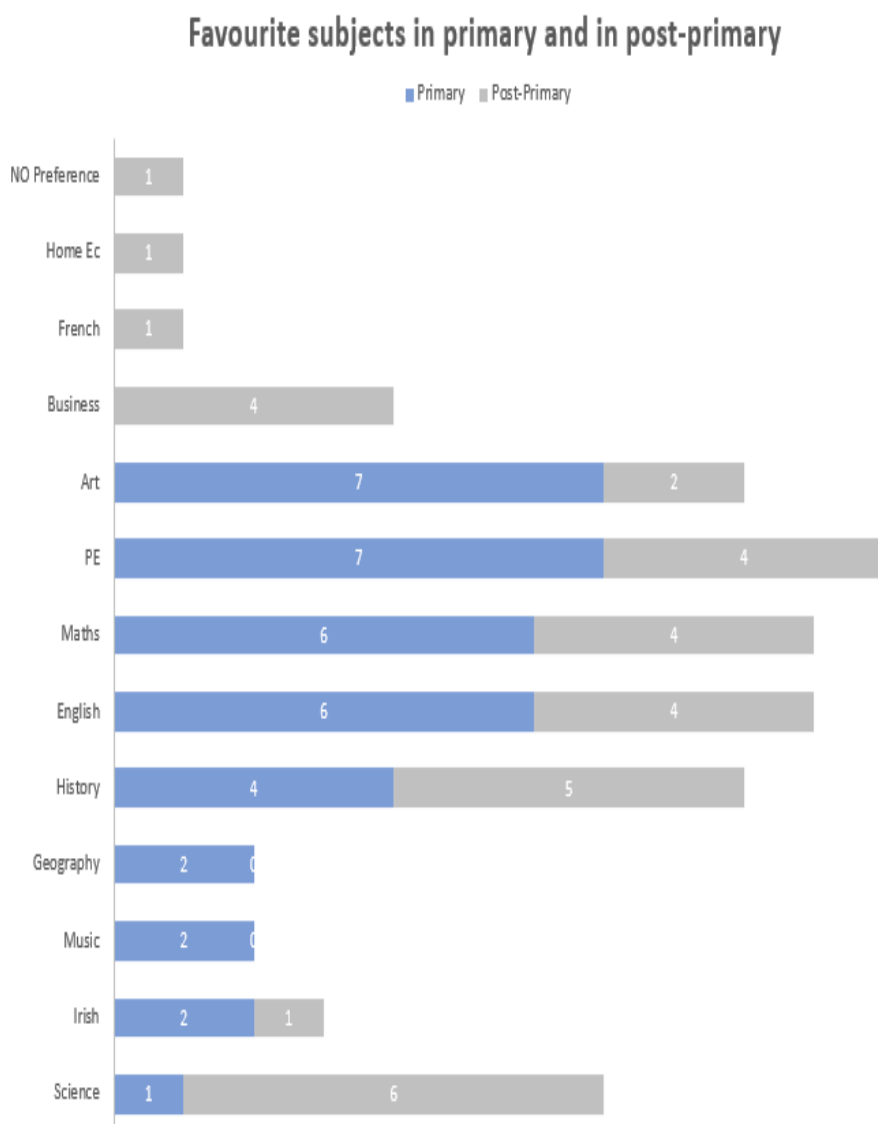


Figure 5.1 Students’ favourite subjects in primary and in post-primary.

Subject preference shifts are influenced by a variety of factors. Introduction to new subjects in post-primary school led to changes in preferences e.g., for Foyle (French) and for Feale (Business and Home Economics). The in-depth exploration of History content boosted interest for some participants (Suir, Shannon). Subject preferences remained consistent for six participants. Four of these six participants attributed their continuity in subject preferences to personal interest, while the other two participants cited the influence of teacher subject specialists, and their own perception of being good at a subject. Corrib sums up the situation for most students: “Subjects I liked, I like them more now; subjects I hate, I hate even more” (Corrib).

Seven participants recorded shifts in preference that they attribute to increased subject difficulty. This difficulty related to the subject’s level, their personal abilities, and a waning interest (e.g., Lagan, Blackwater). Changes in teaching methods triggered a shift for one participant in their subject preference (e.g., PE and Irish preferences for Nore). Otherwise, discontinuity in the subject content caused shifts in seven cases. In five of these cases, participants either did not provide a specific reason or mentioned concurrent liking of other subjects (e.g., Slaney, who still likes PE but also developed an interest in Science). While those who preferred Geography in primary school and moved away from it in post-primary, attributed this change to the fact that the subject was “totally different” and more difficult.

Subject preparedness

Perceived subject preparedness was viewed as generally positive by students for the core primary subjects (Maths and English), mainly due to their daily coverage in primary school (Table 5.1). History closely followed with five students indicating positive preparedness due to familiarity of topics like archaeology and the Renaissance that had been covered in primary. The exception was algebra in Maths (Liffey, Lagan and Moy)

because they believed they had not covered the curriculum adequately in their primary school.

Overview of students' perceptions of coverage of subjects in primary school					
(x) = number of participants who mentioned it.					
Subject	No, not really	A bit	yes	Not mentioned	
History	(7)	(2)	(5)	Others	We didn't do any history at all in primary.
Religion	(2)	(2)		Others	
Business		(2)	(1)	Others	JEP programme
Music		(1)		Others	Didn't do a lot but I liked it when we did
Science	(7)	(5)	(1)	Others	We never did any science. No, never science. Rarely. We do experiments outside.
English			ALL		More creative writing in primary.
Maths			ALL		
Irish		(2)	(10)	Others	The only thing we <u>actually</u> use in secondary school from what we learned in primary school is Irish; Teacher didn't really speak it.
Geography	(6)	(6)	(0)	Others	Bit in SPHE (Boyne); we did the rivers; rarely did it; no relevant topics (Feale)

Table 5.1 Students' perceptions of engagement with subjects in primary school.

The Irish learned in primary school was highlighted by a number of students as particularly relevant: Barrow even mentioned that Irish was the only subject they found directly useful in post-primary school, a sentiment shared by others from different primary schools. However, a number of participants mentioned the difference in content such as poetry and stories, which detracted from their sense of preparedness in these subjects.

As illustrated in Table 5.2, according to the students, Science emerged as the least prepared-for subject but was higher in terms of preference by seven participants (Science was an optional subject in 2 of 15 post-primary schools). For instance, Bann found Science enjoyable in primary school but commented that both Science and Geography underwent substantial course changes from primary to post-primary school.

Generally, students perceived themselves as inadequately prepared for post-primary education in these subjects due to the pronounced disparities between primary and post-primary content. Limited engagement with Science in primary school was also highlighted by one participant as having an impact on subject choices in post-primary school. In Dodder's words, "in my primary we didn't really do much Science and in my school it's an option to do Science, so if you do Science, I think, like you should probably do more Science, or whatever you choose, in primary". Overall, only one participant, Feale, indicated readiness across most core subjects (except Irish) as well as History, Geography and Science.

<i>What subjects did you feel you were not prepared for/were different in secondary school?</i>		
<i>Subject</i>	No. of times	Reasons
Science	7	Totally different; terminology; content
Geography	5	Totally different
Maths	5	Algebra; very different.
Irish	4	Content, poetry, literature; essays
History	3	Content was a different, more in depth
English	3	less creative writing; types of questions / Long questions; PQE, writing strategies; Writing essays-structure

Table 5.2 *Students' perceptions of differences in curriculum continuity.*

Twenty of 25 students offered an opinion as to whether it was more important for primary teachers to familiarise themselves with the post-primary school curriculum. Thirteen of 20 students stressed that this approach would help bridge subject knowledge gaps. This in turn, would sufficiently prepare them for initial core and elective subjects, set realistic expectations for their level, and facilitate subject choices. Nore suggested that enhanced curriculum knowledge by teachers would help calibrate teachers' expectations of their subject level and content coverage, preventing repetition or covering too much of a subject in primary school. This is validated by the fact that some students associated their feeling of academic readiness with how their 6th class teacher explicitly drew attention to the relevance of aspects of a subject for post-primary education. Feale attributed their preparedness across subjects to a 6th class teacher who frequently pointed out, "you'll be doing this in post-primary" (Feale). However, seven participants came to a contrary conclusion saying that preparation was not relevant due to the fresh start in First year. (See Appendix 5.4 for student perspectives.) The others did not offer an opinion.

Summary

Most participants observed a shift in their subject preferences during the transition, with various reasons provided. While continuity in core subjects like English, Irish, and Maths generally receives positive feedback from students, the main issue lies in the perception of discontinuity in non-core subjects Science which is attributed to a perceived lack of engagement with these subjects in primary education and a mismatch in subject content. Despite this, Science remains the students' top preference in post-primary. Most students believed that both primary and post-primary teachers lacked a comprehensive understanding of each other's curricula. They advocated for primary teachers to have a better grasp of post-primary curricula to ensure better preparation.

5.2.4 Bridge 4: Pedagogy

This Bridge refers to teaching methodologies and practices across primary and post-primary classrooms (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.7). The interviews with 26 students aimed to explore their perceptions of continuity or discontinuity in teaching practices from primary to post-primary and the perceived impact on their learning. The first part of this section reviews teaching practices that students perceive as similar or different from their experiences in primary schools. The section then presents students' opinions of the teaching practices they encounter in their post-primary classrooms. Finally, the section presents students' perceptions of continuity in assessment.

Teaching methods and practices

Various observations regarding differences in classroom teaching methods have emerged (see Appendix 5.5 for a table of comments). Specifically, concerning the core subjects of Irish and Maths, students generally felt prepared, but they identified variations in teaching methods that raised concerns. In the case of Irish, these variations relate to the use of the target language. For example, one student described their experience with Irish: “We didn’t really study Irish that much at all... the teacher didn’t really speak it... for one year in 4th class, we had no Irish whatsoever... in first year, I was maybe a year behind others” (Feale). Inny and Luba also expressed a lack of continuity in the use of the target language: “It was quite hard because in post-primary, they don’t use it... in English, they’ll just talk to you in Irish the whole time. We didn’t do that type of thing in primary to prepare for it, so it was a bit overwhelming at the beginning” (Luba).

In Maths, differences in calculator usage emerged across participants regardless of location, (Boyne, Slaney, and Corrib). Slaney recounted how primary school restricted calculator use, prioritising the skill of manual calculation. However, upon entering first

year, calculator use became mandatory, leading to a week and a half dedicated to learning this new skill. Their Maths teachers dismissed primary school methods, asserting that they needed to adapt to post-primary school approaches. These disparities in Maths methods prompted both Feale and Corrib to question the relevance of their previous eight years of Maths education. Corrib went so far as to label it “pointless”.

Post-primary teachers and continuity in the classroom		
Reference by students	Number of references	Specific comments made
Revision	6	Some revision in Irish, maths Depends on teacher
Pace	6	Faster liked by some, not by others Slower (sometimes too slow mainly in Irish and Maths)
Start from scratch	4	Most if not all subjects; Geography specifically mentioned
Expected we didn't know anything	3	Irish Maths
Went back to basics	3	Low expectations
Made reference to primary	3	Maths (1), Geog (1), Science/art (1)
Irrelevance of learning in primary made explicit	2	Maths
Assumed only the basics	3	Geography, Irish maths
Passing reference to primary	2	Irish Maths
No reference or opinion given by others		

Table 5.3 Student perceptions of continuity in teaching practices.

The students also said that in Irish and Maths, some teachers referred to previous subject content or primary school experiences. Six participants mentioned instances of revision in these subjects during the initial weeks of post-primary education. However, in Geography, Irish, and Maths, some teachers started from scratch or assumed minimal prior knowledge. The introduction of revision in the early weeks was generally positively received by students as it aided memory retention, refreshed knowledge and provided a sense of familiarity.

Repetition, particularly in Maths and Irish, was seen as beneficial for understanding for most, but its pacing varied from just ‘sufficient’ (Luba) to “dragging on for a month” (Bann), leading to concerns of either rapid or sluggish progression and boredom for some students. Two participants noted the repetition of identical texts from primary in the English classroom specifically; however, this was generally viewed positively by students.

Students also indicated that teachers sometimes held low expectations of their prior knowledge in certain subjects, while teachers’ excessively high expectations, especially in Irish and Maths, raised concerns. Very few students expressed frustration with material revision; the majority agree that being over-prepared was better.

In terms of teaching methods, the majority expressed that these were similar in primary and post-primary. While increased use of technology for independent research was praised in post-primary, variations on the whole were limited and can be summarised by Suir’s comparison of teaching methods in both primary and post-primary:

it’s the same [as in primary] explanation on the board, explanation on the board in post-primary, take it down, learn it. You do more work in post-primary school maybe more explanation, more explaining, but it’s typically the same class, some teachers do group work in post-primary school but it’s not common.

However, expectations of behaviour in the classrooms were different, with more restricted movement and increased control by teachers in post-primary referenced by the participants.

Continuity in assessment

The participants indicated that teachers possessed limited knowledge of their subject abilities. Boyne, however, felt that their Irish proficiency was recognised because the

teacher had asked what primary school they attended. The Irish teacher was aware that this primary school had a reputation for preparing students well in Irish. Weekly tests were used primarily to ascertain competence levels in one school, while more periodic tests (mid-term, Christmas, end of year assessments) were more representative of the sample. The summative assessments raised stress levels among First years. Formative feedback by teachers on homework was viewed as “more direct...faster... more personal than in primary school”. The nature of the feedback from post-primary teachers was also “a bit of a shock” as students were used to a less direct approach in primary school. Participants noted that post-primary teachers were quicker at identifying mistakes, a contrast to their primary school experience. Bann expressed a desire for this kind of correction in primary school, where errors might go unnoticed even after repeated occurrences.

Slaney, Lee, and Maigue all agreed that tests in post-primary had different formats, lengths, and expectations for answers. They found the tests more challenging, with a demand for structured paragraphs despite not having received prior instruction in this style of writing (Slaney). By comparison, they referenced that primary school assignments often focussed on projects and reports, while post-primary leaned more toward traditional test-based learning. This shift posed adjustment challenges for some students, who perceived primary school projects as “less about learning and more about completing tasks” (e.g. Brosna).

Homework was a recurring topic. Participants reported discrepancies between the expected amount of homework that their 6th class teachers had warned that they would receive and what they actually received in post-primary school. They also mentioned that

homework was often peer-corrected rather than reviewed by teachers, which discouraged completion and created difficulties for teachers to identify struggling students (e.g. Lee).

Benefits of discontinuity

Discontinuity in teaching methods had mixed effects, affecting subject preferences and preparedness, but also fostering personal growth, maturity, and responsibility. Feale, for instance, highlighted homework challenges and the realisation that peer correction was common, and work was not always seen by teachers. This led to an awareness of a personal responsibility for learning.

Several participants found value in the presence of subject-specific teachers, diverse subjects, and varied teaching approaches as preparation for broader learning (Slaney, Lee, Feale). Suir summed up the positives, emphasising the importance of the need to adapt to diverse teachers and learning methods, as it is preparation for the variety of experiences life presents, especially in college.

Impact of age and stage of teacher

Students noticed that less experienced or younger teachers employed different teaching methods and had different classroom dynamics. Participants identified perceived weak classroom management, excessive focus on content delivery over understanding, fast-paced classes, and excessive reliance on textbook-based tasks (see Appendix 5.8). Teachers were noted to “stress over little things”, while Feale’s advice for less experienced teachers was to avoid falling into extremes of being overly strict or not strict enough.

Participants mentioned that student teachers were often assigned to younger year groups and had limited presence in senior classes. Additionally, one third-year student pointed

out a high turnover of student teachers, stating they had six Business teachers in the first year due to a series of student teacher changes (Feale).

Summary

Students noted both similarities and differences in teaching methods between primary and post-primary schools. Many students highlighted variations in post-primary teacher expectations, with some assuming students knew nothing about a subject while others had unrealistically high expectations. While many participants found the revision and repetition of content in September helpful, they expressed negative views about the discontinuity in teachers' assessment practices and formats.

5.2.5 Bridge 5: Managing learning

While the pedagogy bridge is concerned with teaching practices of the educator, this Bridge is concerned with students and their ability to manage their own learning - their self-management and learning strategies (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.7). The interview questions probed their perceptions of readiness for learning. Notably, while there was an equal balance of male and female participants (13:13), male participants mainly referenced organisational preparation, while female participants were more vocal about the learning dimension of this Bridge. The section firstly considers how the participants view their preparation for management of learning in their primary schools. It continues to present students' opinions on learning to learn, developing independence and skills, developing learning autonomy, and parental support.

Learning to learn

Most participants find "Learning to learn" challenging, and this struggle isn't specific to particular school types or locations. While some, like Lee, Maigue, and Slaney, mention

study skills programmes, not all participants touch on this aspect. Both parents and students express concern about the lack of study skills preparation, as highlighted by Shannon who lacked knowledge about studying, and who believed that it was crucial to ensure that incoming first years are equipped with study skills. “Even a slight emphasis on study skills from teachers could make a significant difference.”

Interestingly, participants from two urban schools indicated that study skills classes were offered at their schools, although not to first-years due to COVID-19. These workshops would have greatly assisted them in preparing for Christmas exams during their initial year. While many participants expressed stress about these first-year assessments, some found that these challenges spurred personal growth and a change in perspective. One participant advised incoming First years to dedicate a brief period for studying for the upcoming test, “but don’t let the stress overwhelm you, as these minor tests won’t hold much significance in the long run.” Surprisingly, no participants mentioned any form of peer or peer-learning support in their accounts.

Developing learner autonomy

Transitioning to post-primary school brought increased responsibility and independence for most participants, leading to new friendships, travel experiences, and a wider range of activities compared to primary school. However, this shift also presented challenges, not only in terms of organisational independence but also in self-directed learning. As one participant succinctly put it, “the teachers don’t hold your hand anymore, so you need to be responsible.”

For some participants, this new-found autonomy in learning brought satisfaction and enjoyment in subjects, e.g. Suir and Corrib with History. However, others faced difficulties, especially in their first year of post-primary school. Tolka, for instance,

appreciated the independence but initially found it challenging to navigate learning without the structured guidance from primary school.

As students embraced independent learning, a potential issue arose in the reluctance to ask for assistance. This reluctance, rooted in concerns about peer and teacher perceptions, led to a classroom atmosphere where students often remained silent instead of seeking clarification, as noted by Lee and Maigue. The faster pace of teaching and less comprehensive coverage of material compared to primary school exacerbated this issue, potentially resulting in learning gaps.

The increased responsibility among students also prompted differing views on parental roles. Some participants advised parents to let their children experience the consequences of incomplete homework, fostering responsibility, as suggested by Lee. Conversely, others emphasised the need for initial parental oversight due to the newfound freedom in post-primary school, where not all homework is checked as rigorously as in primary school, as noted by Feale.

Preparation in 6th class

Several participants discussed the preparation provided by their 6th class teachers for managing themselves and their learning when in post-primary school. Informal discussions about organisational skills, independence, and responsibility were common in most participants' primary Senior Cycle education. For example, Brosna mentioned that they were informed about post-primary school expectations like punctuality, organisation, homework completion, and grasping certain mathematical concepts.

Liffey highlighted that they were prepared in some respects, such as time management skills and homework deadlines, but felt unprepared for exams and study techniques when

they entered first year. Those coming from the same primary school as Suir, Liffey, Barrow, etc., also displayed a similar readiness despite variations in their 6th class teachers.

However, Slaney noted that internal discussions within primary school classes (1st class to 6th class) were stronger than discussions about the transition from 6th class to first year. Slaney's experience of minimal preparation in the final 6th class might be attributed to the shift to online teaching from March to June 2020 due to COVID-19. Additionally, two participants from Dublin noted that teacher discussions were more curiosity-driven about the chosen school rather than genuinely instructional, a perspective not reflected in the interviews of rural participants.

Summary

This section explores students' preparation, learning challenges, and growing independence during the transition from primary to post-primary education. Most participants received informal guidance on organisational skills, independence, and responsibility. However, there were disparities in preparedness, with some feeling unprepared for exams and study techniques in their first year. The post-primary classroom offered more freedom in learning; and while some embraced it, others struggled to navigate their learning journey without the familiar structure.

Overview of findings of student interviews

The transition from primary to post-primary education is characterised by a mix of positive experiences and challenges for students. Overall, students exhibit a positive outlook on the social and emotional aspects of transition, with schools implementing initiatives to support integration and emotional wellbeing. However, students feel that important information about their strengths, weaknesses, and abilities is often not

communicated effectively, and there is a perceived lack of understanding between primary and post-primary teachers regarding curricula. Despite continuity in core subjects like English and Maths receiving positive feedback, there is a perception of discontinuity in non-core subjects, such as Science, leading to challenges in subject preferences and perceptions. Variations in teaching methods and expectations between primary and post-primary schools are noted, with some students struggling to navigate the increased independence and different assessment practices in the post-primary classroom. Overall, while many students successfully adapt to the transition, others encounter difficulties in adjusting to the new environment and academic expectations.

5.3 Section 2: Qualitative findings (Teachers & management interviews, n=30)

Transition from the perspective of teachers is an under-investigated area. As an exploratory sequential design, the aim of these semi-structured interviews is to not only gain a deeper understanding but provide a sound basis for content of the quantitative survey. While the interviews in Section 1 offer insight into the classroom from a students' perspective, the findings of the interviews with teachers and management delve deeper into teachers' roles in transition. In total 18 post-primary teachers and 12 post-primary management participants were interviewed. (See Chapter 3, Section 3.5.3 for a detailed profile of participants).

In particular, the aim of this Section is to inform the question: "What is the extent of post-primary teachers' knowledge regarding the transition process, encompassing pedagogy, practices, and curriculum? The findings are presented in this section according to the Five Bridges of Transfer. For Bridges 1 and 2 the findings of the 18 teacher and 12 management interviews are compared. For Bridges 3, 4, and 5, the findings of teachers' and management interviews are amalgamated.

5.3.1 Bridge 1: Administrative

This Bridge focuses on the transfer of information between primary and post-primary schools. As outlined in Chapter 2 and earlier in this Chapter, formal transfer of information methods in an Irish context comprises the Education Passports and can also include entrance assessments and interviews with students and parents. The latter two may or may not take place and are school dependent. Questions were posed to Management Participants (MP) and Teacher Participants (TP) regarding their awareness, use, sharing and accessibility of student information, and inter-school communication regarding transition.

The Education Passport (EP)

The Pie chart (Figure 5.2) details the awareness of the EP among the total sample (30). Analysis indicates that awareness of the EP is high. 13 of 30 are ‘very familiar’ while only 2 never heard of it who were teachers of Science and languages respectively (with an average of eight years’ teaching experience). 15 of 17 participants had never heard of the EP or had some awareness of it but had not seen it.

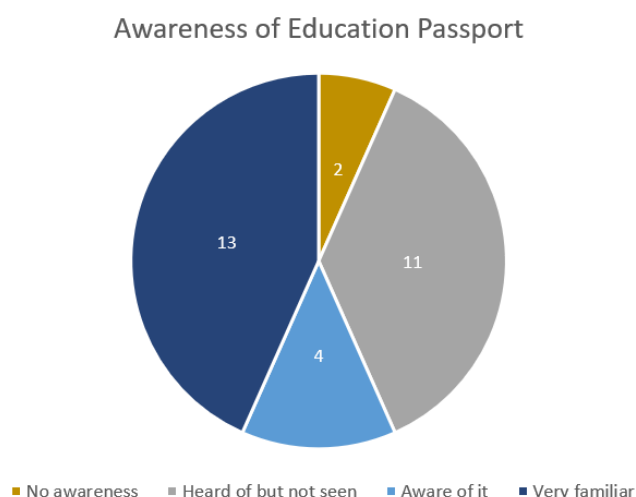


Figure 5.2 Awareness of the EP by teacher and management participants.

As expected, the cohort that were very familiar with the EP were mostly in management positions or involved in SEN. The exceptional case is Loughlin, who holds the position of deputy principal. However, it is noteworthy that this school has also designated an Assistant Principal (AP) to handle transition responsibilities. Kiernan, an experienced teacher with over 20 years of experience, echoes the sentiment of the 15 participants who had awareness of the EP but were not directly involved: “I’ve heard of the concept. I knew it existed, but I wouldn’t have known it as something concrete within the school”.

Source of knowledge of EP

While awareness of EP was integral to the management role, teachers encountered the EPs in various ways - through SEN discussions at the beginning of the school year, personal research or previous work experience, or as a parent. Martins’ comment sums up the perspective of teachers:

I’ve heard of it from those meetings, but as a subject teacher, you rarely... I guess you don’t really encounter it since it’s typically managed by the special education team. The information hasn’t trickled down to subject teachers in my 11-year experience. I’ve never even considered requesting it.

CPD did not emerge as a primary source of information on EPs for these teachers. This is despite the fact that NIPT workshops had been obligatory for teachers with 6-10 years of experience.

Use and usefulness of EP

The findings show that most of the participants used the EP in a limited manner or not at all (see Figure 5.3). Of those in management or SEN positions, four used the EPs as part of that role and six used them for reference only as needed. Nine of 12 in management specifically referenced the EP as most useful in identifying students with additional educational needs and they acknowledged the *usefulness* of this information, especially for the Year Heads (Santry). However, their active *use* of it, varied. Only one management

participant used the information to allow teachers to better understand their first-year students. As Blackrock states, “it’s an awful shame to have all that information about that human being that could be useful but just isn’t.”

The EP was considered “not generally useful” by five of the 12, using terms and phrases like “haphazard” (Kells), “of varying relevance” (Killarney), and “bitty” (Blackrock). Their preferred information sources included application forms, enrolment forms, school profiles, and informal communication. One participant noted, “The EP information might be helpful, but personal conversations are more valuable. I tend not to use them much; only occasionally as a reference” (Navan). Various reasons for lack of engagement with the EPs were cited by management participants ranging from inconsistent receipt, varied content quality, awkward timing, and bias. As Killarney explained, some primary teachers preferred to give students a ‘fresh start’ and withhold potentially useful information. Overall, however, alternative sources of information were considered better by management (8/12). These included one-to-one interviews, meetings with primary teachers, home-school liaison officers, and informal discussions.

Turning to the teacher participants, the majority were unaware of its use (10/18). The other eight were aware of the content but did not refer to the EP or use it in their planning. Both management and teacher participants noted how the sharing of information was dependent on the Year head or SEN department.

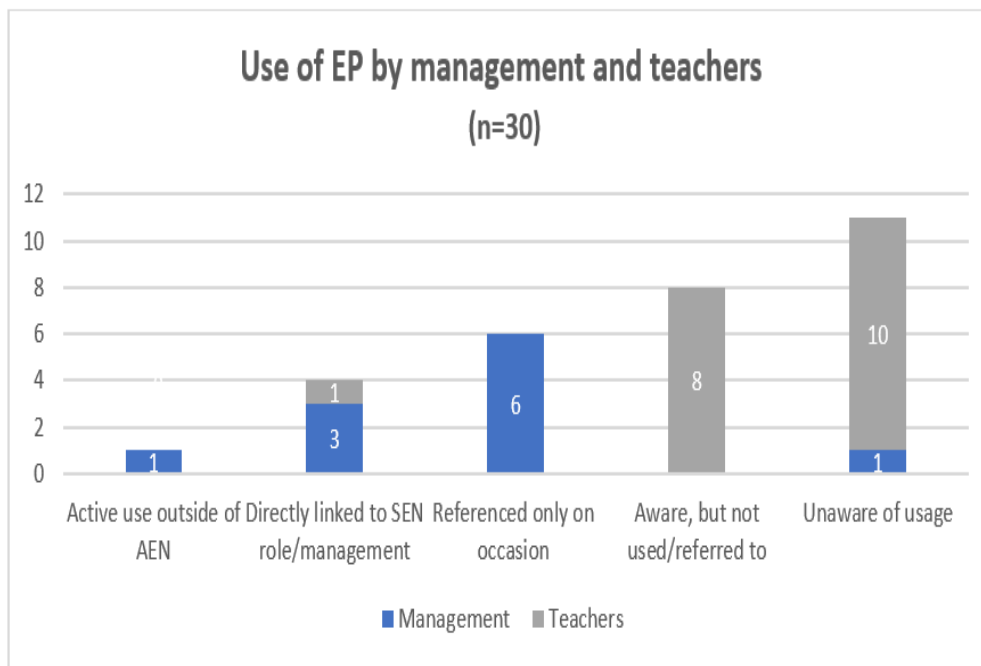


Figure 5.3 Participants' usage of the EP.

Concerns about EP usefulness post-enrolment were raised as “by October, they’re obsolete” (Killarney). Tara also questions the balance between the effort that goes into the administration of these documents and their value due to GDPR concerns. While GDPR and concerns over confidentiality were raised a few times by management participants, issues of trust in the information provided was mentioned more frequently.

In conclusion, while many management participants acknowledge the potential of the EP, practical application and usefulness vary. Some participants favour alternative sources, while others value it in identifying students with AEN. Challenges include inconsistent information, biases, and time sensitive nature of the documents. These are summarised in Table 5.4.

Overview: Reasons for lack of usefulness	Overview: Alternative & better sources of information
• The timing of receipt of the passports • They are not always sent/received • The (in)consistency in content and detail provided • Unwillingness to commit comments in writing • Bureaucracy of the enrolment process (received only when enrolled in school) • Workload of teachers/management • Lack of guidance for parents on filling them out • Reliability of information from schools/ Reluctance to share information • Reliability of information from parents • Literacy levels of parents / pupils • Unsuitability of questions for Post Primary • Lack of understanding of the role of the EP • Accessibility of files to staff • Limited lifespan of information • Other sources provide better information	• One-to-one interviews with parents (Santry, Kells) • Optional one-to-one interviews (Tramore) • Meetings with Primary school teachers and AEN in primary • Building relationships with staff in primary schools • Home school liaison officer (Slane/ Tara) • Informal transfer of information (Tara, Byrne, Slane) • Enrolment forms • Profile forms by students (Santry, Tramore) • Individual booklets (Killarney)

Table 5.4 Overview of reasons for use/non-use of EP.

Entrance assessments

Entrance assessments are no longer used for gaining entrance into post-primary schools. They are, however, still used to assess students' ability. All participants of Phase 2 worked in schools that used them. Management participants stressed that these assessments were purely for creating mixed ability classes, ensuring gender balance, and a diverse mix of students from feeder schools. They were intended/structured to be low stress events. The description of the entrance tests' function provided here confirms the students' assumptions, as discussed in Section 1. Only one management participant mentioned sharing these results with parents. The majority of participants' schools (26/28) scheduled these tests prior to students starting in the school. All management participants expressed

a preference for these assessments over the STen results¹⁸ or 6th class reports provided in the EP as they found them more reliable, and the results were immediately accessible.

While teacher participants demonstrated high awareness of entrance exams, deeper discussions revealed limited knowledge of the assessment content and a limited role for the results in their teaching. As one participant states, ‘we’re not involved in setting the entrance exam. The Resource department handles that. I know it includes literacy and numeracy, but I don’t think it covers traditional English or Maths’ (McAteer).

Awareness and access to information

As expected, all management participants indicated that they had access to information on students. They also spoke of their teachers having access to certain types of information, including social, emotional, and learning needs, and health issues. 11 out of 12 mentioned that such information was available to staff upon request. However, five out of the 12 mentioned issues related to the logistics of access and of interpreting data. Killarney pointed out that while access is available, interpreting the data is a separate skill.

While most teachers (15/18) had some access to information, for the most part access was very limited. Only three participants mentioned having ‘comprehensive’ online information about their students. One Year Head described a process where they receive a “massive file of information about every child” which helps them get acquainted with students even before they start (Hegarty). O’Reilly also mentioned that although they had not seen an Education Passport, the content is shared verbally and through online profiles in meetings. Byrne also referred to significant information access in their school. Other

¹⁸ STen scores indicate a student’s approximate position (as a range of values) with respect to the population values and, therefore, to other students in that population. Standardised tests are conducted in 6th class in Ireland, as well as in 2nd and 4th classes.

teachers, like Flynn, Peters, and Mahon, mentioned limited or no information except for students with special needs or those who excel academically.

Cosgrove explains that they gain information directly from teaching experience: “We don’t get much information, but I access a lot of data from the kids themselves. It’s first-hand from teaching them”. Martins similarly noted, “for the most part, you have no information on other students on your class list. You only learn about them when they’re in front of you for the first time”.

More teachers mentioned the uncertainty about the amount of access they have to information about students and the bureaucratic complexities of GDPR regulations. The interviews highlight that subject-specific teachers often have limited access to comprehensive student information, except for content related to SEN. While GDPR and confidentiality was used as a potential reason for not engaging with the material, there was also a clear lack of clarity by participants of the regulations, with inconsistencies in practices evident across participants’ schools. In some examples, even the SEN department lacked clarity about who had access, adding to the confusion (Cosgrove, O’Reilly, Byrne).

Another reason for teachers’ lack of engagement with EPs is down to the perception that certain information on students is the domain of the special education team rather than subject-specific teachers. Yet other teachers make a strategic decision not to engage with the information on students. Flynn, for example, avoids reviewing any academic information so that they can provide students with a fresh start.

While all participants expressed a genuine desire to support students, administrative pressures often determined their actions and priorities. Time pressures were frequently

mentioned. Blackrock highlighted the challenge of addressing multifaceted demands while trying to incorporate new information into their teaching practices, while Finn believed that administrative requirements sometimes overshadow the nurturing aspect of teaching.

The low level of awareness among teachers about the content and purpose of EPs, however, is a significant factor influencing non-engagement. Finn's observation that only a minority of teachers realise the transformative potential of EPs suggests that many educators might be missing out on valuable insights that these documents can provide. Those who did not know of the EP and its content, especially in relation to learning preferences, were surprised of the amount of information provided in it. One teacher would have liked access to entrance exam results to pre-emptively address students' struggles: "a lot of times, you don't find out until April or May of their first year. I feel that's too late to realise a student is struggling" (Mahon). In some instances, they described alternative profiles and handouts for gathering student information, duplicating material already available in the EPs.

Communication between schools

In terms of communication between feeder schools and post-primary schools, the majority of management participants (10 of 12) reported that their post-primary school teams conducted promotional visits to feeder schools. (See Table 5.5 for overview of communication). These visits were generally seen in a positive light. However, there is some ambivalence as to whether they are marketing rather than educational activities. Two participants described these visits as uncomfortable, lacking value, and resembling a commercialisation of education (Kells and Tramore). Instead, these schools found it more effective to engage with parents and students directly.

Other management (4) participants indicated that they enabled their post-primary teachers to visit 6th-class students in the primary schools. Again, some stated that this was more of a marketing strategy to increase numbers. However, all schools of management participants describe good lines of communication with primary schools for students identified with AEN. Such communication took place either in person, by telephone and/or email exchanges. DEIS school participants reported that the Home School Community Liaison officers played a vital role in information transfer (Tara and Slane).

Management-led initiatives to develop primary to post-primary communication pathways were described by a few participants. Trim (ETB) set up regular meetings with feeder school principals for ongoing communication. This approach facilitated insights into the challenges faced by primary schools and supported a smoother transition. In a DEIS school, a Transfer Day organised by the local GAA brought together multiple schools, fostering connections within the community. In a Gaeltacht area, Gaelscoil schools collaborated frequently due to shared linguistic and community ties.

Overview of Communication between primary and post-primary schools		
Team visits feeder schools Resource Dept (including Home School Liaison)	All	12
Information evening/open night pre-September	All	12
PP Team talks to 6 th class pupils	Loughlin Slane Navan Trim	4
Agreed dates for assessments among PP schools in a locality	Tramore , Killarney Kells	3
Visits to Primary schools an exercise in recruitment	Tramore, Kells Navan	3
Combined events / Community based	Limerick, Tara, O'Loughlin	3
Invitations from PP to go to P	Tramore, Kells	2
Dedicated Home school Liaison/ school completion personnel	Tara Slane, (also mentioned by Martins, Greene)	2
No visits to primary schools	Kells, Tramore	2
Rotation of open days	Tramore	1

Table 5.5 Overview of communication between primary and post-primary schools.

Summary

The findings strongly emphasise that teachers possess minimal to no knowledge about their students, except for those in managerial roles or with specific responsibilities within the school. Despite the Education Passport providing certain information, informal sources of information are favoured for various reasons. While all relevant information related to AEN is shared with subject teachers, there exists a notable inconsistency in sharing students' performance data and results with subject teachers.

5.3.2 Bridge 2: Social & emotional

As described earlier in this Chapter, this Bridge refers to the social and emotional supports to aid transition of students. Overall, the participants were very positive about the structures and processes around supporting students physical, social and emotional needs during transition. Costello, for example, referenced the growing emphasis on addressing not only special educational needs but also emotional and behavioural challenges among students. This sentiment was echoed by participants throughout the study, indicating an increased awareness of students' social, emotional, and educational needs. Also, as evident in the findings of Bridge 1, there is active sharing of relevant additional needs' information with teachers to support students' wellbeing during transition and to help them develop their abilities to cope socially and emotionally.

The findings of this bridge are discussed under the following areas: induction initiatives, mentoring support systems, and supports for teaching, learning and assessment.

Induction & settling-in initiatives

All participants referenced induction activities, which varied in duration and content, ranging from two days to one week. First-year students were often introduced gradually

to the school. For those with AEN, individual orientation times were arranged. For other first years, there was a reduced timetable in the first two weeks. Additional measures in the first few weeks included early dismissals for lunch breaks to manage overwhelming numbers, and relaxed rules for forgotten items. Some schools gave each student their individual printed timetable; others staggered locker access, allowing students to keep their books in their base class initially. These arrangements were typically informal, shared during staff meetings, with one exception where it was formalised in school policies.

While the data showed little distinction in induction and support programmes across school types, DEIS schools emphasised supports more prominently. Private schools offered longer induction periods (up to one week), potentially due to a value-driven approach. ETBs, voluntary post-primary schools, and community schools had shorter programmes. Although sports activities were common, only one participant mentioned teacher involvement in these activities.

Slaney in Section 1 mentioned their growing affinity with their school before enrolment. The schools themselves also provide opportunities for students to strengthen their identification with the school. One management participant – Killarney described, how as part of their three-phase induction, ‘goodie’ packs were given to each student in June with water bottles, pens, keyrings etc. with school crests to deliberately encourage bonding. No other participant mentioned such deliberate initiatives, although one mentioned individually named timetables for their students (Kells), and most mentioned journals with school crests that were handed on in September. References were also made to a number of more formal induction programmes such as the *Meitheal* Programme,

School Completion Programme, Big Brother Big Sister Programme, as well as general transition activities.

Mentor systems and supports

As per student contributions, mentor systems in various forms were referred to by all participants with two examples of note. In one DEIS school, teachers were allocated three to four students which they casually checked in on during the year (Martins). A First year/6th class buddy system was referred to by Hegarty in an Educate Together School. Tutor systems were reported by all, yet the organisation of these varied - 10 minutes daily or 1 hour weekly. Year Heads and Guidance counsellors were also available, and in one private school, a counsellor was assigned for each year group (Kiernan). Both student mentor and tutor class time were noted as particularly useful from teachers' and management's perspectives, with one participant seeing the tutor system as similar to students having one teacher in primary on a daily basis. However, this contrasts with the reality of interaction between mentors and First years (especially for boys) as described by the students in section 1.

One Irish-medium school implemented an interim report at the end of September to update parents on their child's social, emotional, and linguistic integration into the school. According to the participant, academic progression was not the reason behind these interim reports. Instead, this report mirrored primary school reports, reflecting the school's commitment to holistic transition support. Other initiatives and supports referred to during the interviews included assessment adjustments for first-year students, such as no-homework policies initially, no grades for Christmas exams, and a no-fail policy for the first year.

While most management and teacher participants agreed that students are well supported, a subset of participants comprising both management and subject teachers (5) raised concerns about the potential repercussions on the core teaching and learning experience of the increased focus on social and emotional aspects. It is interesting to note that some participants, such as Peters, Martins, and Geoghegan, expressed concerns about the allocation of significant time to addressing student wellbeing, which could lead to a reduction in contact teaching hours for academic subjects. Martins and Geoghegan commented on the challenge of balancing the importance of wellbeing with the practical demands of getting through a course within the available time.

For other participants like Adare and Finn, there was a perception that the emphasis on wellbeing has, to some extent, overshadowed the primary mission of teaching and learning. Finn noted that the prioritisation of activities like organising sports events over focusing on effective teaching methods. Adare stated that while students' comfort and wellbeing is crucial, there needs to be a balance to ensure that educational achievements are also a central focus. In contrast, Slane emphasised that the attention is appropriately directed towards students who require additional support. Overall, these concerns reflect the complex interplay between promoting wellbeing and maintaining a strong focus on effective teaching and learning within the educational context.

Summary

Overall, the physical, social, and emotional needs of the students is seen very positively by all participants with evidence of active initiatives in place in schools to enable a smoother transition for students. In fact, there is a suggestion, albeit by a minority (5/30) that there is too much emphasis on wellbeing at times.

5.3.3 Bridge 3: Curriculum

As described in Chapter 2, Bridge 2 focusses on knowledge of and continuity in curricula between primary and post-primary. This section explores what teachers and management do to bridge this gap for students. To offer this support, post-primary teachers need an awareness of what students have covered in their primary curriculum (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.7). As we have also seen, teachers' professional knowledge is influenced by many factors (Chapter 2, Section 4) and the interview questions in Phase 2 sought information about this. This section, therefore, explores these participants' view of continuity, their knowledge of the primary curriculum and the sources of this knowledge.

Teachers' views of curriculum continuity

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2, Section 3) curriculum continuity in the classroom is an important aspect of smooth transitions for students (Evangelou et al., 2008) and discontinuity can contribute to lower academic performance and contribute to lower levels of wellbeing. The consensus among participants is that while it is not necessary for students to possess advanced knowledge, having a basic understanding of subject-related concepts, language, and methods. For example, Maths teachers, emphasise the importance of students possessing foundational knowledge, with O'Loughlin particularly stressing mastery of times tables, while Irish teachers emphasise comprehension of language concepts over rote-learned lists of vocabulary (O'Reilly, Costello, Cosgrove, Peters). Geoghegan, a Science teacher, shares similar views, highlighting the value of students grasping basic scientific language. In total contrast, however, Flynn sees the Geography curriculum in primary as totally inconsequential, preferring to see it as a totally new subject.

From the interviews, it seems that the teacher and student participants have very different ideas of what continuity means. For teachers it is high-level subject concepts, yet for the students it is more related to subject topics. While both student participants and teachers viewed History as positive in terms of continuity, and Geography as different, opinions of teachers and students on other subjects did not align. Maths and Science teachers experienced some positive crossover in curriculum. For students these were most different. These were also the subjects, however, where students' perceived lack of scientific and mathematical literacy was noted by teachers. In contrast, the interviews indicate that English had a relatively higher level of continuity. English subject teachers did not report dependency on individual primary teachers for curriculum alignment. However, some English teachers did note overlaps in texts studied and shifts in focus, such as a transition away from cursive writing and creative writing echoing similar points raised by students.

While there was consensus that certain subjects experienced more discontinuity than others, they agreed that influence of individual primary teachers played an important role. Factors such as a subject's position in the curriculum hierarchy, the passion, bias, and subject knowledge of 6th class teachers, and subject specialisation were highlighted as contributing factors to the variation in curriculum transition. This phenomenon was more prevalent in non-core subjects like Art, Music, Business, and Geography.

Source of knowledge about primary curriculum

The sources of knowledge mentioned by participants are varied. The top sources referenced by both teachers and management are family, younger siblings and friends; being parents themselves; personal research; and their own experiences in primary school. (See Appendix 5.13 for an overview of sources).

While four of 12 management participants highlighted the importance of personal research as a source, only one teacher (1/18) mentioned that teachers' knowledge might be influenced by their own postgraduate studies. Very few mentioned CPD as a source of knowledge. Only one teacher mentioned the inclusion of the topic within initial teacher education programme, and this was due to a project topic they had chosen (Costello). One (McAteer), mentioned having seen the primary textbooks in their post-primary schools, but they too had an inherent interest in the area as they had participated in the research years earlier.

However, a slight disparity exists between the opinions of management and teacher participants concerning the role of CPD, school initiatives, and knowledge acquisition. While CPD is mentioned only once by a teacher participant, specifically in relation to a single occasion when the primary school Science curriculum was discussed during a cluster day, four of 12 of the management participants view CPD as an important source of knowledge for teachers particularly in relation to mathematics. For instance, Santry and Limerick referred to attending CPD sessions that focussed on the primary school Maths curriculum.

Navan stressed the role of subject-specific associations in knowledge enhancement, a perspective not mentioned by teacher participants. Teacher participants tended to place more emphasis on their own experiences in primary school. Kells noted, however, that teachers' familiarity with the primary school curriculum depends on their individual interest in seeking out this information. Kells stated that about 70% of their staff might lack awareness of the primary school curriculum, although around 30% of teachers, mainly those specialising in subjects like Maths, English, and learning support, demonstrate familiarity due to the necessity of their roles.

Responses indicate that although participants recognise the importance of knowing about primary education, it is not a top priority for them. Some expressed a general desire for more engagement with the curriculum, while others felt they should professionally know more about primary schools. Many admitted to their limited knowledge and not actively seeking information. Departmental discussions on this topic were rare, with most participants citing time constraints as a factor.

Sharing of expertise between primary and post-primary teachers

Communication and collaboration between primary and post-primary teachers on curriculum knowledge were not common among the participants. Out of 30 participants, only six (four teachers and two in management) mentioned instances of some collaboration on curriculum matters. For example, Peters mentioned occasional collaboration for modern foreign language instruction, but it was more like recruitment efforts. O'Reilly recounted post-primary teachers being invited to a primary school to observe students' and discuss curriculum alignment, but primary teachers felt they had already covered all relevant material when the topic was broached. Kearney was aware of an initiative to facilitate communication but could not participate due to their workload. Byrne speculated that communication might be more prevalent in regions with clusters of schools, but this was uncertain.

Student participants on shared campuses might have expected collaboration, but evidence suggests otherwise. Among the teacher and management participants, only five out of thirty had experience with schools on the same campus (O'Reilly, Peters, Flynn, Kells, Killarney), and none mentioned significant formal sharing of knowledge or expertise. There was more sharing of facilities than shared expertise, and reported interactions were often event-oriented, like Christmas fairs or concerts, rather than focussed on teaching

and learning. Peters, who had experience with a private school on the same campus, noted that while there was collaboration for facilities, teachers rarely interacted across the levels. O'Reilly expressed hope for more collaboration as this was an area that their principal had highlighted for improvement.

Examples of transition focussed initiatives

Cross-teaching experiences between separately located primary and post-primary schools were limited, with only a few instances of subject-specific or teaching initiatives involving both levels. A minority of participants had encountered such experiences, with Flynn mentioning exposure to them in the UK system. Four participants mentioned subject-specific cross-teaching, often related to Science or languages. For instance, Kells and Greene described Science department initiatives where 6th class students visited the post-primary school for a Science Day, with one in a DEIS school.

DEIS schools were exceptions to this trend. Tara, Slane, Martins, and Greene highlighted school completion programmes that facilitated continuity and knowledge sharing for students, contributing to both social and emotional continuity and information exchange about students' needs and progress. Four initiatives for transferring expertise between primary and post-primary schools were described. The first two came from subject-specific departments within post-primary schools, while the other two had a community-based approach. Although developed independently, both approaches shared common methods.

Subject-specific initiatives

In the Maths departments of the schools of Slane and Blackrock, teachers drew on primary school textbooks and curriculum to craft a targeted approach. Both were independent but had similar approaches. They had meetings with local primary school 6th class teachers,

collated the textbooks and drafted and administered tests based on the primary curriculum's 5th and 6th class content. This facilitated identification of student strengths and needs, aiding teachers in constructing a curriculum bridge between primary and post-primary levels. Notably, the emphasis was on bridging gaps and aligning students' knowledge with post-primary expectations.

Whole-school community initiative

Two other initiatives took a whole-school community approach. O'Dea's and Trim's schools initiated comprehensive endeavours to foster expertise transfer. Again, both were independent, but shared a similar approach to collating and using information. O'Dea's school adopted an evidence-based approach involving surveys, observations, and questionnaires. By surveying teachers, the school identified areas of interest for expertise transfer. Teachers from the post-primary school visited primary schools to observe classroom dynamics and teaching methodologies. Student-appropriate questionnaires were designed, incorporating literacy, numeracy, and learning style assessments, and administered before the commencement of the school year. Additionally, students were asked to create a personal profile called 'All about me' which included individualised information to be shared with tutors. Another significant component of this initiative involved students selecting samples of their work from 6th class, showcasing their abilities in subjects such as English and Irish. This multifaceted approach not only informed post-primary teachers but also enriched students' transition experiences.

The agency of the 6th class teacher and the structure of the 6th class year itself emerged as a significant factor in discussions about curriculum continuity and the variation in first-year students' knowledge. This was further accentuated by various elements like Drumcondra assessments, and the preparation for confirmation, which some participants

indicated could divert attention away from the regular curriculum and result in a rushed completion of textbooks by the end of the academic year (O'Loughlin, Killarney, and Kells). In Kells' perspective, the 6th class teachers might feel compelled to tailor their subject content based on what they anticipate will be assessed in post-primary school, primarily due to entrance assessments (Kells).

Summary

The discourse surrounding curriculum continuity reflects a predominantly negative perspective. Collaboration between primary and post-primary schools, as well as between teachers, is limited, leading to a lack of systematic knowledge exchange. The understanding of curriculum continuity is often informal and inconsistent, with management assuming that CPD and subject-specific groups address transition challenges. While some subjects exhibit stronger curriculum continuity than suggested by student input in the exploratory interviews, students' engagement, interest, and knowledge are still influenced by their 6th class experiences in the teachers' opinions. However, the exploratory interviews suggest that teachers and students see this continuity in different ways. Responsibility for transition is seen as shared among specific stakeholders.

5.3.4 Bridge 4: Pedagogy

As described in Chapter 2, Section 1, this bridge refers to the continuity or discontinuity in teaching methods and assessment practices in the classroom. Participants discussed their knowledge of teaching, learning and assessment methods in primary and post-primary, where they got this knowledge and similarities and /or differences in teaching between the two levels.

Participants appear to have limited familiarity with teaching practices at the primary level, relying on their own children's experiences when relevant. There was a general consensus that Junior Cycle reform had reduced the gap in teaching practices between primary and post-primary schools, except among Irish language teachers who noted discrepancies in methodologies, particularly in Irish language instruction.

Participants agreed that students were well-acquainted with group work, active learning methodologies, and project-based learning. However, differences emerged in assessment practices. Students were already familiar with KWL charts¹⁹, regular short-term tests, daily homework corrections and self-correction tasks. Peer assessment was relatively new to them, a point also mentioned by student participants. Students' familiarity with rote-learning, weekly tests, and repetition as teaching methods were less useful for them, as these practices were not frequently used in post-primary schools. (See Appendix 5.14 for a summary of teachers' contributions on pedagogy.)

For teachers, it was important to create an inclusive classroom environment with First years. They referenced different pedagogical practices. For instance, a language teacher in a diverse school focussed on integrating linguistic differences within the curriculum to celebrate students' cultural backgrounds (O'Dea). O'Reilly, from an educate together school, highlighted the use of shared platform notes in the classroom for restorative practices. These notes guide teachers on how to support individual students, promoting a positive classroom environment that fosters trust and cooperation.

¹⁹ KWL chart, is a graphical organiser designed to help in learning. The letters KWL are an acronym, for what students, in the course of a lesson, already know, want to know, and ultimately, learn.

Pedagogy continuity

While most participants acknowledged some collaboration among post-primary teachers of First year students on topics that should be taught, only a few mentioned shared subject-specific teaching approaches. For instance, teachers of Irish (Costello, O'Reilly, Peters, McAteer, etc.) often use an agreed topic-led approach. In contrast, Maths teachers tended to emphasise continuity in both methods and content. Yet this was in-school collaboration and subject specific and did not include 6th class teachers. However, knowledge of teaching methods in primary was not strong among participants.

Generally, teachers did not seem to really know what is going on at primary and they were not consistent in their approach across classes. Instead, they tailored their teaching according to the group in front of them. Several participants mentioned that their lack of familiarity with the primary curriculum plays a role in adopting this approach. Several participants mentioned drawing on what they might know of the feeder primary schools or gathering information from the students themselves. For others, primary school methods were not important as the subject was entirely new for the students. An exception to this trend is observed among language teachers. Since languages are not consistently taught in primary schools, these teachers often have no choice but to begin from the beginning. Even in cases where primary language initiatives exist (as mentioned by Greene), language teachers may still approach their subjects as if students have had no prior exposure. Interestingly, language teachers note that their teaching methods often align closely with primary school methodologies.

However, a few language teachers do consciously find out from first year students what they know or prefer (O'Loughlin and Geoghegan). This understanding guides their initial

activities and the level of language they use in teaching. Martins employs activity sheets to gather information about students' learning preferences in the initial classes.

However, the majority of participants adopt as they themselves describe a 'start from scratch', 'tabla rasa' or 'jazz-hands' approach' (i.e. – I don't want to know what they did or what they know as described by Flynn) in the first few weeks of post-primary education. This approach involves assuming minimal prior knowledge and aiming for a level playing field among students. It provides all students with an equal starting point (Finn) and avoids potential confusion about different levels of knowledge. Additionally, some teachers find it simpler to start anew rather than trying to assess each student's prior knowledge (Flynn).

Shift in teaching & learning expectations

The impact of pedagogical practices was noted particularly by most Maths and Irish teachers. In their interviews they spoke about a shift in the focus on learning at post-primary, which was important to bridge. The change in emphasis from outcome to process in Maths in particular was considered a big change from primary to post-primary. A change in students' attitude toward calculator use was observed, with Finn mentioning the importance of students' viewing calculator usage as a tool rather than as cheating. Similar sentiments were stated in the student interviews earlier in the Chapter.

Irish language teachers also expressed a particular challenge in the shift in focus from oral to written skills. Specifically, they express the belief that the emphasis on writing in the JC assessment has impacted students' learning experiences. Peters, O'Reilly, and others mentioned that this shift had implications for student motivation and performance. The issue here is not the curriculum as that lays equal emphasis on both skills, but on assessment where oral skills are not assessed.

Summary

Overall, the discourse by participants on pedagogy is positive in terms of continuity of teaching methods with participants suggesting that gap between primary and post-primary has closed with the introduction of the new Junior Cycle. However, knowledge of teaching methods in primary school is not strong. Pedagogical approaches of post-primary teachers come down to the individual, underpinning teacher agency. Very few participants describe more formal subject departmental approaches.

5.3.5 Bridge 5: Managing learning

As described in the literature review (Chapter 2, Section 1) the Managing Learning bridge offers insights into supporting students' development of essential skills appropriate to their new learning environment, including independent learning, organisational skills and metacognitive skills, i.e., knowing how to learn. Questions asked explored teachers' perceptions of whether students were prepared for the learning. Like the student participants, many included references to organisational preparation for classes and this is included here. These findings describe teachers' perceptions of skills development and the role of the teacher as support and as an obstacle to skills development. The data collated in Table 5.6 offer an overview of participants' perceptions of students' skills according to each JC skill and summarises the comments made by participants during the interview on student skills as they enter First year.

Overview of Key Skills of Junior Cycle							
Being Literate	Being numerate	Managing Myself	Staying well	Communicating with others	Being Creative	Working with others	Managing information and thinking
Yes	yes	Not really	Yes, high awareness	Yes	Not all Individual dependent	Yes	Not really
Except Digital literacy	Except Digital literacy	Except Digitally. Hampered by parents		Ex. Digital communication	Digital creativity student dependent	Except Digital communicating	Except Digital knowledge

Table 5.6 Overview of participants' perceptions of students and JC Key Skills.

When discussing students' existing proficiency in JC key skills upon entering 1st year, the majority of teachers observed that students were least proficient in managing themselves and managing information. Many participants highlighted study skills and organisation as crucial areas where incoming students needed improvement, with some schools even offering study skills courses to address these needs.

While primary schools made some efforts to prepare students for the demands of post-primary education, the effectiveness varied widely. Some participants cited examples such as practicing with shoeboxes as lockers, assigning homework for future completion rather than the next day, introducing real lockers, and gradually increasing the amount and complexity of homework. However, most agreed that these practices were often dependent on individual primary teachers and varied from school to school. Furthermore, their effectiveness was influenced by the individual needs of students.

Participants provided examples of how schools were addressing the lack of basic digital skills among incoming post-primary students. They noted that tasks such as working with word documents, uploading files, and using digital tools were often underdeveloped in

students. This gap in digital literacy was especially noticeable in schools that use iPads instead of physical books.

The role of the teacher in the development of skills was highlighted by a number of participants. Dunphy's comment particularly highlighted the crucial role of teachers in fostering students' skills. They noted that students were well-equipped with organisational and management skills due to their primary classroom environment, where they had a central teacher as a focal leader. However, when students transitioned to post-primary school and encountered multiple subject teachers, the challenge emerged. The skills were there, but the application in the new environment was lacking. Dunphy's viewpoint reflects the idea that students possess essential skills, such as organisation and note-taking, but the lack of consistent teaching approaches across subject areas in post-primary school can hinder their ability to effectively apply these skills. This inconsistency can lead to students struggling or falling through the cracks. This observation underscores the importance of not only teaching specific skills but also of fostering a coherent skills development approach across different subjects and teachers to support students during their transition to post-primary education (as mentioned earlier in this Section).

Summary

Similar to that of students' contributions, discourse in relation to this bridge was mixed. While they acknowledge the organisational preparation by their 6th class teachers, deficits in skills such as study skills and digital skills were identified that hampered learning. However, participants referred to school initiatives aimed at developing these deficits.

5.3.6 Building bridges

In general, the interviews with teachers and management suggest that the area of transition requires significant time, effort, and energy to bring about meaningful change. They emphasise that transition should be a two-way process. Additionally, several themes emerged during the interviews that are relevant to the transition process. These include considerations related to the age and experience of teachers (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.5), a recurring use of the language of “assumptions and expectations” with predominantly negative connotations (related to issues of discourse discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2), and concerns related to trust, responsibility and management among stakeholders involved in the transition process (Chapter 2, Section 2.5.4).

Impact of age and stage of the teacher

Among the 30 participants, seven specifically mentioned the age and career stage of teachers in relation to their pedagogical practices and general approaches to First-year students (namely Cosgrove, Flynn, Finn, Hegarty, Dunphy, Killarney, and O’Loughlin). These participants drew from personal and professional experiences that had influenced their expectations, teaching methods, and attitudes toward First-year students. For instance, Hegarty and Flynn noted that younger teachers often prioritise their appearance and subject matter over the students themselves. In contrast, Finn and Dunphy cited their own experiences as parents, which made them more empathetic and understanding toward First-year students. This shift in perspective underscores the importance of educators recognising the developmental stage and emotional needs of these new students, who may be perceived as “tiny little babies” (Finn) rather than fully mature teenagers.

Frequency of assumptions & expectations

The literature review (Section 2.2) highlights the predominance of negative discourse in relation to transition. The findings indicate that the words ‘expect/expectations assume/presume’ are frequently used in the discussions about the transition between primary and post-primary education. These terms appear a total of 72 times across 22 interviews (See Table 5.7).

Frequency breakdown of ‘expect/expectations/ assume/presume’ in TS/MS interviews						
	Bridge 1	Bridge 2	Bridge 3	Bridge 4	Bridge 5	OTHER
Expect	3	3	12	26	19	4
Assume	3	1	3	9	1	CPD 3

Table 5.7 Frequency breakdown of assumptions & expectations.

A frequency analysis of these terms in the context of different bridges reveals interesting patterns. The highest frequency of usage is seen in Bridges 4, 5 and 3 respectively. In Bridge 3 (curriculum), the references mainly pertain to the expectation of cross-curricular knowledge between primary and post-primary education, as well as the importance of effective communication between educators from both levels to understand each other’s expectations regarding this knowledge. In Bridge 4 (pedagogy), the discussions around expectations often involve the impact that low expectations of prior knowledge has on teaching approaches. Bridge 5 (Managing Learning) is particularly focussed on expectations relating to student skills, behaviour, and organisation. Many participants discuss how certain skills are expected of students when they enter post-primary school, and they often assume that students possess these skills (despite them requiring practice and development). This weight of these expectations serves to expose the vulnerable position of learners when they enter post-primary school.

The cultural and physical separation between primary and post-primary schools (even when they are collocated) plays a part in expectations from post-primary teachers. This was a recurrent theme in interviews. About half of the participants drew attention to the distinctiveness between the primary and post-primary sectors, often using phrases like ‘separate tribes,’ ‘living on different islands,’ or ‘territorial about our sector’ or ‘left to pick up the pieces’ reflecting a perceived lack of understanding and trust between educators in these two sectors. There seems to be a perception among some post-primary educators that primary teachers might not fully understand the demands and expectations of post-primary education. Cosgrove and Lee both suggest that this could be due to limited exposure and understanding of each other’s teaching environments – the lack of a shared perspective leads to misconceptions and misinformation being circulated, sometimes through hearsay or social media. While participants reiterated a ‘no-offence meant’ attitude to their primary colleagues or to those in charge, the data implies certain issues that need further exploration.

Responsibility, management and leadership

The responsibility for ensuring a smooth transition between primary and post-primary education is a topic that garners diverse opinions. Among management responses, responsibility is evenly distributed, with three mentioning “everyone and no one.” Among teachers, a shared responsibility is preferred, while a balanced view is offered on the role of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). While only one teacher explicitly assigns responsibility to 6th class teachers in primary schools, the majority suggest that it is a shared responsibility among teachers across both levels of education.

The issue of responsibility and oversight of teaching within schools was raised as a concern by a number of teachers. Participants, including Kearney, Finn, Costello, and Santry, express the view that teaching methodologies and pedagogical approaches may not receive sufficient attention. Finn suggests that management may not always focus on what teachers are teaching, indicating a potential gap in oversight. Costello highlights the need for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) but notes that responsibility for addressing transition-related issues often falls on individual teachers, and these concerns are typically embedded within broader educational priorities such as differentiation and mental health support. Hegarty and Adare, however, raised a concern that valuable CPD research conducted by teachers in post-graduate courses on the topic of transition is not being fully recognised by those in positions of authority. The participants perceive that the topic might be treated more as a checkbox exercise rather than a substantial area for improvement and growth.

In practical terms, time and workload are recurrent pressures to addressing the topic of transition in schools. Such pressures effect curriculum coverage, professional collaboration between primary and post-primary teachers, and effective communication between schools and their staff. The shortage of time is frequently accompanied by a negative tone in the interviews underscoring its impact. The rising bureaucratic demands on educators mentioned by several management participants further compound the time-related struggles.

Role of ITE

Participants have diverse perspectives on the role of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes in addressing primary to post-primary transition. While some acknowledge ITE's importance, most believe that ITE alone cannot fully address the challenges. Factors such as the structure of ITE programmes, the inexperience of PME teachers, and the limited authority of PME students in schools contribute to this view. Participants suggest that transition-related topics might be more effectively addressed at different career stages, such as when teachers are NQTs or engaging in Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Some propose focusing on Year 2 of ITE, as teachers would have overcome initial classroom challenges by then. Additionally, certain participants (Adare and Hegarty) raise concerns that policy makers make limited use of research findings on transition by teachers.

Summary

This section on building bridges explored emergent themes. The data implied that the age and career stage of teachers can influence a teacher's pedagogical practices and attitudes towards First-year students. It highlighted certain levels of expectation and assumption by teachers of students' knowledge and revealed an uncertainty about who is responsible for transition. While the role of ITE was seen as important, participants suggested that professional development at other career stages was even more important.

5.4 Comparative summary Phase 2

The exploratory interviews have provided valuable insights into transition from both the student and teacher/management perspectives. While there are certain similarities between the views of students and that of teachers and management, there are also certain differences. These are collated in Appendix 5.16 and summarised below.

Bridge 1: Administrative

In summary, teachers and management participants convey a predominantly negative attitude towards the Education Passport (EP), with little understanding or trust in its effectiveness. They perceive interviews and assessments as irregular and sometimes burdensome, with inconsistent sharing of information among teachers. Their discourse can be viewed as mostly negative towards communication aspects of the EP and transition in general. This contrasts with the students who discuss transition with a generally positive attitude, but there is a sense that they believe that teachers do not know them or have read the information in their Education Passport.

Bridge 2: Social & emotional

The student participants' data depict a positive atmosphere within educational settings. Student participants express a positive attitude and discourse, particularly focusing on varied initiatives, with an emphasis on sport-related activities during induction. These activities are time-specific, often linked to the initial days of the term, suggesting an optimal settling period within Term 1. In contrast, teacher and management participants also convey a positive attitude towards supports, albeit with a nuanced concern about potential overemphasis on wellbeing. They mention a variety of initiatives implemented within schools, although they do not specify a particular focus. Additionally, they note that these initiatives primarily occur within Term 1. Overall, both student and

teacher/management participants indicate a proactive approach to supporting students, though they differ slightly in their specific emphases and concerns.

Bridge 3: Curriculum continuity

The student participants' data reveal a predominantly negative attitude and discourse within educational settings, particularly highlighting a perceived lack of content continuity in certain subjects, notably Geography and Science. This discontinuity is linked to their perceived lack of engagement with these subjects in primary school, with subject preferences changing from primary to post-primary education. Notably, the student participants imply a lack of knowledge by teachers at both levels regarding each other's curricular content and suggest a need for primary teachers to be more acquainted with post-primary curricula to adequately prepare students. In contrast, teacher and management participants' data reflect a mixed attitude and discourse within educational settings, with varying perceptions of continuity across subjects. It suggests discrepancies between how teachers and students perceive continuity, indicating potential differences in understanding and implementation. Observations reveal that teachers have limited knowledge of primary curriculum, and examples of good practice in curriculum bridging are often specific to individual schools or communities. Additionally, the data suggest that there appears to be limited to no communication with primary schools, and highlight a potential gap in information sharing and collaboration between educational levels.

Bridge 4: Pedagogy

The student participants' data present a mixed attitude and discourse within educational settings, noting both similarities and differences in pedagogical approaches between primary and post-primary education. While there are similarities such as the use of group work, listening, and note-taking, differences are noticed by students in the use of the target

language (Irish) and teaching methods in subjects like Maths. Prior learning is minimally referenced, and expectations of knowledge and pace of teaching vary widely among teachers. According to students, teaching approaches also differ, with some teachers perceived as more knowledgeable than others, and revision or repetition is mostly viewed as beneficial. Assessment practices receive a negative response, particularly regarding different formats and styles, such as single end-of-term exams, while homework practices vary depending on the teacher, with feedback being more direct in some cases.

In contrast, teacher and management participants' data reflect a positive attitude and discourse within educational settings, particularly noting some improvements in pedagogical practices with the introduction of the new Junior Cycle. However, sources of knowledge are described as ad hoc, and teachers' approaches vary depending on individual preferences. Most teachers approach teaching First years with a fresh start, and there is minimal use of subject departmental approaches in pedagogical practices. Assessment practices reveal discrepancies, with some primary methods like rote-learning and weekly tests not used sufficiently in post-primary education. Overall, the student participants' data highlight a mixed experience with various pedagogical approaches and assessment practices in post-primary education, while teacher and management participants perceive positive changes with the introduction of the new Junior Cycle but note ongoing variations in pedagogical approaches and assessment practices.

Bridge 5: Managing learning

The student participants' data reflect a mixed attitude and discourse regarding Managing learning with varying levels of skills and awareness of learning gaps. While some students recognise the strong organisational preparation by their 6th class teachers, others struggle with organisational and digital skills, impacting their learning. In contrast, teacher and

management participants note similar mixed attitudes, with acknowledgment of students' varying skills and deficits in organisational and digital skills, despite recognising the role of 6th class teachers in providing preparation. Overall, both groups highlight the importance of addressing skill gaps to enhance students' learning experiences.

Potential emergent themes

Emergent themes of Phase 2 student and teacher/management interviews include

- Age and stage of teacher impacts how they interact
- An emphasis on expecting and assuming knowledge
- Role of teacher both in 6th class and in first year play important roles
- Trust issues.

5.5 Exploratory sequential design: Implications for QUANT

As discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.4, exploratory interviews serve as a preliminary step to gain insights into a topic and support the subsequent QUANT phase of data collection. In this study, Phase 2 interviews have provided valuable insights into the transition experience from the perspectives of students, management, and teachers. Table 5.7 summarises the perspectives of the teachers and the students in the interview data across the Five bridges of Transfer.

The interviews raised a range of questions that needed further exploration in the survey component. The survey, will therefore, incorporate emergent themes from Phase 2 and use participant-specific language, such as 'separate tribes' and 'parallel pathways' where applicable. It will also explore recurring issues of time and workload as common barriers to addressing transition, along with other potential obstacles identified in the survey.

In summary:

- Teachers differed in how they addressed issues of transition according to their age, gender, role in the school and subject area etc. Therefore, a comprehensive profile section will be included in the survey.
- Specific survey questions will be designed to inquire about teachers' status and their contact with first-year students.
- The survey will address administrative procedures as there was inconsistency around the knowledge teachers would like to possess about incoming students, access to relevant information, and the use of existing administrative measures.
- The survey will assess differences in EP knowledge according to school status.
- Questions will assess consistency and variety of induction activities and mentor support systems, as well as the concern that there might be an excessive focus on student wellbeing.
- There is a disparity between what subjects students and teachers perceive as having good continuity between primary and post-primary. The survey will gather more information on curriculum and pedagogy continuity and subjects.
- Questions will establish sources of teachers' knowledge about transition and primary school.
- The survey will gauge the impact of Junior Cycle reform on perceptions of pedagogy and curriculum continuity.
- The survey will address the variety and consistency of learning-to-learn supports and students' skills.

- Questions will get greater clarity on the concept of transition itself. There seems to be differing interpretations among participants. Students view transition as a significant event where they leave primary school behind, while some perceive transition as an ongoing process and others as a fresh start or rite of passage.

Overall, the exploratory interviews raised several questions that warrant further investigation. The Phase 3 national survey aims to provide a broader understanding of these issues across various subjects and teachers.

5.6 Section 3: Quantitative findings

This section presents the findings of the quantitative survey (n=475). The survey was developed using the foundations of the exploratory interviews from students and teachers in phase 2. The Section is presented according to the Five Bridges of Transfer. A profile of the sample is given in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.3.

Descriptive analysis has been employed for presenting the findings; however, due to the substantial volume of data and the constraints of the word count, only specific variables receive focus in this description. Qualtrics Stats-IQ and Crosstabs IQ were used for identifying associations between data-based variables such as DEIS status, age, teacher registration status, and gender. Furthermore, a substantial number of additional comments were submitted in the survey. The data from open-ended questions were thematically analysed using the *a priori* themes of the Five Bridges (Chapter 3, Section 3).

5.6.1 Pre-service and in-service presentation of findings

As previously stated, the survey was conducted with in-service and pre-service teachers. To ensure unbiased findings all data was analysed to ascertain any noticeable differences between responses given by pre-service and in-service teachers. Statistical tests (t-tests or chi-square tests as appropriate to the data type) were conducted to determine whether the responses from each group were statistically significantly different. (For clarity and reference, detailed data results for both pre-service and in-service teachers are provided in Appendix 5.0.) Where the responses for the two participant groups were statistically significantly different, this distinction is noted in the results below and highlighted in Green in Appendix 5.0. Conversely, where the results of the groups are not different, they are reported as one group within the text.

As regards in-service and pre-service teachers' awareness of pre-entrance instruments such as the EP, interviews, etc., as expected pre-service teachers had much less awareness of all of the instruments. In the case of in-service teachers, for all of the instruments, a substantial proportion of teachers (from 1 in 2 for interviews or the EP) were either unaware or unsure of the existence or content of the entrance instrument. Most teachers were aware of the use of entrance assessment but less than half acknowledged the use of the EP. This would suggest that in-house practices have a greater visibility for students in First year than the standardised protocol of the EP.

As regards knowledge of the primary school curriculum and assessment instruments, again as expected perhaps, there was a statistically significant difference between pre- and in service teachers with pre-service teachers reporting knowing much less about the primary context. This would very strongly suggest that post-primary ITE may be firmly siloed in its own context.

In general, the most significant variable observed was the age of the teacher except in relation to 'age and pedagogical approaches'. In this case, no statistical associations were identified. It is essential to note that both statistically significant and non-significant associations are described and presented in subsequent sections only when they are relevant. Additionally, not all cross-comparisons between variables are provided, given the volume of data, but important ones are provided.

5.6.2 Bridge 1: The Administrative bridge

As outlined earlier, this Bridge refers to the transfer of information between primary and post-primary schools at an official level. This section outlines the findings in relation to teachers' awareness and use of instruments that are associated with the transfer of information during transition.

Education Passport awareness

As regards knowledge of the Educational Passport, 44% of respondents (184/420) stated they had no knowledge of the EP while 18% (76/420) stated they were aware of it but did not use it. 38% (160/420) were definitely aware of the EP. Overall, there is a slightly higher general awareness of the EP than no awareness of it (238/422; 56%). There is no difference in the percentage of those in DEIS (56 of 128, 43.75%) and non-DEIS (127 of 291, 43.6%) schools who never heard of it²⁰.

An average of approximately 45% of respondents across all subject areas are unaware of the EP. These proportions are roughly similar across all subjects (Figure 5.4).

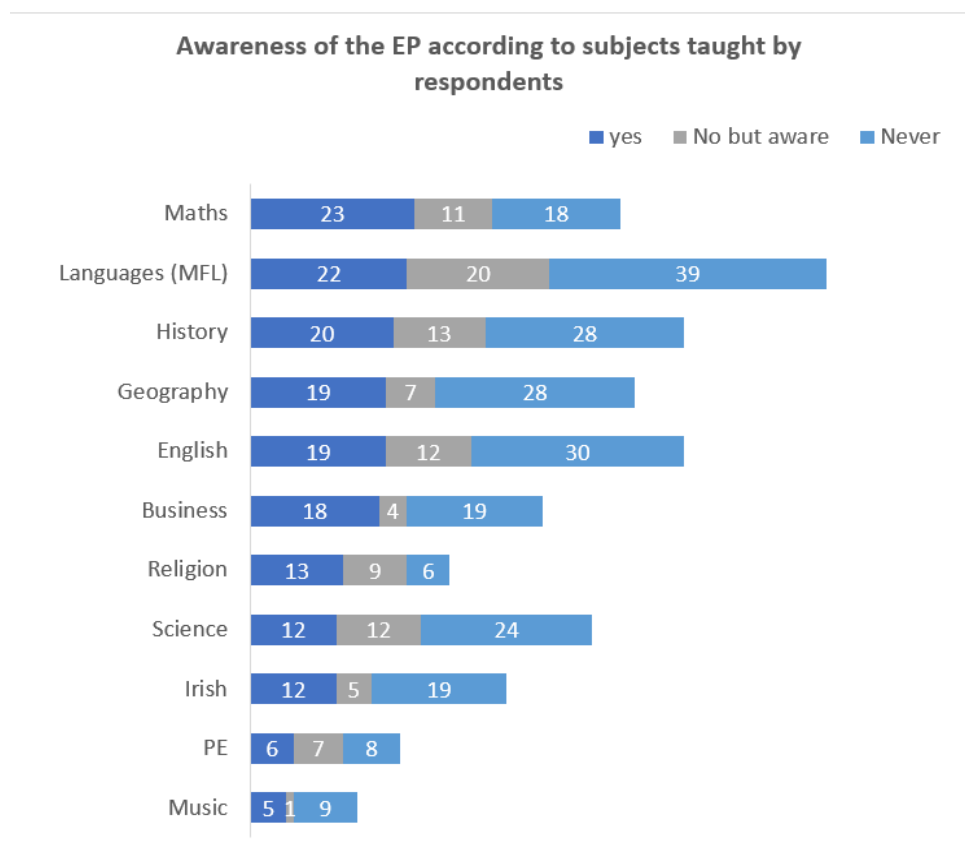


Figure 5.4 Awareness of EP according to subjects taught.

²⁰ No, but aware = 18.75% (DEIS) v 17.86% (Non-DEIS; Yes 37.5% (DEIS) v 38.5% (Non-DEIS)

Respondents and their level of awareness according to role

As might be expected following the qualitative data (Section 5.3.1), those in management or AEN roles are more likely to be aware of the EP. Chi-square tests for independence were conducted to assess the association between the role of the teacher and their knowledge of the EP. The association between these variables was significant, $X^2(2, N = 419) = 57.0933$. The result is significant at $p < .05$ indicating that there is a link between the role of the teacher within the school (Management, AEN or Year head/tutor) and their knowledge of the EP. As illustrated in Figure 5.5, there is a higher number of combined role-related positions who are aware of the EP, than there are subject teachers who do not hold such positions (91).

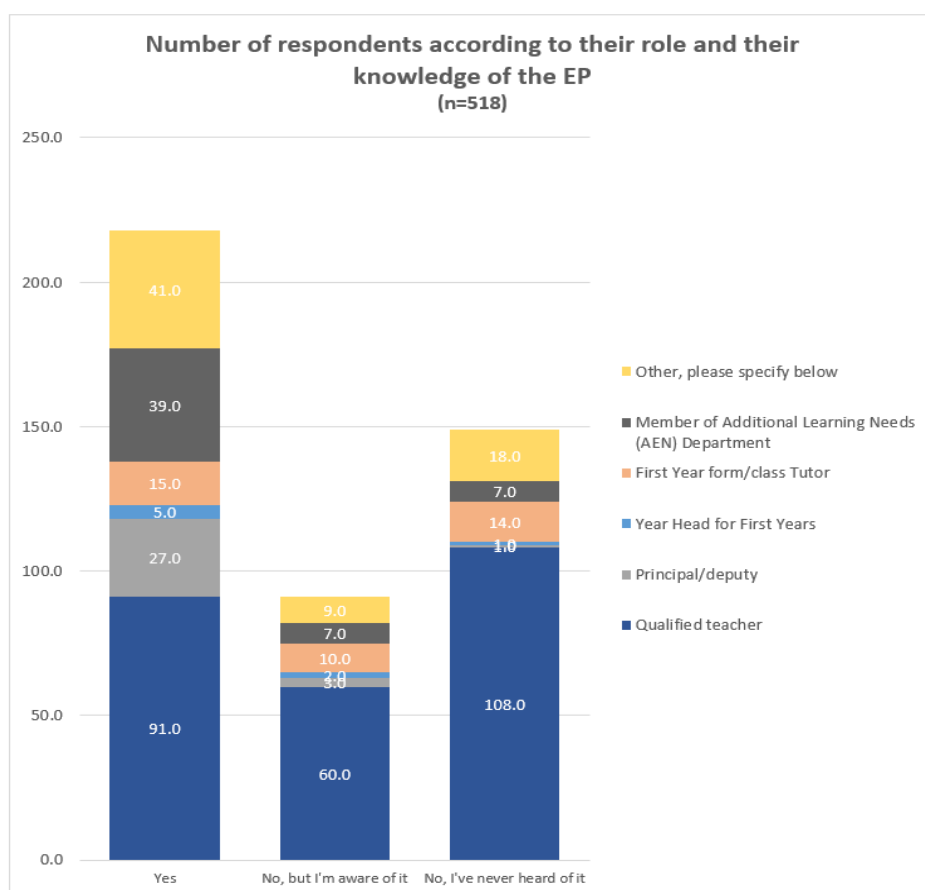


Figure 5.5 Overview of knowledge of EP and respondents' roles in schools.

Education Passport and usefulness

Respondents who indicated an awareness of the EP (162) rated its usefulness on a five-point Likert scale from extremely useful to not at all useful. 153 responses were recorded. 53 respondents found it very useful, 56 found it moderately useful and 21, extremely useful, indicating an overall positive disposition in relation to the usefulness of the EP. In addition, over 133 comments were registered, 85 of which were positive comments on the usefulness of the EP while 48 were negative comments.

Positive discourse

15 of 85 comments labelled the EP as ‘good’, while four comments emphasised its importance. Only 1 comment characterised it as an excellent resource. A number of positive comments employed qualifiers such as ‘some’ (11 times), ‘basic’ (mentioned 2 times), and ‘general’ (repeated four times) to describe their perspective. In terms of content, the positive feedback centred around several aspects:

- Additional background information: The EP was credited for providing supplementary background information in 10 instances.
- Insight into individual strengths: In five references, the EP was praised for offering insight into the strengths of individuals.
- Academic achievement: Six positive comments noted the EP’s ability to showcase academic achievements.

However, many of the comments, totalling 29, highlighted the EP’s primary use in identifying students with AEN, their requirements and the necessary support.

Negative discourse

Over 20 of the 48 negative comments highlighted the usefulness of the EP for students with AEN. However, in terms of content, the negative feedback centred around several aspects:

Basic-ness and vagueness: Negative feedback criticised the EP for being ‘very basic’, ‘very general’, ‘vague’, and ‘not in-depth’. Some negative comments pointed out dissatisfaction with ‘too vague answers from teachers’ and the ‘excessively positive’ tone of the EP.

Inaccuracy and outdated information: The EP’s information was considered to be ‘inaccurate’, ‘outdated’, and ‘not honest’.

Submission and timing issues: Negative responses pointed to problems with EPs not being ‘submitted’, ‘filled in accurately’, or displaying ‘discrepancies between schools’. They also mentioned that EPs often ‘came too late to have any relevance’.

Inadequate dissemination: The EP’s usage within schools was criticised for not being ‘disseminated, shared, available, or circulated’ effectively.

Limited teacher engagement: Negative comments noted that EPs were sometimes only available to specific staff (SEN department) and that many teachers did not engage with them, citing lack of usefulness.

Summary

Awareness of the EP is low among subject teachers and knowledge is associated with the respondents’ role in their school. While the benefits of the EP in identifying AEN is acknowledged, criticisms of its usefulness included its basic-ness, vagueness, inaccuracies, and outdated information. Some mentioned submission and timing issues, inadequate dissemination within schools, and limited teacher engagement.

Formal interviews

As regards interviews with incoming First year students in the target post-primary school, 409 responses were submitted.

In summary:

- Approximately 25% (102) of the sample reported that interviews are not conducted with incoming students in their schools.
- 14% (58) of respondents stated that interviews are a standard practice in their schools.
- Slightly over 14% (59) mentioned that interviews are available upon request.
- 19% (77) of respondents mentioned that interviews are specifically carried out with students who have additional needs, rather than with all students.

28% (113) of the participants indicated uncertainty as to whether interviews take place in their school. More of the in-service respondents (63%, 72) were unsure compared to 37% (42) of pre-service respondents. Tests for independence revealed no significant association between this uncertainty and their qualification status as fully registered teachers or any other variable other than age of the teacher.

Summary

Formal interviews are not always held in schools for all students but are predominant for students with AEN. A high number of respondents were unsure, indicating a lack of overall knowledge of the local procedures.

Entrance assessment knowledge

284 of 411 respondents (70%) indicated that entrance assessments are held for First year students while 50 (12%) are unsure if they are held or not (see Figure 5.6).

Access to results: Of the respondents who answered yes to having an entrance assessment in their schools (284), 166 indicated that they had access to these results (58%). 71 of 166 indicated that they were unsure if they had access or not. Those who are unsure comprise fully registered teachers (51/71) and non-fully registered teachers (20/71). This equates to approx. 24% of fully registered teachers and 34% not-fully registered teachers in this sample.

Access preference: There is a clear division between those who wish to have access and those who don't. Of those who do not currently have access to the results 22 of 42 would like access while 20/42 would not. It suggests that some teachers see value in accessing assessment results to better understand and support their incoming students, while others may have different perspectives or concerns about such access. While this could also depend on if they are teaching First year groups, crosstabs indicate that 39 of the 42 who answered this question teach First years or have done in the past three years.

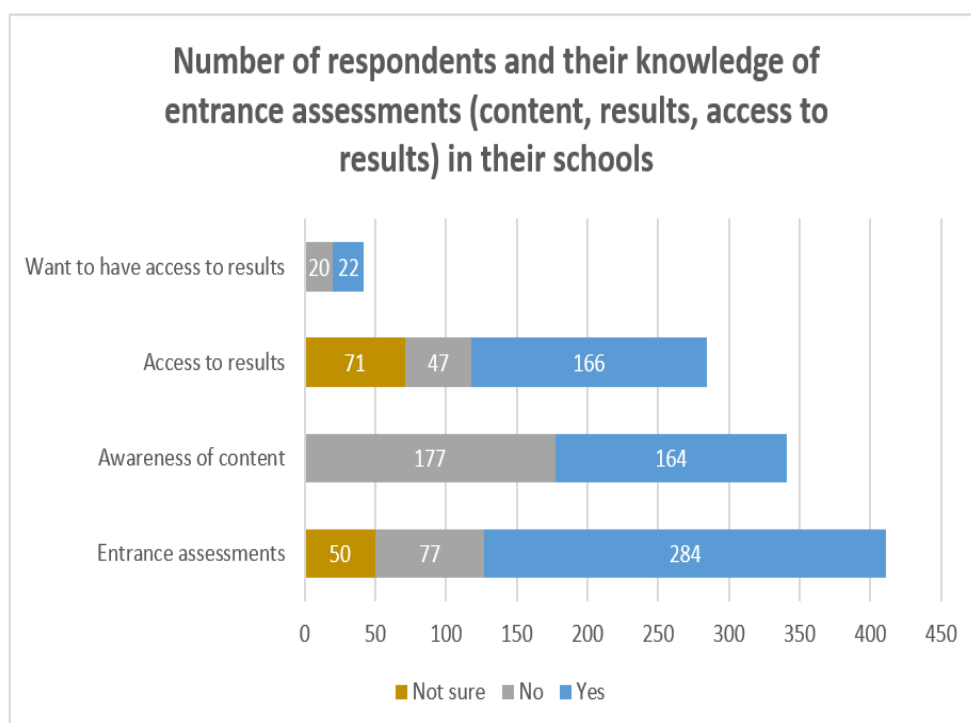


Figure 5.6 Overview of knowledge of awareness of and access to entrance information.

Overall satisfaction with information and access

Survey participants indicated how well they know their incoming First year students using a five-point Likert scale from ‘extremely well’ to ‘not well at all’ according to four statements (see Figure 5.8). 366 responses were submitted. Overall, the number of responses indicate that while the AEN needs of students are known very well and extremely well by most respondents, the more personal aspects such as hobbies and learning preferences are less known.

Respondents’ knowledge of the academic ability of all First-year students

The number of responses in this area were distributed evenly across three points on the scale – ‘moderately well’ with 135 (37%); Over 30% of the respondents indicated an extremely well (35, 10%) or very well (81, 22%) knowledge of the academic ability of all incoming students. 117 (over 30%) expressed the opposite - slightly well (78); not well at all (39).

Overall satisfaction with amount of information

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with five statements regarding the information they have on incoming First year students. They used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The survey received between 364 and 368 responses depending on the statement. Overall, the data indicates that participants are generally content with the amount of information and access they have about their incoming First year students (see Figure 5.7 and Table 5.8).

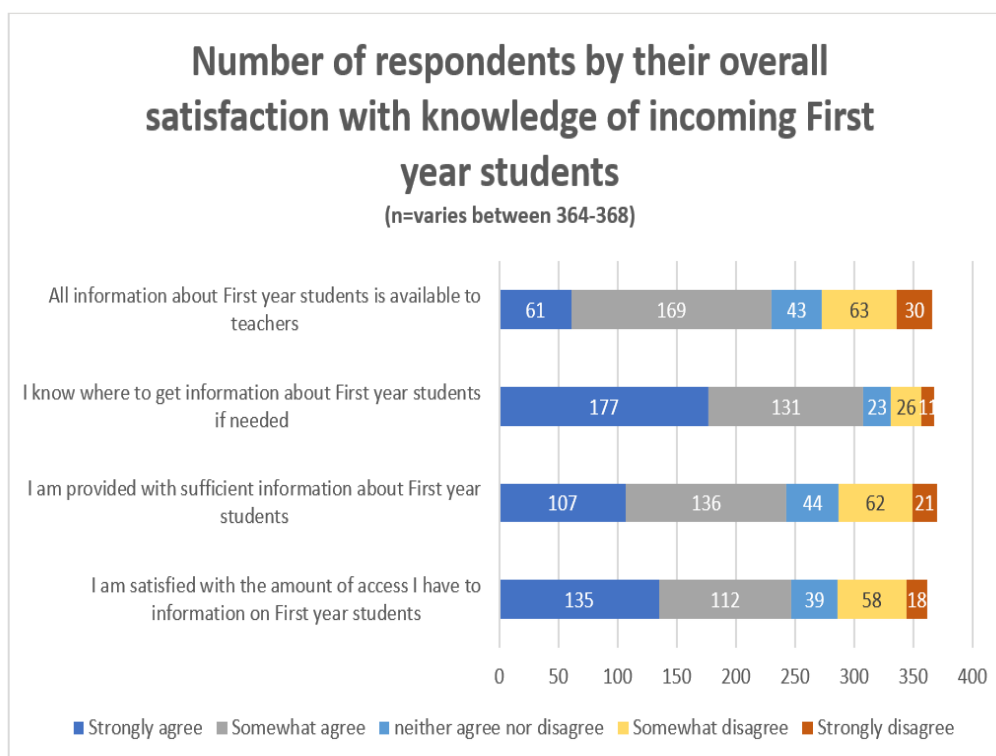


Figure 5.7 Overall satisfaction of respondents' knowledge of incoming students.

I am satisfied with the amount of access to information (n=365) More respondents (247/365, 68%) indicate they strongly agree (135) or somewhat agree (112) with this statement. Comparatively a total of 79 (22%) either somewhat disagree (58) or strongly disagree (21) with the statement.	I know where to get the information if needed (n=368) More respondents 'strongly agreed' (177/368) with this statement than for any other of the five statements. Those who either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed (131) constitute approx. 83% responses of the total positive responses. Conversely, this statement also received the lowest number of 'strongly disagree' (11) responses of the five statements.
I am provided with sufficient information n=(367) More respondents agree or strongly agree (243, 66%) with this statement than disagree (80, 22%).	All information is available on my incoming first years (n=367) More respondents agreed than disagreed with this statement. 61/367 strongly agreed, 169 (46%) somewhat agreed with the statement, compared to 94 (26%) that either somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 5.8 Findings of satisfaction with information provided

Additional comments

Additional comments provide insights into the complexities surrounding the Education Passport's implementation. With regard to academic ability assessment, similar to Phase 2 interviews, one comment questioned the necessity of knowing the academic performance of incoming first-year students from primary school:

I'm not sure knowing academic performance from primary school is necessary. It may prejudice teachers and pigeonhole students into lower or higher academic expectations. Junior Cycle is a common course designed to be accessible to all students. Many who didn't shine in primary do in secondary. I see it as a fresh start.

Interview comments (Phase 2) also referred to teachers' understanding of assessment. One comment highlighted that many teachers are unaware of the existence of Education Passports and lack the time to review them comprehensively:

Many teachers do not know they exist, nor do they have time to sit and read them all. Most teachers do not know how to interpret Standardised assessments or Cognitive ability tests. It's no one's fault. Teachers have a lot to do, and very little time afforded to them for admin. In fact, no time.

Communication between primary schools

Survey participants described the communication between local feeder/primary schools and their post-primary school on a five-point Likert scale from excellent to poor or 'I have no idea'. In total, there were 369 responses. Almost 45% of the respondents chose a positive description of the communication with 48/369 and 117/369 describing it as excellent or very good respectively compared to fair (31/369) or poor (7/369). However, 78/369 (21%) responded 'I have no idea'. As expected, more pre-service (29/66, 44%) than in-service (49/303, 16%) teachers responded that they had 'no idea'.

Relevant tests of independence were carried out. An association between teachers in DEIS schools and their satisfaction with the level of communication suggested statistically significant results $\chi^2(2, N = 369) = 73.2426, p < .0001$. The result is

significant at $p < .05$. Teachers in DEIS schools have a greater level of satisfaction of communication with primary schools.

Types of communication between primary/feeder schools PP schools

Survey participants identified the types of collaborative activities between their school and local primary/feeder schools from a list of 15 options. An additional free text option was included. Multiple responses were allowed. There were 368 responses with 31 offering additional information (These 31 responses are not included in Figure 5.8).

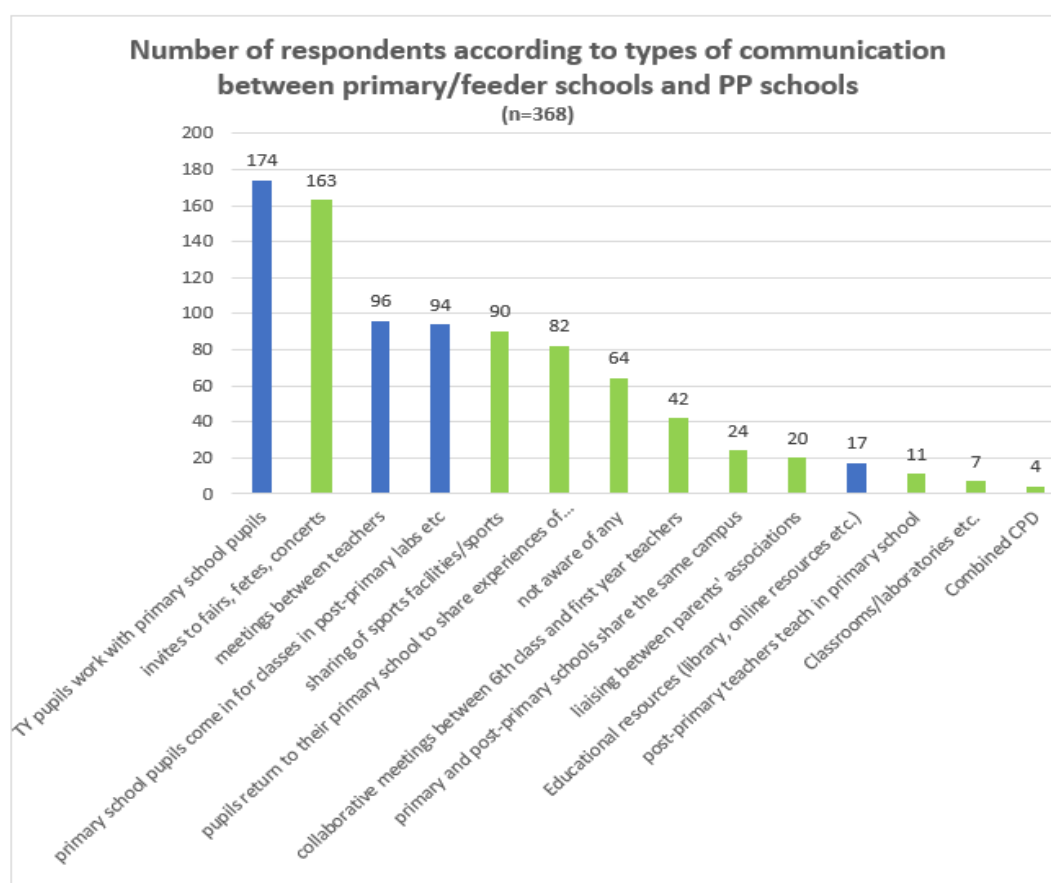


Figure 5.8 Types of communication between primary and post-primary schools/teachers.

The types of activities identified by the sample that are shared between schools can be divided into professional communication (identified in green in Table 5.9) and functional communication (blue). Professional teacher communication comprises communication

other than promotional communication, such as teaching, and meetings between teachers, students, and primary students. Functional communication refers to sharing of sporting facilities and classrooms, visits by principals to primary schools and open days.

Professional communication	Functional communication
• Highest response comes from post-primary student interaction such as transition year students liaising with primary schools (174) and students returning to their primary schools to share experience with local feeder/primary schools (82). This response is higher than teaching and teacher communication. • 94 (23%) respondents indicated that students come into the post-primary schools and a similar number (96) refer to meetings with teachers in primary. • The response for communication between parents' associations (20) • Combined CPD (4) and sharing of educational resources (17), almost equal the number of responses for the communication between parents' associations. • Teachers teaching in primary school is not prominent.	• 163 (47%) respondents indicated that invites to events in the post-primary school such as fairs, concerts etc. takes place. • Sharing of sports facilities (90) is three times higher than the total of sharing CPD (4), sharing of educational resources (17) and teachers teaching in primary schools (11). • Only 7 participants mentioned the sharing of classroom/ labs etc.

Table 5.9 Overview of communications between primary and post-primary schools.

Additional comments

Various strategies were discussed for facilitating student transitions. Some educators mentioned the use of open days as a means to introduce prospective students and their families to the school, often supplemented by principals' visits to feeder schools to invite students to these events. Additionally, comments highlighted meetings specifically tailored to students with AEN, likely aimed at addressing their unique requirements during the transition process. HSCL meetings were noted as another avenue of support. Several collaborative programmes were also spotlighted, such as 'one community one book' and the 'School Completion Programme,' which involve partnerships between the

school and primary feeders to ensure a seamless transition experience. However, it was acknowledged that there can be challenges in building relationships with numerous feeder schools.

Summary

The findings show strengths in teachers' awareness of students' additional educational needs but highlight a notable gap in understanding personal aspects like hobbies and learning preferences. Overall, teachers express satisfaction with access to information. The additional comments highlight concerns about the potential biases associated with academic performance data and the challenges teachers face in accessing and comprehending assessment information.

5.6.3 Bridge 2: Social and emotional

Questions in relation to this bridge explored the supports in place for students entering First year, and the teachers' perception of these supports.

Overall satisfaction with social and emotional supports

348 respondents rated their overall perception of the level of social and emotional supports offered to incoming First year students on a five-point Likert scale (extremely good to extremely bad). Overall, respondents indicated that they are satisfied with the level of social and emotional support offered by schools with 304/348 (87%) indicating an extremely or somewhat good response.

Perception of social and emotional supports for incoming students

Participants were asked if they believed incoming students were supported in relation to a list of six categories using a five-point Likert scale from 'extremely well' to 'not well at all'. The categories related to social and emotional supports from getting to know the

school environment, making friends, dealing with stress, dealing with assessments, expectations of discipline and getting to know teachers. 361 responses were received. In rank order, top of the perceived strong supports for incoming students was ‘getting to know the school environment’ and ‘understanding expectations of discipline’ while supports for dealing with stress and assessments were down the list of supports.

Extremely well/very well

- Respondents indicated that overall students are equipped extremely well and very well in these five categories with ‘support in getting to know the school environment’ at the top of this scale (309, extremely well/very well).
- Getting to know ‘schools’ expectations of discipline’ is second highest with 269 responses, while ‘getting to know teachers’ and ‘making friends’ follow closely in the extremely/very well category with 251 and 256 respectively. Dealing with stress and assessments are not as highly rated in this category with 217 responses for stress and the lowest of the extremely well/very well category for students and assessments (193).

Slightly well and not well at all

- The number of respondents choosing these categories is low by comparison (fewer than 40).
- The highest number of responses (39) refer to students’ ability to cope with stress followed closely by students’ ability to deal with assessments (37).

Induction programmes

Survey participants were asked if their schools offered induction programmes; what is the length of these programmes; and what are the types of activities and structures in place during induction. The total number of respondents varied from 296 to 361.

Induction programmes offered (n=361)

The majority of respondents (308/361) said their schools offered induction programmes. 23 said no, while 30 were unsure.

Duration of induction (n=296)

Responses on the length of the induction programme indicate that an induction programme of 1-2 days is most popular. Comparatively, shorter induction (up to one day) and longer induction (3 days or more) are fewer with responses of 86 and 63 respectively.

Activities as part of induction

From a list of 11 options respondents indicated the type of activities that are undertaken as part of induction for First year students. Multiple options were possible. 15 respondents were not sure of activities, while 28 offered 'Other' responses. Overall, sporting activities topped the list for induction programme activities. Fewer respondents indicated that there was engagement with incoming students pre-September (271). In most cases they described such pre-September events as linked to sports camps that incoming students were invited to attend and/or specific days for SEN/AEN students. However, in-situ mentor schemes between teachers/students and student-to-student are strongly represented. A further breakdown of responses is represented in Figure 5.9. More formal programmes in addition to those mentioned in Phase 2, such as the Aspire programme and Starting Secondary School Module, were referenced.

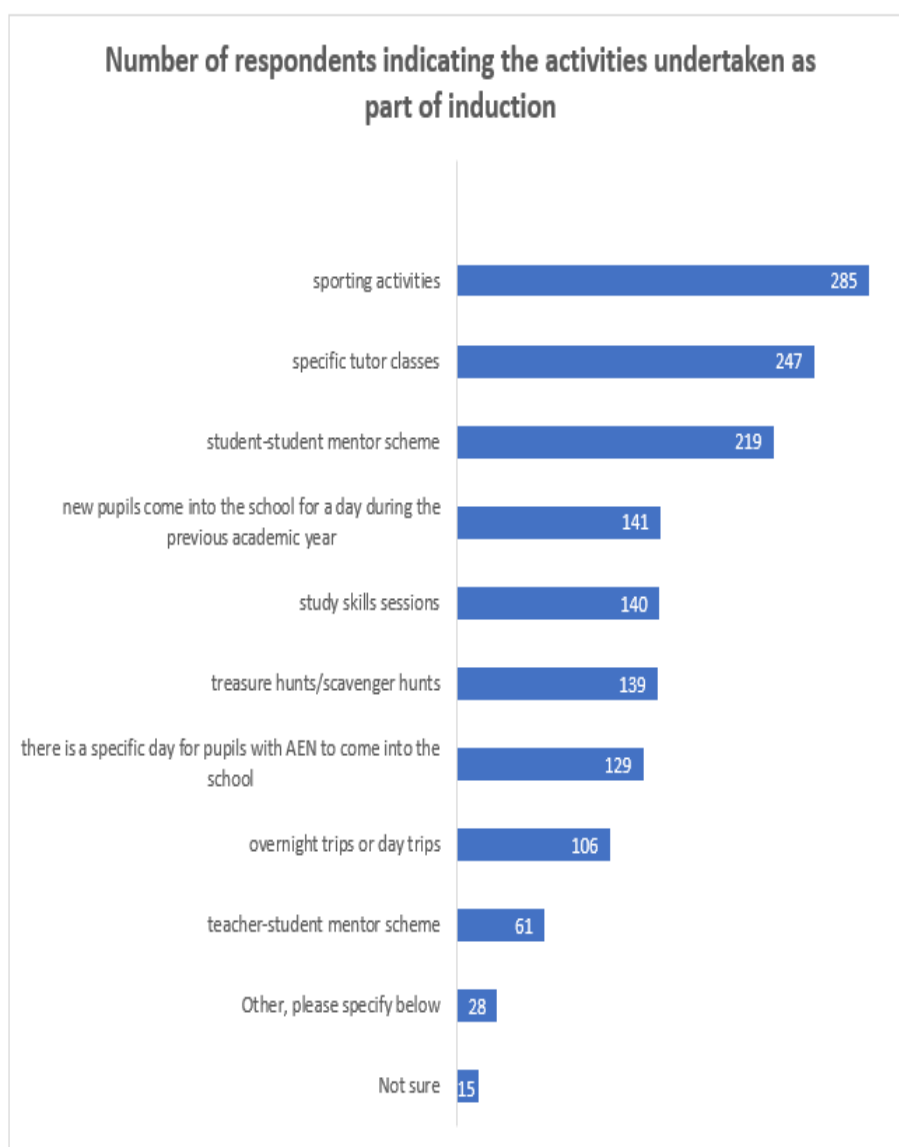


Figure 5.9 Activities reported as being part of induction.

Timing of induction supports/activities

The 11 options made available to respondents (including those mentioned in the ‘Other’ category) can be divided into activities that happen at the beginning of the academic year (September); that happen pre-September, or that are continue during the new school year. While most respondents indicated that activities occur at the beginning of the school year (a combined total of 670 indicating these events), a considerable number of respondents

indicated that there are ongoing supports during the school year (combined total of 527). Pre-school year induction activities are not as popular with respondents.

Awareness of specific policies for First year students

Respondents were asked if they were aware of any specific policies that were in place to support First years in their schools. There were 348 responses (between 280/281 in-service and approximately 61 pre-service) and multiple responses were allowed (see Figure 5.10). Overall, 150 responded that there were no official policies in place, while 105 indicated that they were unaware if there were any policies in place. Of these 78/105 (74%) were in-service teachers (approximately 28% of all in-service respondents for this question). However, 19 responses indicated that there were ‘unofficial’ policies regarding homework in place, and 21 indicate a supported ‘no fail’ policy for First year Christmas exams. 48 responses also refer to specific first year reports being issued.

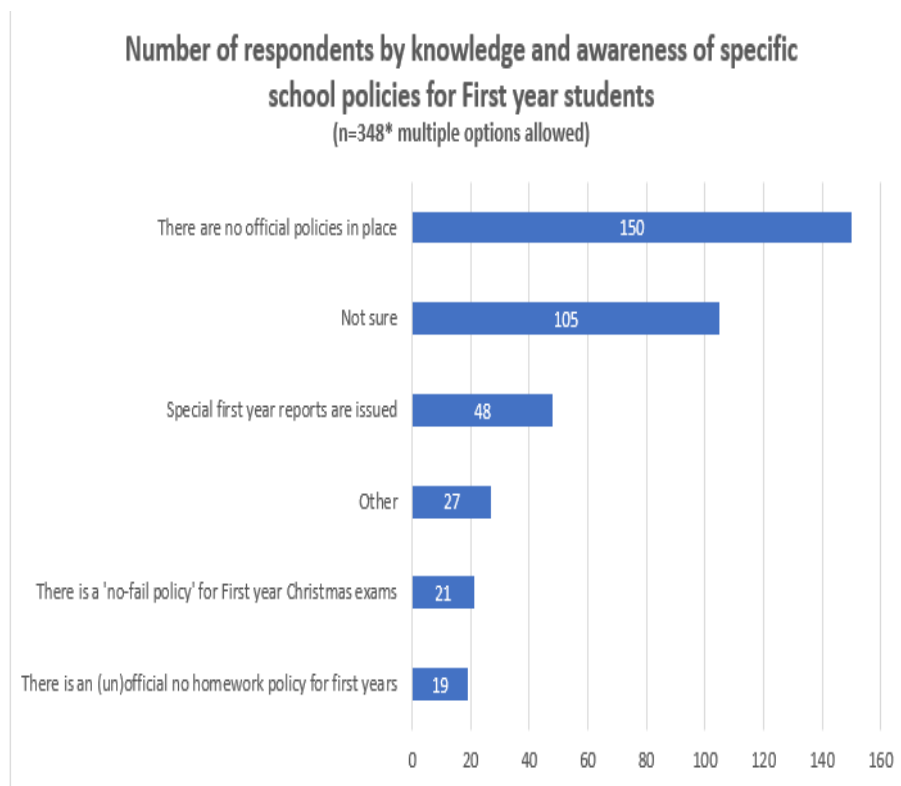


Figure 5.10 Knowledge of school policies on transition.

Additional responses

Additional comments on supports can be subdivided into seven categories related to social, emotional, and academic supports for incoming students. In addition to these categories, there were numerous references to the supportive roles of HSCL, Chaplains, Guidance Counsellors, and the SEN teams in schools. (See Table 5.10 for a detailed breakdown of these comments).

Overview of supports from additional comments made by respondents	
Transition programmes	Several references were made to a number of programmes such as the Meitheal Programme, School Completion Programme, Aspire programme, Starting Secondary School Module, Big Brother Big Sister Programme as well as general transition programmes.
Organisational and orientation supports	Several comments referred to First years having their own classroom away from older students and their own toilet facilities. In addition, references were made to First years being allowed to finish class earlier. Individual timetables for classes and exams were also given to First years.
Behavioural supports	A few references were made to behavioural incentives where First Years are not given docketts (for poor behaviour) for the month of September or October; a Merit system and awards for attendance and rewarding good behaviour with a trip in May.
Social supports	References to social supports within school included clubs, homework, breakfast, chess and library clubs as well as social evenings for First years in school, a day off in September, bonding trips etc
Emotional supports	Specific tutor time and mentor systems were included by some participants here. Comments also referred to mindfulness sessions and additional wellbeing time.
Academic supports	A few references were made to taster opportunities as well as the inclusion of weekly learning to learn classes; a camp to help students with Gaeilge; mentors available in homework clubs, resource used to help students, as well as sessions of Guidance related learning delivered throughout the year.

Table 5.10 Overview of supports from additional comments.

Most comments were received from in-service registered teachers, and most comments were positive, such as “there is now 400 hours of wellbeing input across Junior Cycle supporting induction programmes. Never has there been so much support for students along with the inclusion and extended SEN provision”. However, some comments showed higher expectations of students’ maturity “they are expected to be post-primary students. Not treated like babies” and “No fail and no homework is [sic] surely not a policy in any Irish school”. Others view supports as teacher dependent with some teachers “more compassionate and help them settle in easier while others are more ruthless and feel first years should big it up now that they’re in secondary”.

The impact on the development of students’ independent coping skills is also commented on with one respondent commenting that “standards of behaviour and the ability to work independently have significantly deteriorated over recent years and this is an area that any programmes on integration need to address. Students are very well supported.... [there is a] huge focus on wellbeing, however, this word has been misinterpreted to represent anxiety and stress - issues for which we are overcompensating ... More focus on resilience [is needed] and being able to cope without having to ring home all the time”.

A handful of comments questioned **the role of the teacher** and over-emphasis on wellbeing to the detriment of academic standards and independent coping skills:

I don’t see supporting those needs as an educationalist’s role. Absolutely not to support parents. I teach them Science for 2 hours a week. All students have wellbeing time in the mornings for 10 minutes each day. I do not know what their tutors are doing with them during this time. Maybe they are supported, maybe they are not.

Others question the movement away from the academic “There is only so much time in the day! A lot of these things sound great but how are we to find the time? And also, how do we work towards academic excellence with things like a ‘no fail’ policy?” Another

respondent observes that ‘it is becoming harder as a subject teacher to accommodate all the extra things we are required to take on for the good of the students’, while another respondent remarks that “the emphasis on behaving well instead of learning well is totally unbalanced and detrimental to the aim of an educational institution”. While demands on time is commented on, so too are **inadequate resources** with one participant stating:

resources [are] completely overstretched to provide supports for all students, but First years in particular. We are a 1000 student school. Students are coming from feeder schools with DEIS-status, but our school does not have DEIS status and so does not have the additional supports it desperately needs ... Home-School liaison officer, additional guidance capacity, JCSP etc.

Reference is also made to students losing their Special Needs Assistant (SNA) when moving into secondary and a lack of supports available. ‘Time’ as a resource in short supply is mentioned over 100 times in additional comments.

Summary

The survey reveals varying familiarity levels among teachers regarding aspects of primary school. These were concerns about parallel curricula, mixed views on the impact of Junior Cycle reforms, subject-specific challenges, and the need for shared responsibility in curriculum knowledge between primary and post-primary teachers.

5.6.4 Bridge 3: Curriculum

Questions under this bridge focussed on knowledge of the curriculum at primary and teachers’ perception of preparedness of students in and across subjects.

Overall knowledge of primary school

Between 318 to 336 respondents indicated their level of familiarity with listed aspects of primary school (yes, no, somewhat) (see Figure 5.11).

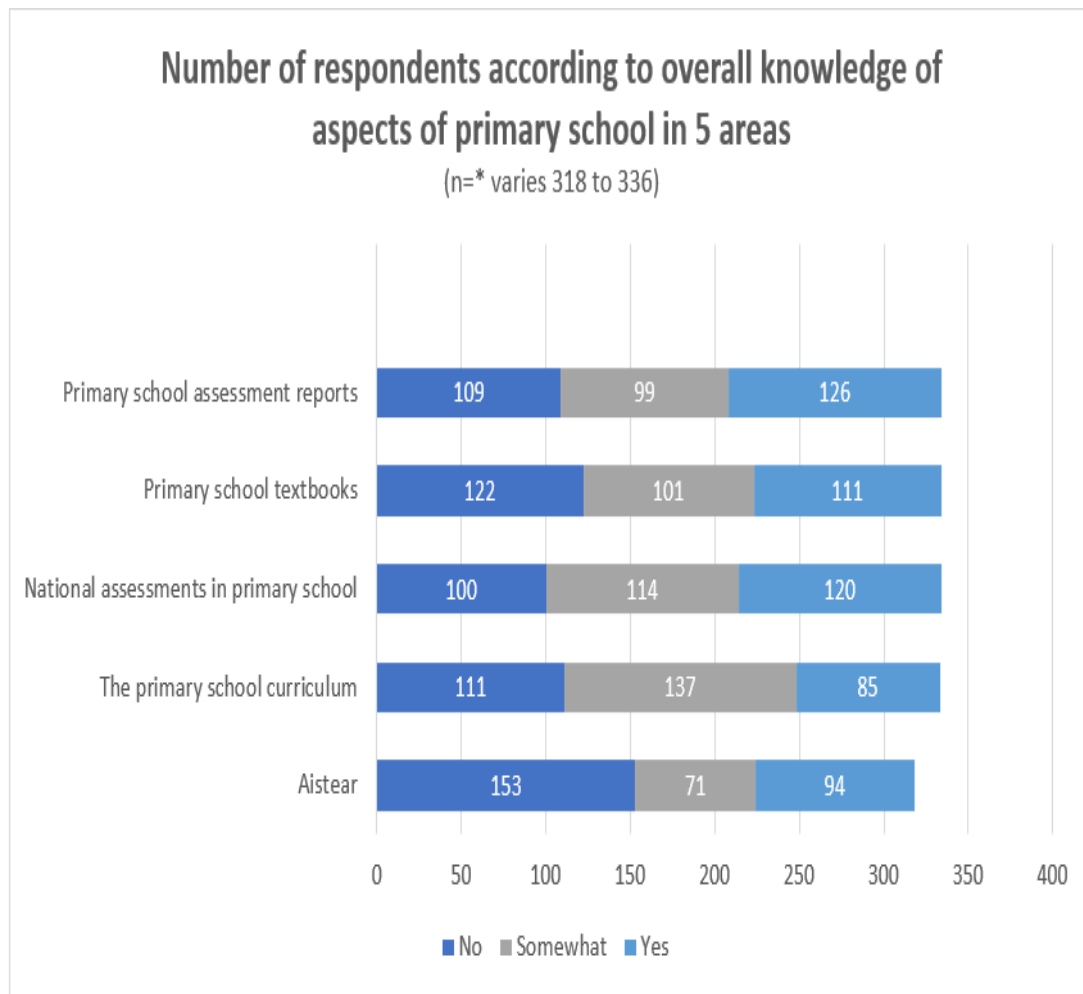


Figure 5.11 Responses regarding overall knowledge of aspects of primary school.

Yes: Overall, there was more familiarity with primary school reports (126) as issued by schools and possibly using NCCA templates as described in Chapter 4, and National assessments in primary school (120) such as Reading and Maths tests (that are expressed as STen figures), and textbooks than of Aistear (94) or the primary curriculum (85).

No: Overall, knowledge of Aistear is low, with respondents indicating the highest ‘no’ response in this category. This is followed by textbook knowledge and school curriculum.

Somewhat: More respondents were somewhat aware of primary curriculum and national assessments in primary than annual primary school assessment reports, textbooks or Aistear. (See Table 5.11 for an overview of this knowledge).

Overview of respondents' knowledge of primary school by category	
Aistear:	Respondents indicated the highest 'no' response for Aistear.
Curriculum:	More respondents (137) indicated 'somewhat' knowledge of the primary school curriculum than 'yes'. However, 111 responded 'no'.
Primary assessment reports:	126 and 99 responded 'yes' and 'somewhat' respectively while 109 responded 'no'.
National assessments in primary:	While overall awareness (120, yes), and 'somewhat' awareness (114), indicate that respondents show an awareness of national assessments, the response across categories is evenly distributed. However, the no responses comprise almost a third of the overall responses (100).
Primary school textbooks:	While overall awareness ('yes' and 'somewhat' combined) textbooks, the response across categories is evenly distributed 111 (yes); 122 (no) and 101 (somewhat).
Primary assessment reports:	More respondents indicated 'yes' or 'somewhat' for awareness of primary assessment reports than no.

Table 5.11 Summary of knowledge of primary schools.

Perception of continuity of curricula

293 respondents indicated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree with the statement 'The primary and post primary curricula are like two parallel pathways - there's no intersection'. More respondents agreed that they were like two parallel pathways (119/293) than disagreed (84). 90 gave a neutral response. Additional comments within the survey described the primary and secondary curricula as "two different worlds".

Figure 5.12 illustrates the response to this question according to the main subject the respondent teaches. For example, 51 teachers teach English as their **main subject**. Of these almost 25% don't know the primary curriculum and 37% are not sure. However,

among respondents who listed Maths as their primary teaching subject, 31% (5 out of 16) indicated uncertainty or a lack of knowledge when answering this question.

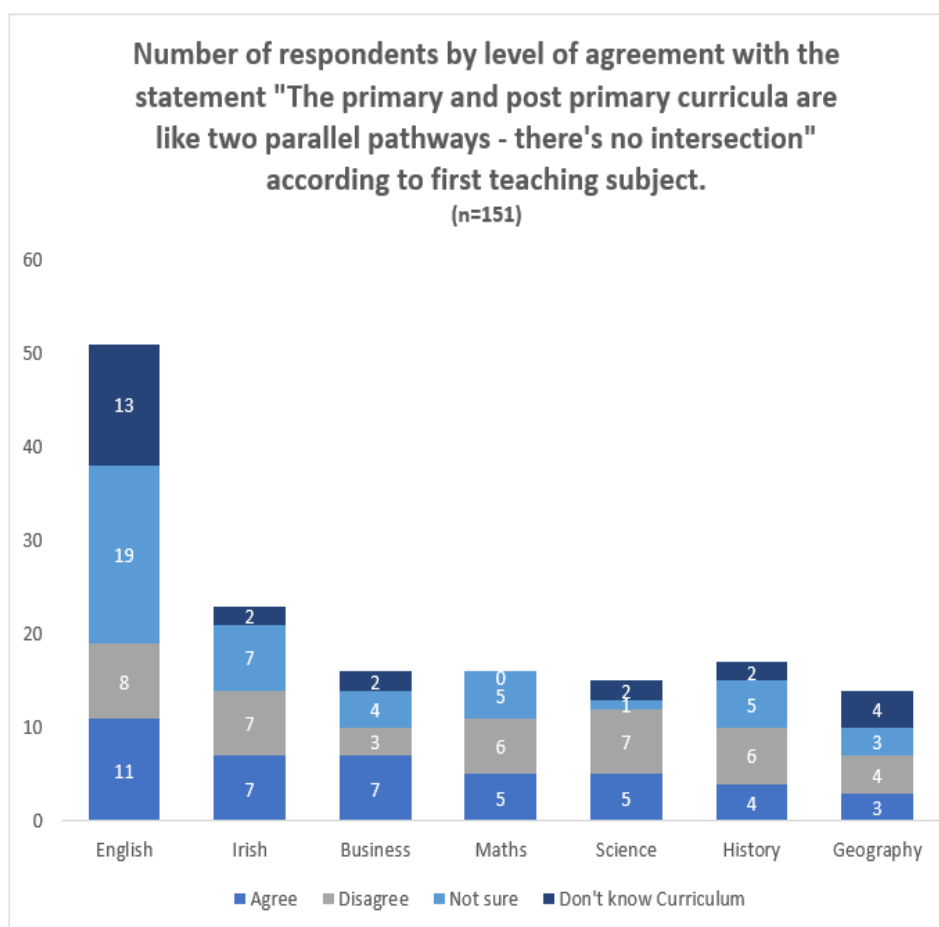


Figure 5.12 Responses to curriculum as two parallel pathways by subjects.

Impact of Junior Cycle on curricula continuity

310 respondents (256 in-service/ 54 pre-service) indicated their agreement on a five-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree with the statement 'Reforms in the Junior Cycle have strengthened the links in **curricula** between primary and post-primary'. While we saw earlier that Phase 2 teachers generally agreed with JC curricula continuity (Section 5.3.3), more of the survey respondents strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed (129/310) that Junior Cycle reforms have strengthened curricular links. 45% of these 129 (115/256) were in-service teachers. Slightly more (20 of 54) pre-

service respondents indicated a somewhat or strong agreement with the statement than disagreed (14/54). A neutral response was preferred by 32% (101/310).

Breakdown according to subjects

Of the core subjects (Maths, English and Irish), Maths teachers agreed most that students were prepared. By comparison, History, Geography, and Science teachers did not agree. As previously seen in the exploratory interviews, (see Section 5.3.3) there is a consensus that students were not as well prepared in Geography and Science. The exploratory interviews did not suggest a problem with History, but the survey responses indicate they feel that students are not prepared in History as much as students or teachers believed they were. Irish teachers were almost equal in their agreement/disagreement that students were prepared in their subject (see Figure 5.13).

Additional comments

Additional comments within the survey relating to JC reform state that “Junior Cycle have probably helped to strengthen links between primary and 1st year, but these reforms have made the transition from Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle (Leaving Cert) more difficult” and “The Junior Cycle reforms have placed an emphasis on the need for continuity but I’m not sure that all primary schools work equally well to prepare for secondary - it works both ways”.

Comments also referred to gaps in student subject knowledge for History, home economics, Geography, and Science mainly. However, one comment states:

we should have subject specific briefing on the senior curriculum at primary level. However, ... the primary schools feeding our intake vary considerably in how they teach my main subject, English. A common curriculum is no guarantee of an equal playing field.

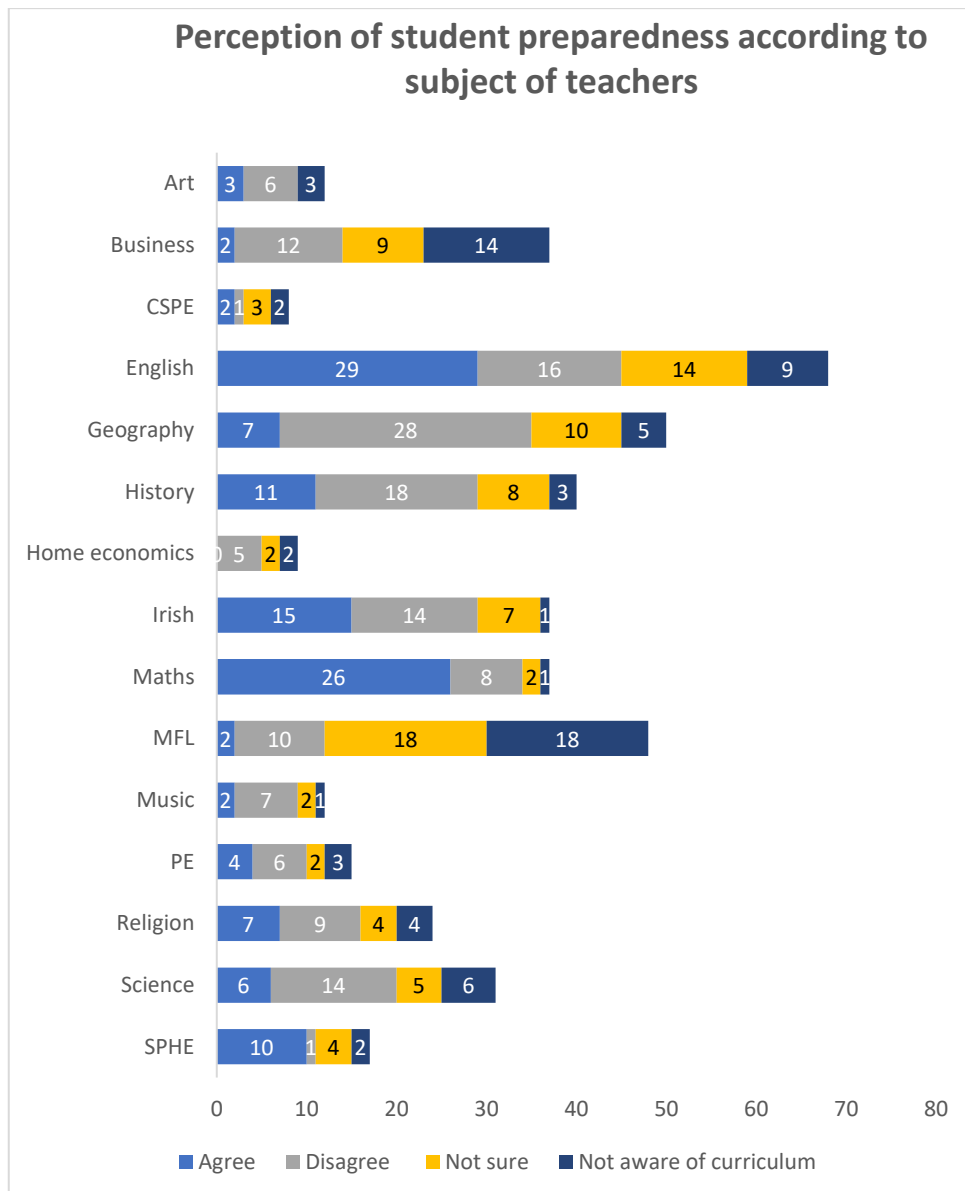


Figure 5.13 Respondents' perception of students' preparedness according to subjects.

When the numbers who agreed are expressed as a percentage of the total number of respondents in this subject, Maths teachers believe that their students are most prepared (70%) followed by English (43%) and Irish (41%) as illustrated in Figure 5.13. Science and Geography are at the lower end with 19% of the former and 14% of the latter indicating preparation. It must be noted that the raw numbers are low for some subjects and that this is more of an indication of a subject trend.

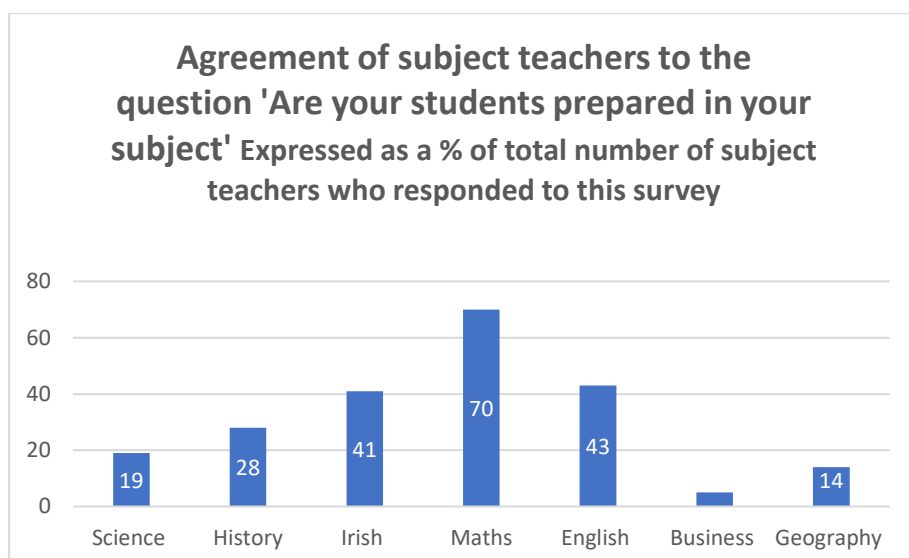


Figure 5.13 Breakdown by % of those who agreed that students were prepared by subject.

Responsibility

Survey participants were asked to choose between two statements aimed at ascertaining who was responsible for knowing about the curricula in both primary and post-primary levels. A neutral option was also offered. 313 responses were received. More respondents indicated that post-primary teachers (127) should know more about their subjects at primary than the other way round (75). However, 111 respondents chose neither.

88 additional comments were received. While in earlier Phase 2 interviews students felt it was the primary teachers' responsibility to know about the post-primary curriculum, the majority of these teacher comments stressed the importance of both knowing each other's curriculum (appeared 71 times). Several comments called for supports to be put in place by the NCCA, ITE and school management to allow for collaboration including combined CPD. Specific reference is made to the differences in levels of assessment 'I believe that the gap in standards between the two is an issue. I think both primary and secondary need a bridge for standardising correcting and grading, e.g., students getting high grades in core subjects in primary only to get to a 50-60% standard in post primary'.

Summary

The Phase 2 findings largely highlighted negative aspects related to collaboration between primary and post-primary schools and teachers. In the Phase 3 survey, there was a mix of perspectives. Respondents demonstrated different levels of knowledge about the primary school curriculum, with a prevailing belief that primary and post-primary curricula are separate. The attempts to ensure curriculum continuity through the Junior Cycle were seen as ineffective by the survey participants. Additionally, there were more concerns about students' preparedness in non-core subjects than in core subjects. Surprisingly, ensuring curriculum continuity was primarily seen as the responsibility of post-primary teachers rather than their primary school counterparts.

5.6.5 Bridge 4: Pedagogy

In phase 2, participants expressed positive sentiments about the continuity of teaching methods between primary and post-primary education, particularly due to the introduction of the New Junior Cycle. However, the sources of knowledge for these methods remained informal. Teacher decisions on how to approach teaching first-year students were primarily influenced by individual teacher agency, with a few participants mentioning formal subject departmental approaches. The findings of the survey add further insight into these pedagogical queries.

Knowledge of the primary classroom

Between 318 and 336 participants indicated their level of familiarity with aspects of primary school classroom (yes, no, somewhat). Overall, the results reveal that the respondents are 'somewhat' familiar with teaching methods, daily routine and behavioural expectations in the primary classroom as represented by Figure 5.14.

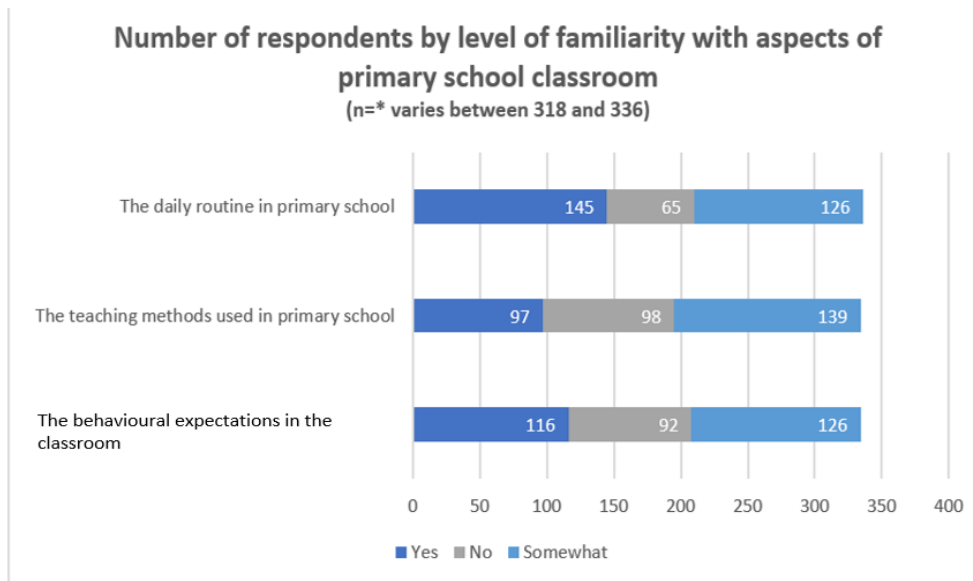


Figure 5.14 Overview of familiarity with aspects of primary school.

- Respondents indicated that they were more familiar with the daily routine (145) in primary school than **of teaching methods** (97). For teaching methods, there was an equal distribution of responses across ‘yes’ and ‘no’ (97/98) with the majority (139) indicating a partial familiarity.
- There is a high familiarity with **daily routine** in primary. Over 145 indicated a ‘yes’ response and 126 ‘somewhat’. This is the highest combined awareness across all eight categories between knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy. This area has the lowest no response count (65) overall.
- More respondents indicated ‘somewhat’ (126) or ‘yes’ (116) familiarity with **behavioural expectations** than ‘no’ (92).

Continuity in teaching methods

A total of 323 participants gave their opinion as to what extent they agreed with the statement ‘There are **similarities between the teaching methods** used at primary and post-primary’. Overall, there is a high level of unawareness of teaching methods (139, 42%). However, the level of agreement with the statement is higher (114, 35%) than

disagreement (74, 23%). Additional comments refer to differences in teaching methods for Maths/Science.

Maths and Science are taught very differently in primary and in post primary. [In] Science, the focus is on experiments with little or no content/context being taught, and [in] Maths[the focus] is general problem solving whereas at secondary school it is more structured topics. There are crossovers in problem solving techniques but not in the topics.

Approach to prior learning

A total of 323 respondents gave a yes/no response to five statements related to the role played by prior learning when teaching First year students. The results are illustrated in Figure 5.15 and discussed below. Respondents were also given an opportunity for free text comments. 90 comments were given and are included under the relevant headings below where applicable. Statistical testing revealed no associations between any variables of age, school status, gender, or registered status for any of these statements (265/6 were in-service registered teachers while 57/8 were pre-service).

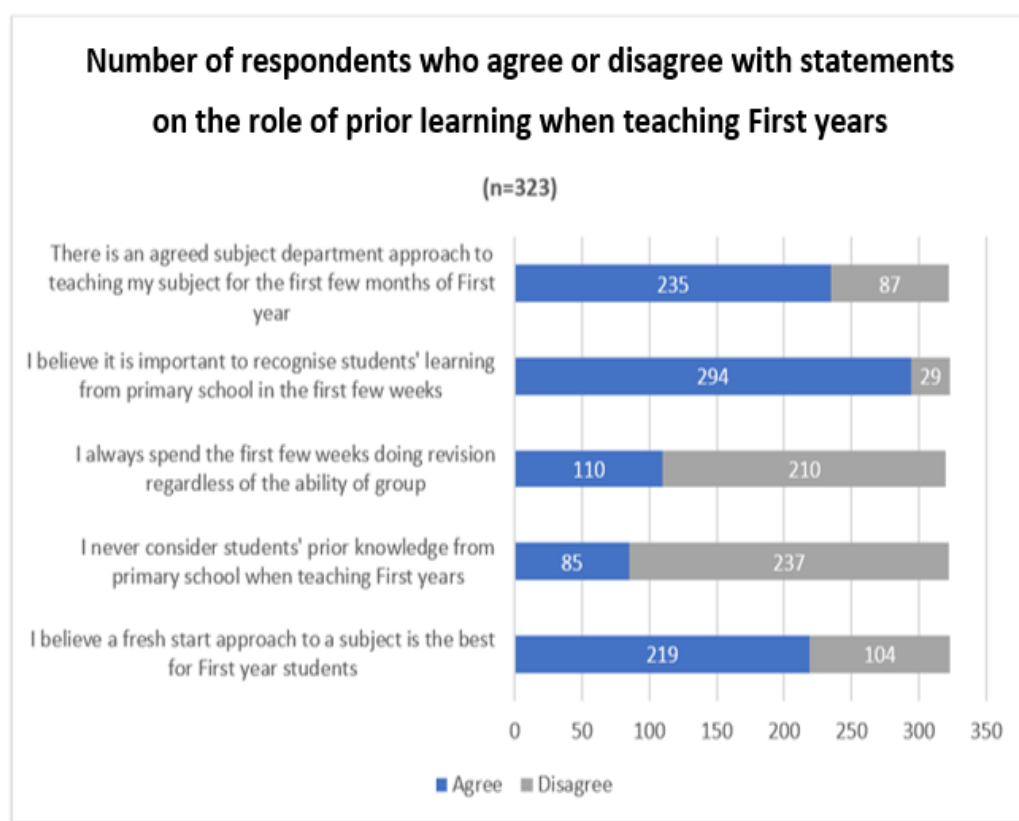


Figure 5.15 Overview of responses to use of prior learning.

Fresh start approach

Similar to the “jazz-hands approach” of Flynn in Phase 2, a fresh start approach was preferred by 219 respondents (68%) compared to 104 (32%) ‘who did not agree’. Some of the reasons for this choice are expanded in the comments section where there are numerous references to “starting afresh ... blank canvas ... [and] ground zero”. Some refer generally to teaching their subject “as if they [students] have never done it at all’ or “assume they know nothing,”. Others consider it a necessity:

With many feeder schools, the gaps in students’ schemas are many and various. It’s almost impossible to assume any of them know anything. Start of first year is spent attempting to establish a common base line.

Others see it from the perspective of the students: “I like to start from ground zero to show them as we go how far they went and the progress we made together”. Another respondent remarks that a “fresh start approach depends on the experience the student had with the subject at primary level. Sometimes the approach is not good, and they need a fresh start”. Other comments consider their teaching approach and the role in supporting students’ self-esteem: “I believe a fresh start approach may not be the best way to teach the students at first, some students can be intimidated coming into a larger school and, as such, a fresh start approach may feel more intimidating and lose some ground with them”. As stated at the beginning of this section, there was no statistically significant associations found in responses between age and pedagogical practices. Although the numbers are low for subjects (less than 30), the breakdown of responses by subject suggests that this exists across subjects. (See Appendix 5.17-19 for graphic illustrations per teaching subject).

Recognising prior learning in first few weeks

Over 294 respondents (91%) agreed with the importance of recognising prior learning in the first few weeks compared to 29 (9%) who didn't agree. (See Appendix 5.17) A considerable number of comments reinforced the rationale for use of prior knowledge in their teaching, for example:

I teach my specification and the department agreed scheme of work - regardless of the learning from primary school but use the prior knowledge of students in the class to help the teaching and learning process when particular topics arise.

Revision time is not a preferred activity according to most of the respondents. When asked if they spend time on revision for First years in September regardless of student ability, 210 respondents (66%) stated that they do not. 110 (34%) stated they did. Reasons given include a back-to-basics teaching approach, the fact that students come from so many different feeder schools, or revision is needed to achieve “a baseline understanding of the level of the students”. Another respondent commented: “I always spend the first few weeks doing revision regardless of ability of group but as far as I know there was no revision done in liaison with the primary school curriculum taught”.

By contrast, respondents who did not conduct revision commented: “no time, unless it is part of the curriculum”; “the subject is a new subject” (languages/business) and more positively, “they need to be engaged early - not dumped into revision”. Another teacher/parent added “my child is bored in most subjects that are spending so much time going back over stuff done in primary school – Maths and Irish in particular”. Comments also refer to the difficulty of doing revision in class due to the inconsistency in the teaching of certain subjects and non-subject specialism of teachers in the primary feeder schools. “Revision is necessary as not all primary curriculum is covered.” A few

specifically mention this in relation to History and Science but similar comments are offered by PE, Irish, Maths and Home Economics teachers.

Primary teaching in subjects outside of Irish, English and Maths depends on the interest of the teacher in other subjects, like History. There is a lack of consistency, for example when students from 1 feeder school with 2 different 6th class teachers, these students can have such massive differences in the knowledge and skill sets, all because of their teachers. In secondary every teacher teaches the same content in their subjects.

Most respondents acknowledge a **coordinated departmental approach** in their teaching of first years (235, 73%) compared to 87 (27%) who don't (see Appendix 5.18). Again, this is consistent across subjects. Further information in the comments section indicates that although there may be a shared approach regarding content to be taught, there may not be shared methodologies: "In our school there is agreement about what content is taught to first years but there are not agreed teaching approaches" (Maths teachers).

Junior Cycle reforms and pedagogy

307 survey participants indicated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale with the statement 'Reforms in Junior Cycle have strengthened the links between **pedagogy** in primary and post-primary'. No clear opinion emerges from the responses. Of 307 responses, there is an even distribution between agreement (109) and disagreement (111) with 87 giving a neutral response.

Source of knowledge of primary school

A total of 329 respondents identified the source of their knowledge of primary school from a choice of 13 options. Multiple selection was allowed. Additional comments (27) were submitted.

As illustrated in Figure 5.16, the top three sources of information in primary school are (1) linked to their own children (164, 50%), (2) family and friends who are primary

teachers (140, 43%), and (3) their own experience of school (89, 27%). Just over 10% (38) refer to knowledge gained through CPD. In fact, independent research and study and the media surpass any forms of CPD as potential sources.

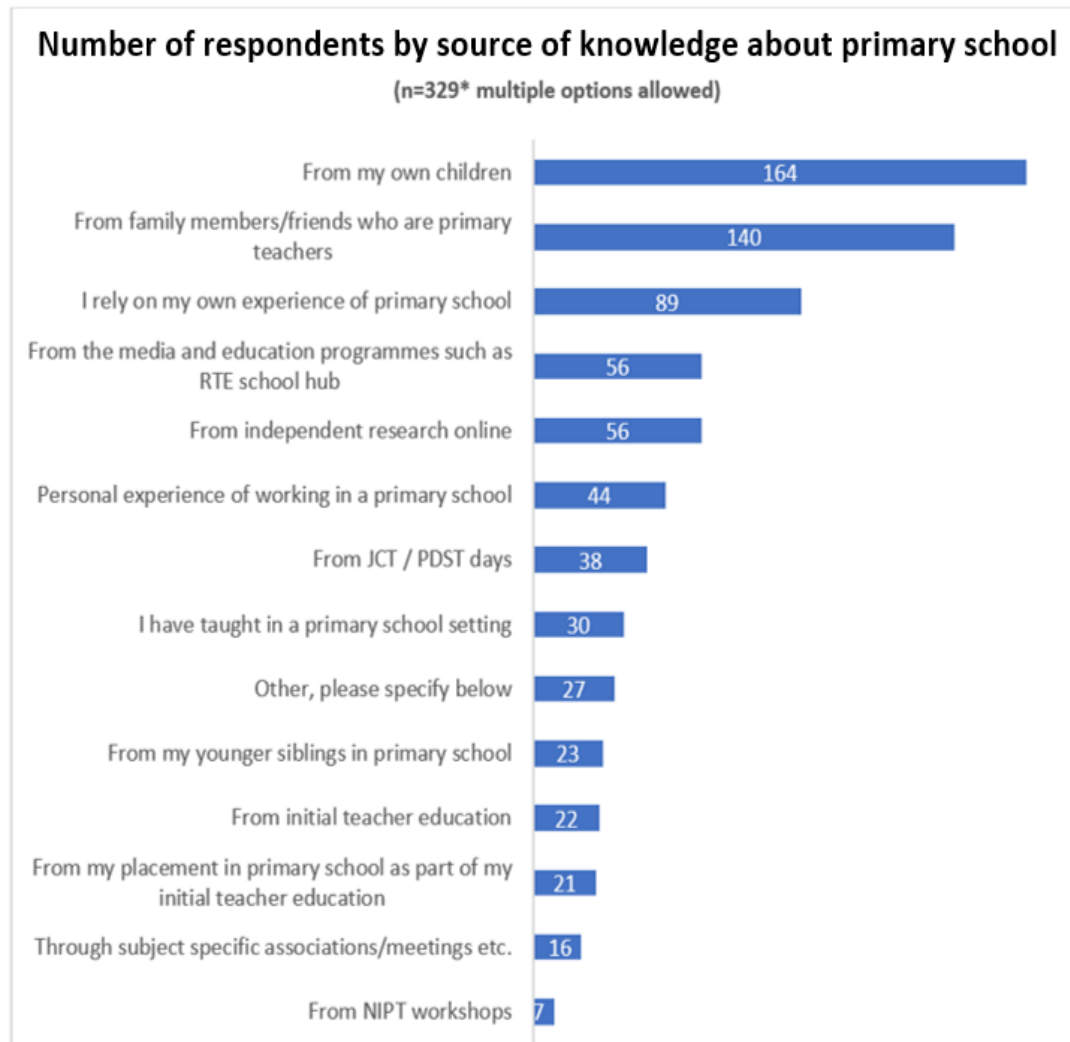


Figure 5.16 Respondents and their sources of knowledge about primary school.

Chi-Square tests were conducted on this data to establish any association between age, gender, years of experience and the source of knowledge. Strong significant statistical associations were found between age and source of knowledge. $\chi^2(3, N = 329) = 118$, $p < .00001$. The result is significant at $p < .05$. Specifically, references to sourcing knowledge from own children was mentioned by more respondents from the age of 36 upwards, while the younger age groups tended more to rely on their own experience from

primary school. As the average age for all births in Ireland is 33.3 as of 2021 (cso.ie) and given the age profile of these respondents, those in their mid-to-late 30s could have children in primary school and may be familiar with the junior side of primary school reports. However, the 2021 figure is the highest in over 40 years (cso.ie, 2023).

Significant associations were also found in the younger age groups, who referenced siblings, family and friends or work experience in a primary school setting. The 36-45 age category referenced media as a source. Gender-wise, male participants tended more to rely on their own experience more than females (31.9% v 26.2%) (see Table 5.12).

STRONG SIGNIFICANCE	
Age and... (36 - 46+)	Source of knowledge from own children
(19-35)	Own experience in school
SIGNIFICANCE	
19-25	Source: family and friends
19-25	Personal experience working in primary
19-25	Source: siblings
26-35	Source RTE school hub/media

Table 5.12 Overview of age and statistical significance.

Attitude to primary teachers

A total of 308 respondents indicated their level of agreement with the statement ‘Primary and post-primary teachers are ‘separate tribes’. More respondents agreed with the statement than disagreed. 193 respondents either ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat agreed’ while 73 (24%) ‘disagreed strongly’ or ‘somewhat’ with the statement. A further breakdown is evident in Figure 5.17.

While comments do not overtly make a judgment on primary teachers, attitude is implied in comments such as: “post-primary has lowered standards and expectations in recent years. primary has not raised its standards to meet ours” or “the standard of work done in primary school has been dumbed down a lot over the years”.

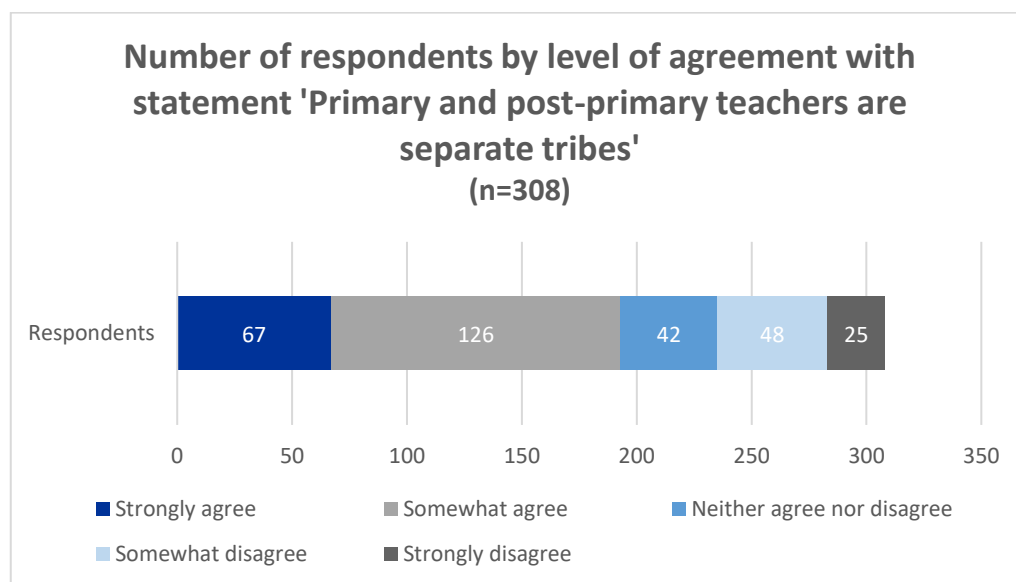


Figure 5.17 Overview of responses to ‘Primary and post-primary teachers are separate tribes’.

Summary

The survey findings on the pedagogical bridge highlight that teachers gather knowledge from family and interactions with primary teachers, and their own primary schooling. The findings show agreement on a fresh-start approach to teaching of subjects and that departmental approaches illustrate evidence of teacher collaboration at subject topic level rather than pedagogical level. However, perception by teachers that primary and post-primary teachers are ‘separate tribes’ as evidenced in the findings may hamper cross sectoral collaboration. The findings also show that opinions on Junior Cycle pedagogical reforms vary.

5.6.6 Bridge 5: Managing learning

Discourse in relation to students' ability to manage themselves and their own learning was mixed in Phase 2 interviews, and deficits in skills such as digital skills were identified as hampering learning (see Section 5.3.5). The evidence in the Phase 3 survey shows that these concerns extend beyond the Phase 2 sample.

Ability to manage themselves and their learning

A total of 311 respondents rated their general perception of first year students' ability to undertake certain tasks (yes, no, somewhat) across 11 areas. Multiple selection and additional comments were allowed. Generally, most respondents indicated that students are not able to study (157) or to assess their own work (160) compared to 'somewhat/yes' responses in these categories. The ability to work in groups stands out as the highest of the 'yes' responses (197). Students' ability to concentrate has the highest number of 'somewhat' responses (175). (See Figure 5.18)

Numerous comments were made about students' inability to manage their learning. Organisational skills are mentioned frequently across many sections of the survey, such as in the following examples:

- I think organisational skills are the biggest issue I see lacking in first years and some students find this very hard indeed - on reflection I think this is a big area which needs work for some students.
- I teach home economics; students' skill levels are very low. They cannot carry out basic tasks. Many struggle with organisation skills.
- Post-primary students are expected to be prepared for class, organise themselves and behave in a more mature manner. This is the main area of difficulty I see. We

almost have to train the 1st years how to behave and conduct themselves in a respectful manner.

A few comments pointed to the fact that the level of ability to deal with the various aspects of managing learning is very much student dependent and is variable.

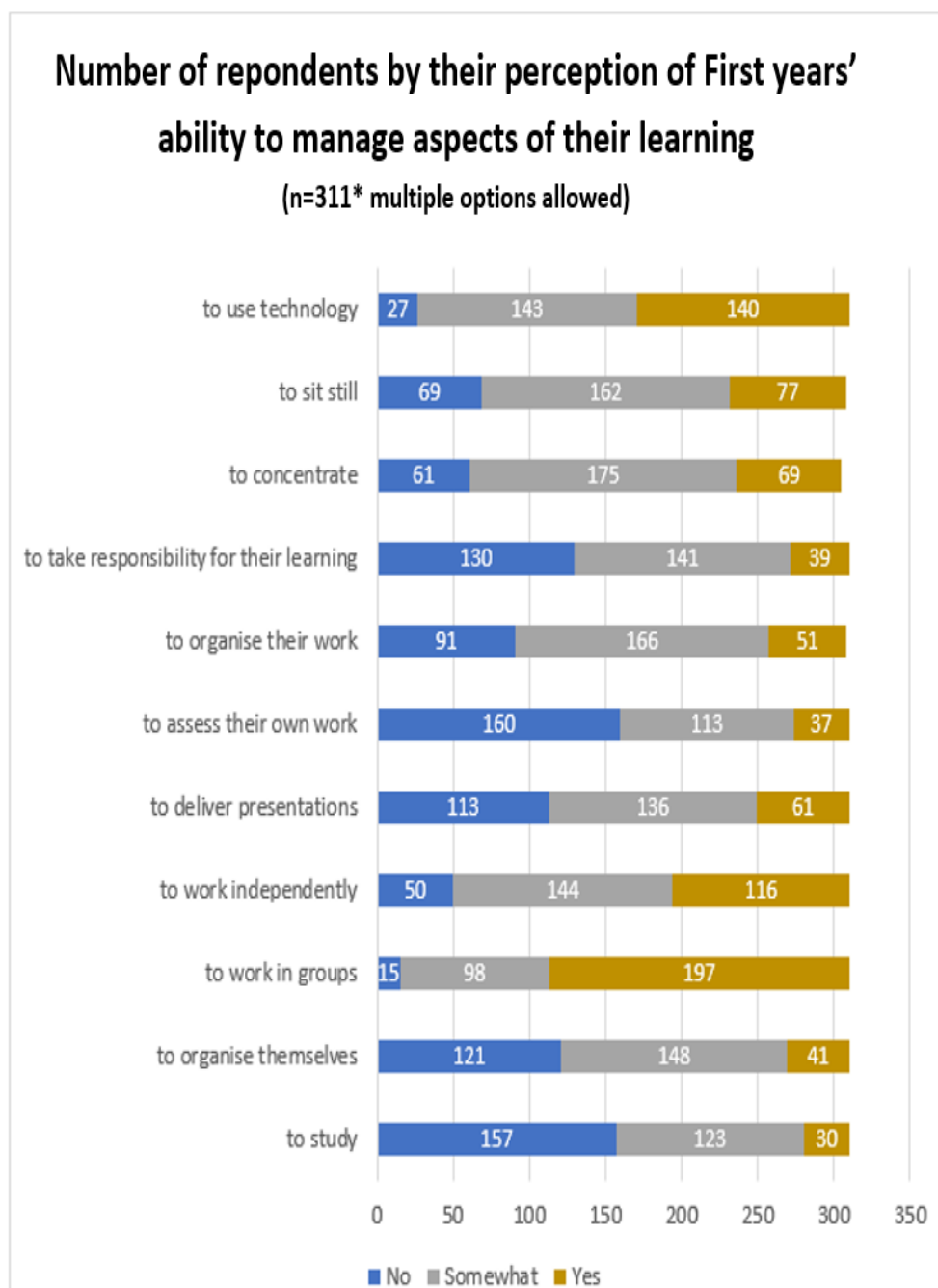


Figure 5.18 Perceptions of First years' ability to manage themselves and their learning.

Initiatives to help students manage learning

A total of 307/308 respondents indicated with a 'yes' or 'no' answer if initiatives to help support students and parents/guardians to manage learning had been introduced in their school. Respondents were given text space to add additional comments. More respondents indicated that supports had not been introduced to support students in their learning - 175 (no) compared to 134 (yes). It is interesting though, that a considerable number of respondents indicated that supports had been introduced for parents/guardians (214-yes) compared to (93-no).

Additional comments

While the responses indicate that the perception of student supports are not as strong as those in place for parents, the free-text comments are mainly positive regarding the considerable supports in place to help students manage their learning. This was also evident in Phase 2 interviews (Section 5.3.5). Across 147 comments respondents described the different initiatives that are in place for students. Over half of the comments referred to dedicated study skills workshops (86). Other supports cited include mentor systems (both teacher and student led) (17), the role of tutors (14), the role of wellbeing in supporting students to develop these skills (15), and a 'learning to learn' programme (10), which elicited criticism from one respondent: "different teachers teach it very differently and some don't care about it. It's a timetable filler."

Summary

In general, respondents noted that First-year students often face difficulties with tasks such as organisation, studying, concentration, and self-assessment. While more respondents mentioned the introduction of supports for parents rather than students, there was a positive perception of the substantial support systems in place for students. These initiatives primarily revolved around study skills workshops, mentorship programmes

involving both teachers and students, the role of tutors, and the impact of wellbeing programmes on skill development. However, inconsistencies in programme delivery were observed.

5.6.7 Transition

Definition of transition

In Section 1 of Chapter 2, different definitions of transition were reviewed. To understand participants' understanding of the concept, participants were asked to choose a definition of transition or provide their own. 302 responses were received. Choice was limited to one option. Participants were given a free text option to write in their own definition. Most respondents (149/302) defined transition as a process that is gradual or a phase that everyone must go through (96/302). As evident in see Figure 5.19, 'a process' is almost five times more popular than transition as a rite of passage.

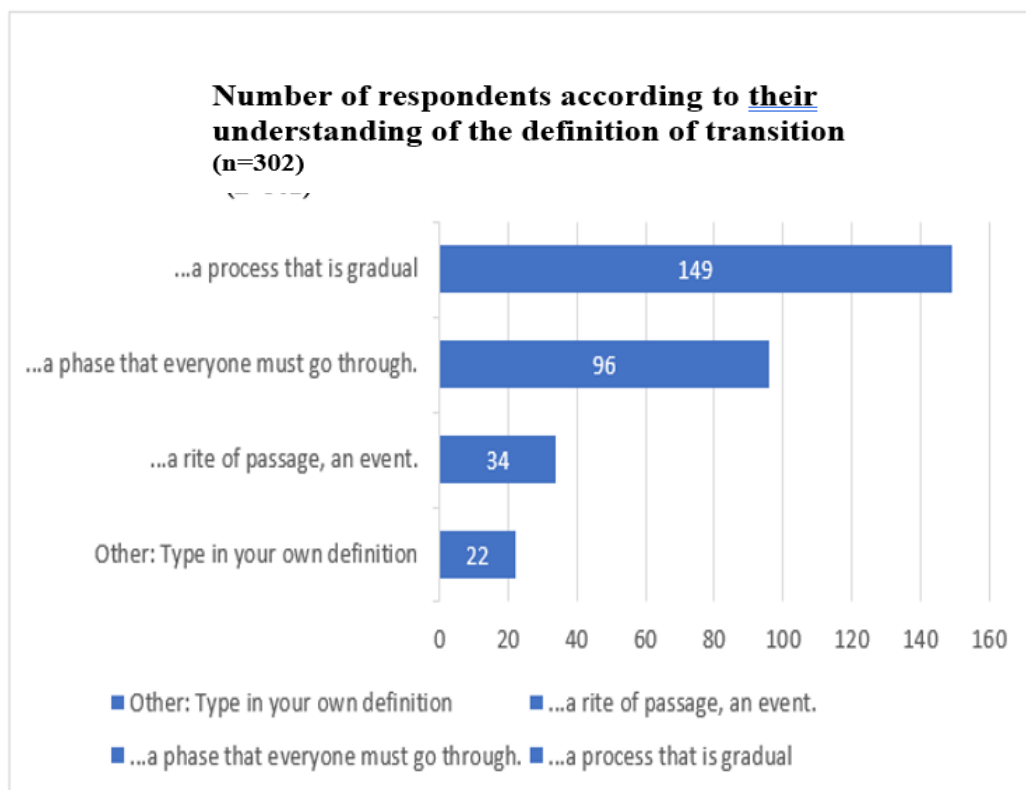


Figure 5.19 Overview of responses categorised by definition of transition.

Several respondents opted to give their own definition; however, many are general comments on transition (see Chapter 9, Appendix 5.22). Two variations of the definition are suggested: transition as a ‘developmental step’ and transition as ‘a complex journey’. Only one suggestion described transition as a ‘learning experience’.

Negative discourse

The comments express a negative perception of transition. The adjectival usage (huge, stressful, terrifying, scary, anxiety-inducing, complex, challenging) coupled with verbs such as ‘land’, ‘navigate’, ‘enforce’, and nouns such as ‘shock’ and ‘challenge’, convey a negative language usage surrounding the topic.

Tests of independence were performed to examine the relation between the definitions of transition and gender, age, DEIS status, location and teaching experience of the respondents. The relation between most of these variables was not significant except in the case of the relation between ‘age of respondents and the definition’ where $\chi^2(9, n = 302) = 24.8937, p = .0032$. The result is significant at $p < .05$. Teachers who are more mature age-wise viewed transition as a process, with almost 72% of those aged 36 and over seeing transition as a process compared to 37% of the same age groups who viewed transition as a phase. By comparison, there is a smaller 9% difference between those younger than 35 who identified transition as a process (56%) rather than phase (45%).

Source of knowledge on topic of transition

Survey participants were asked to consider where they encountered the topic of ‘transition from primary to post-primary’. 10 options were listed including a free text option. Multiple selection was allowed. 301 responses were recorded. An overview of the collated findings is given in Figure 5.20.

The responses received indicate that the top three sources of information on the topic of transition are (1) colleagues in school (146), (2) this survey (113), and (3) subject department meetings in school (94). In relation to the number of respondents who never came across this topic, more respondents had ‘never come across the topic (25) than the combined number of respondents who came across the topic through the NIPT and ITE (20). 113 encountered the topic through this survey.

ITE as a source is more popular among younger respondents (19-25 and 26-35). A chi-square test of independence found no statistically significant associations between respondents’ age and the source of initial teaching qualification. Of those who are student teachers, more responded that they found out about the topic through this survey than any other source. However, colleagues are also identified as important sources.

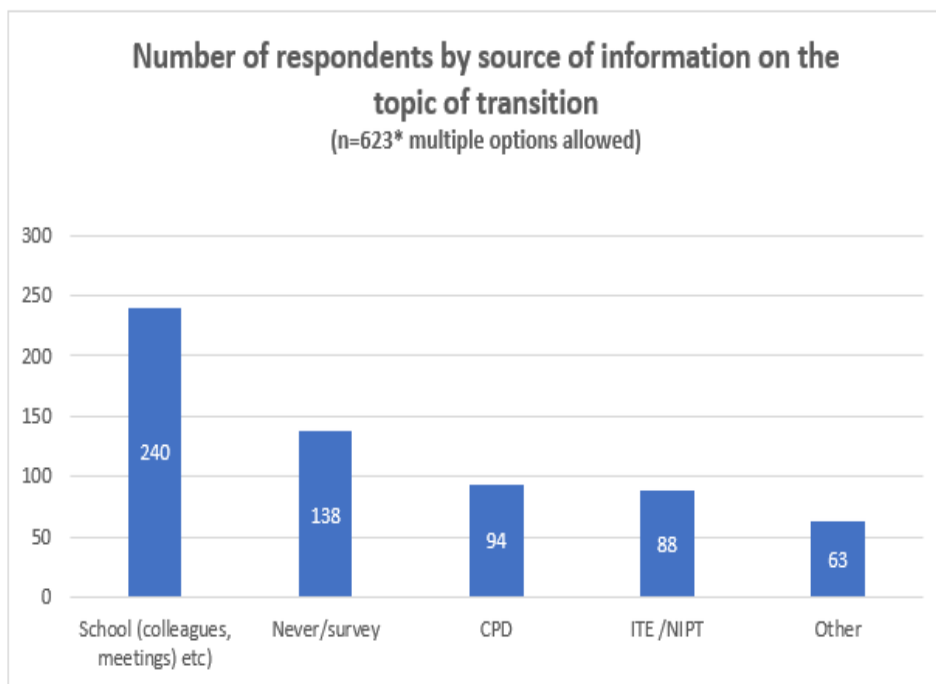


Figure 5.20 Respondents and their source of information on the topic of transition.

Statistical tests also examined the association between age groups (19-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46+) and information source preferences. The data revealed significant associations between age and information source preferences, $\chi^2(3, n = 301) = 15.0$ $p = .002$. The result

is strongly significant $p < .05$. The chi-square test analysis reveals a significant connection between age groups and educators' preferred sources of information. Notable observations include:

- Younger educators (19-25) include this survey and subject specific associations sources of information (potentially due to their familiarity with modern methods and involvement in specialised groups).
- Older educators in both categories (36-45, 46+) show a stronger preference for information shared by colleagues, highlighting the value of experience-based insights.
- The prominence of sources like 'JCT / PDST in-service days' and 'NIPT' across age groups suggests a shared commitment to continuous professional development.
- Older educators exhibit an interest in specialised sources such as 'Subject specific association events' and 'NIPT,' (potentially driven by their desire to enhance subject expertise).
- A consistent proportion in each age group responded 'never' encountering the topic.
- NPC (National Parents Council) was minimally mentioned, especially among younger age groups.

The results do not indicate that DEIS teachers have more knowledge than non-DEIS teachers. Educators in schools classified as DEIS (disadvantaged) seemed more inclined to answer 'yes' to finding out about this topic from this survey. In fact, chi square tests revealed a marginal statistically significant relationship between teachers in DEIS schools and 'survey' as a choice $p < .0555$ compared to their counterparts in non-DEIS schools. Sources of CPD referenced by DEIS/non-DEIS teachers are listed in Table 5.13.

Status	Colleagues	survey	Departmental meetings	ITE	Subject assoc.	JCT/PDST	Never	NPC	NIPT
DEIS	38%	22%	21%	15%	13%	13%	5%	4%	2%
Non-DEIS	32%	29%	22%	19%	9%	11%	6%	2%	3%

Table 5.13 Sources of CPD on transition in DEIS/Non-DEIS schools.

A difference in gender was noted in the response to ‘I don’t need to know about primary’ with more males than females (15.6% v 7.6%) choosing this response. No other gender associations in the findings were noted.

Source of knowledge on transition from CPD etc.

CPD as a source of information (JCT, PDST, Subject Associations etc.) for gathering information on transition is not a popular source. (See Appendix 5.20 for graphic illustration of breakdown of respondents who chose these sources and the subjects these respondents teach.) More respondents who teach Maths (23 of 66), English (20 of 117), Business studies (5 of 59) and MFL (20 of 95) have encountered the topic of transition through these areas. Within the MFL category, teachers of German have the higher response rate, despite the fact the MFL is not part of the primary curriculum.

Preferred knowledge on transition between primary and post-primary

A total of 304 respondents indicated the type of information they would like to receive on primary schools to facilitate transition. Five options were offered with an additional free-text option and an ‘I don’t need to know’ option. Multiple selections were available. As evident in Figure 5.21 responses indicate that knowledge or subject content and teaching methods are the highest preferred choices while textbooks and resources are one of the lowest options (87).

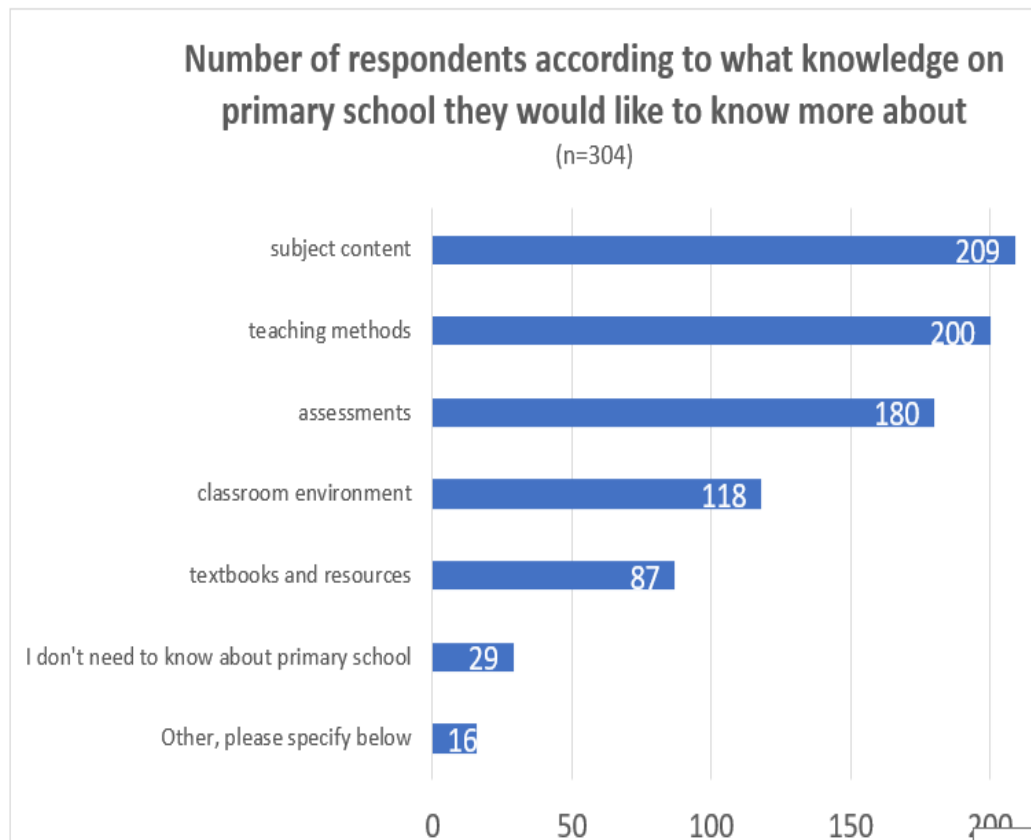


Figure 5.21 Overview of areas where CPD is preferred.

Preference for specific knowledge according to subjects

When subject knowledge preference is compared with the teaching subjects of the respondents, a very small number of almost each subject believe they don't need to know about primary school. (These are identified in green in Appendix 5.21). Knowledge of classroom environment and textbooks is also less important than the wish for knowledge of subject content and teaching methods. Generally, slightly more subject teachers wish for more knowledge on content than methods, while a wish for knowledge on assessment follows knowledge of content and teaching methods across all subject areas²¹.

²¹ Spearman correlation test was conducted to examine whether there is a statistically significant association between two variables: having participated in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and the desire to have more information about teaching methods or subject content. The results were not significant.

Barriers

A total of 296 respondents identified potential barriers to their engagement with the area of transition. Ten options were offered, with multiple selection allowed. Figure 5.46 illustrates the results. Notably, the top two selected barriers were time (225/296) and lack of communication between teachers (148/296), echoing the emphasis on these factors in Phase 2 discussions. GDPR, lack of support for teachers, over-protective parents, and curriculum issues were also identified as barriers ranging between 94 and 98 responses. The age and stage of the teacher were perceived as the least significant barriers. No significant associations between DEIS status, gender, age of the teacher, and these barriers was found.

Transition and place within continuum

301 responses were provided to the question ‘when do you believe a teacher would benefit most from input on the area of transition in their career?’ The data indicate that there is no clear preference for a single stage with 164 of 301 respondents (54%) selecting ‘all the above’. However, over 62/301 (21%) believe ITE is the place and 34/301 (11%) suggest that it is required when a teacher takes on additional roles in a school. The data is visually represented in Figure 5.22.

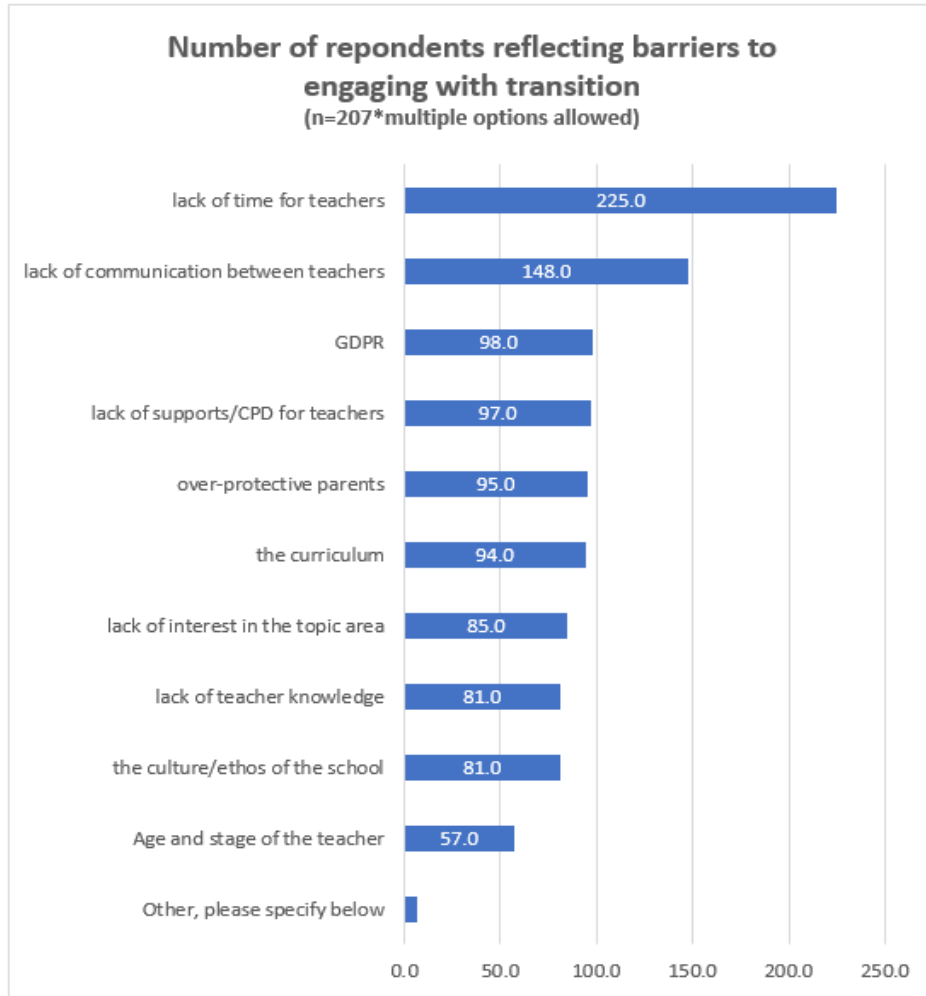


Figure 5.22 Overview of barriers to supporting transition.

While additional comments referred to the need for all teachers, regardless of experience, to have transition-specific CPD annually, others referred to it being a priority for First year teachers only. More comments referred to localised CPD in school rather than as part of Droichead or by central support services such as JCT or PDST.

Within the survey there were also several comments on the importance and relevance of the topic. While a few describe the topic as “important ... interesting ... hugely ignored but important” more questioned the need for a focus on transition for *all* teachers citing time, the temporary nature of the transition and more important issues such as literacy, echoing the sentiments of the teachers in Phase 2. An overview is presented in Table 5.14.

Overview of respondents' perception of the relevance of the topic of transition	
For all teachers: Sample quotes	Relevance in general: sample quotes
- While this is an important topic for secondary teachers, it is wholly important for the first couple of months of the year and then it's over. We play the ball in front of us. Transition is forgotten about by Halloween and so it's not particularly important in the great scheme of things. - Maybe in some schools they have time to delve into what is being done at primary level, but I can't conceive of it. - This topic is probably only addressed with teachers who will directly deal with the incoming first yrs.....Year Head, SENCO Learning Support teacher. All other teachers only want the vital info to get them through teaching the class. Time is a huge issue.....everything is so rushed and holidays are now being shortened which works against the best start for these kids.	- Is there any requirement for bridging the gap? I don't think so - apples and oranges. We need a basic literacy and numeracy to work with, that's all. - Where is there time to learn about the other curriculum? Is it necessary? What purpose would it serve? - What is a matter of fact is that it does not really matter what has happened at primary schools, but there are some woeful problems with certain aspects of literacy. That is the basic ingredient that needs to be bequeathed to the so-called second level school.

Table 5.14 Overview of respondents' perceptions of the relevance of topic of transition.

Summary

The findings suggest that most respondents perceive transition either as a gradual process or as a universal phase experienced by all individuals. The age of the teacher appears to influence this perception significantly. The main sources of information on transition include colleagues within the school, the survey itself, and participation in subject department meetings. Interestingly, age-related preferences are apparent when it comes to the source of this information.

Regarding continuous professional development (CPD), teachers clearly prefer acquiring knowledge related to subject content and teaching methods related to transition. Common obstacles to supporting transition include time constraints and limited communication among educators. Notably, gender, age, and DEIS status do not appear to have a significant impact on these findings.

Respondents hold diverse opinions on the optimal timing for teachers to benefit from transition-related training, although there is a prevailing sentiment in favour of continuous learning throughout a teacher's career. Finally, perspectives on the relevance of the transition topic vary, with some emphasising its importance while others question its priority in comparison to other educational concerns, such as literacy.

5.7 Overall summary of Phase 3

The findings of the quantitative data reveal interesting insights into the knowledge of transition and the impact of this knowledge on practice. The main findings are collated under the Five Bridges.

Administrative bridge

The findings highlight a connection between teachers' knowledge of transfer documentation and their specific roles (managers, AEN staff etc.) but there is a general lack of awareness among subject teachers. Although transfer documentation is generally seen as valuable for identifying students with AEN, concerns arise regarding its reliability, level of detail, consistency across feeder schools, and the time-sensitive nature of the information.

Variables like age, role, and gender significantly influence teachers' knowledge of the transition process. While it is expected that those not fully registered may have less insight into induction processes like interviews, activities, or assessments, a notable number of registered teachers also lack awareness or express uncertainty. Furthermore, the decision to access information appears to be a deliberate choice for some teachers, regardless of their access to the information.

Social & emotional bridge

The survey findings offer valuable insights into the transitional bridge. Overall, there is a positive sentiment regarding the level of support provided. Most respondents expressed satisfaction with the support offered by schools, especially in orienting students to the school environment and setting discipline expectations. This indicates that many schools are actively striving to create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere for newcomers. Nonetheless, certain areas raise concerns. Lower ratings for support in handling stress and assessments highlight potential areas for improvement, as managing stress and assessments is crucial for students' wellbeing and academic success.

Induction programmes and activities were reported by the majority of teachers. Shorter programmes lasting 1-2 days were more common. Respondents' comments shed light on various academic, behavioural, and social strategies and initiatives that schools employ to support incoming students. However, concerns exist about a perceived imbalance between academic excellence (too little attention) and wellbeing (too much attention with consequent strain on teachers' time and available resources).

Curriculum bridge

The survey findings show differing familiarity levels among respondents regarding facets of primary school education. Primary school student assessment reports and national assessments were known more than Aistear and the primary curriculum. There is a perception that primary and post-primary curricula run as parallel pathways, and thus raise concerns about curriculum continuity and a potentially challenging transition. Opinions on Junior Cycle curricula reforms and continuity are divided. Subject-specific challenges exist, with some subjects having better continuity than others. Finally, there is a division of opinion as to who should bear the responsibility for understanding both curricula.

Pedagogy bridge

The findings regarding the pedagogical bridge reveal both areas of agreement and divergence concerning the transition process, with a preference for a fresh-start approach. The recognition of coordinated departmental approaches highlights the importance of teacher collaboration, although the lack of consensus on teaching methodologies within departments suggests a need for more coordinated planning. Additionally, the perception that primary and post-primary teachers are separate ‘tribes’ suggests potential challenges in collaboration and communication. The mixed opinions on the impact of Junior Cycle reforms on pedagogical continuity underscore the complexity of educational changes. Furthermore, teachers source their knowledge of primary education from a variety of outlets, including personal experiences with their own children, interactions with family and friends who are primary teachers, and their own primary school experiences.

Managing learning bridge

Respondents recognise that first-year students encounter difficulties related to organisation, studying, concentration, and self-assessment. While there is a greater emphasis on providing support for parents compared to students, the prevailing sentiment remains positive regarding the substantial support resources available to deal with most skills issues. Nevertheless, some respondents have pointed out inconsistencies in how these programmes are delivered.

Transition

The findings provide valuable insights into how teachers perceive the concept of education transition. Most respondents see transition as either a gradual process or a distinct phase. They primarily acquire knowledge on this topic from colleagues within their school, participation in this survey, or subject department meetings. Interestingly, younger teachers tend to prefer contemporary sources, while more experienced teachers rely more on insights from friends and colleagues.

Regarding the type of information they seek, teachers strongly favour knowledge related to primary subject content and teaching methods, with less interest in textbooks and related resources. The main barriers to supporting the transition topic are time constraints and limited communication among teachers. However, there is no consensus on the optimal timing for teachers to benefit from transition-related input. The relevance of all teachers being required to focus on transition sparks debate, with some teachers questioning its necessity in light of other critical issues, such as literacy. The next discussion chapter compares and analyses the findings of Chapters 4 and 5 in relation to previous national and international empirical research as reviewed in Chapter 2.

6 Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses teachers and their knowledge and understanding of transition in relation to the research questions posed:

- What knowledge do post-primary teachers possess regarding transition, including the process, pedagogical approaches, practices, and curriculum?
- How is the policy landscape in Ireland structured to enhance teachers' capabilities in facilitating the transition of students from primary to post-primary education?

Guided by the insights derived from the findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5, and informed by the Five Bridges of Transfer, the ensuing discussion addresses issues raised by these questions. Section 1 addresses teachers' perceptions of transition within an Irish context and provides an understanding of the conceptual foundation that underpins the findings and discusses it in relation to the theories and definitions as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 1.

Sections 2, 3 and 4 address teachers' knowledge of transition – the process and curriculum and other related documents. These sections are structured according to the Five Bridges of Transfer. Section 2 looks at information transfer and communication between schools as per Bridge 1, the Administrative Bridge; Section 3 combines Bridges 2 (Social & emotional bridge) and 5 (Managing learning bridge) and discusses teachers' experiences and perceptions of social, emotional, and academic supports. Section 4 looks at teachers' perceptions of their knowledge and understanding under Bridges 3 (Curriculum bridge) and 4 (Pedagogy bridge). Section 5 addresses the question of where teachers' knowledge of transition and of primary education comes from, and the influence of personal and policy landscapes on this knowledge. Section 6 specifically address the impact of the

findings of this study in relation to policy and practice. Finally in Section 7, in light of the discussion on different frameworks used to examine educational transition (Chapter 2, Section 1) this study presents a new action framework for transitions that more closely aligns with the findings of the participants' concept of transition. This new framework for action called the 'Three Ts of Transition' (TTT), leverages teacher familiarity with Black and Wiliam's (1998a) categorisation of assessment for, as and of learning. The Three Ts represent Transition of Learning (ToL), Transition for learning (TfL) and Transition as Learning (TaL).

6.2 Section 1: Teachers' knowledge and understanding of transition

This doctoral study offers an insight on teachers' conception of transition in Ireland that is unique in the literature on transitions. The research question asks what **knowledge** teachers have about transition. The question, prompted not only by international research in the area, but also by emergent themes in the exploratory interviews of this study, addresses a previously under-researched area.

As explored in Chapter 2, the concept of transition can encompass diverse viewpoints – ranging from a developmental stage (Eccles & Midgely, 1989), a 'rite of passage' or 'event' (Measor & Woods, 1984), to that of transition as a process (Marshall & Hargreaves, 2007; Jindal-Snape et al., 2019). Marshall and Hargreaves' (2007) found that transition seemed to work better for students when teachers treated it as a process rather than as an event. The findings of this national survey indicate a shared understanding by teachers of transition as a process (Chapter 5, Section 3.8). Indeed, a shared understanding by teachers of a concept is positive as it has an encouraging impact on student achievement (Krischler et al., 2019). In the light of this, and of Marshall and Hargreaves'

findings, the fact that Irish teachers view transition as a process would suggest that they are perfectly placed to ensure a smoother transition experience for students.

However, survey answers to pedagogical and curriculum related questions in the survey show that teachers prefer a ‘fresh start approach’ which is more indicative of transition as a ‘life event’ or ‘rite of passage’. Teachers’ contributions in Phase 2 also confirm this view as evidenced through the language used to describe transition such as ‘jazz hands’ or ‘clean slate’. Overall, this shows a disconnect between teachers’ general understanding of what transition is and their classroom practice with First year students.

Yet the evolving sense of transition as a process (as teachers mature) seems to have no impact on pedagogical practices. While the findings show that teachers *acknowledge* the importance of prior learning (91%), the preference of over two-thirds of respondents for a fresh start approach (68%) implies a view of transition as ‘an event’ or ‘rite of passage’. This suggests a ‘do as I say, not as I believe’ approach in practice. Further analysis of the data revealed no significant statistical association evident between the preference for a fresh start approach and age, gender, teacher registration status or DEIS context. So, while the preference for a conceptualisation of transition as a process by age of teacher aligns with Jindal-Snape’s MMT theory of transitions which considers the knock-on effect of all transitions, the preference in pedagogy practices does not.

Identifying the exact origin of this understanding of transition is challenging and requires additional research. Nonetheless, Chapter 4 provides some indications. One such possibility for the existence of this gap could be attributed to the lack of a clear definition of transition and what it means within educational documents. As evidenced in Chapter 4, the language used to describe transition shifts from an emphasis on student ‘transfer’ (DES, 1982) to student ‘progression’ (NCCA, 2023), a move from the external act of

movement to the student's forward motion, academically, as well as socially, and emotionally.

The awareness by teachers of the need for supports for students has been an increased In the last 10 years due to the emphasis on wellbeing within the curricula, DEIS policies, CPD etc. The pandemic also increased the attention on students who did not have a normal transition from primary to post-primary with many reports on transition during COVID-19 gaining national media attention. This may have contributed to an overall awareness of transition as a process where time and support are needed. It may also have contributed to the positive response to media as a source of information for teachers (Section 5.6.8). In addition, curriculum development has also become a process of increased collaboration of teachers (Looney, 2014). This too could contribute to their openness to a process view of transition. However, the idea of transition as academic progression may not have developed fully formed roots within pedagogical practices of post-primary teachers.

The data also point to a predominant negative discourse in relation to transition within an Irish context. These findings offer additional international evidence to support literature reviews such as Jindal-Snape et al., (2019); West et al., 2010; Hanewald. 2013, etc. There is also a prevalent trend evident in the descriptive comments towards negative linguistic choices. This is conveyed using strongly negative adjectives (such as 'huge,' 'stressful,' 'terrifying,' 'scary,' 'anxiety-inducing,' 'complex,' and 'challenging'), coupled with verbs like 'land,' 'navigate,' and 'enforce,' as well as nouns such as 'shock' and 'challenge' (Chapter 5, Section 5.3).

Despite the negativity conveyed through language choice, progress is evident, and progress takes time. As Lynch et al., (2017) comment, continuity and greater cohesion

are now stressed at all stages of the continuum and in all aspects of the profession, from Céim to Cosán, and from Aistear to Junior Cycle. The findings show that younger teachers believe that JC changes have resulted in increased pedagogical continuity, while older teachers strongly disagree. These perspectives could stem from strong teacher opposition to JC change, an experience that newer teachers might not have encountered to the same extent. Alternatively, it might be linked to the longstanding legacy of viewing primary and post-primary education in Ireland as distinct entities, a topic explored in Chapter 4.

These findings underscore a disconnect between intention and practice, indicating a disparity between policy-driven progression and its actual implementation. It reinforces what Handal and Herrington (2003) describe as the ‘intended curriculum’ versus the ‘implemented curriculum’ and highlights a tension that others such as Looney et al., (2014) have also recognised in an Irish context. As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 4, Maskit (2011) identified three areas of influence on a teacher’s professional development – informational factors such as teacher’s age and experience, professional factors such as perception of the profession etc., and psychological factors that include the relationship between a teacher’s chronological age and their professional development. What the findings clearly show, (Chapter 5, Section 5.6.3/5.6.6), is that the influence of informational and the aforementioned psychological factors on teachers’ knowledge is strong. A major contribution of this study is to provide a unique insight into teachers’ understanding of transitions that is largely absent in the national and international literature, and to consider the interactions between teacher understanding and pedagogy.

While findings of a divergence in transition definitions might not yield extensive policy changes, as exemplified by Galton and Hargreaves (2002) where focus on continuity

resulted in first-year students' separation from other years, a notable concern surfaces concerning pedagogical continuity. Considering that the students in exploratory interviews highlighted some crossover in methods between primary and post-primary, the conscious decision of teachers to take a 'fresh-start' approach is concerning. Post-primary teachers do not seem to leverage the potential benefits of continuity that exist in facilitating the transition.

This section highlights the complexity of transition in education and provides the foundation for understanding the discussion on the practical application of transition by teachers in the next three sections. When transition is understood as a gradual journey rather than a once-off event students experience a better transition (Marshall & Hargreaves, 2014). Such a perspective should encourage teachers to adopt strategies and approaches that go beyond merely addressing the immediate change to providing more sustained supports. The next section addresses the question of teachers' knowledge of the transition process in relation to communication and information transfer as evidenced in the data.

6.3 Section 2: Information and communication

(Bridge: Administrative)

Effective communication through the sharing of transfer documentation has a vital role to play in the transition process (Evangelou et al., 2008), and such documents [EPs etc.] are there to ensure that information is passed between primary and post-primary schools in the best interests of the student (Barber, 1999). Within an Irish context, the importance of such communication between primary and post-primary levels has been recognised since the recommendations of the Transfer Committee (1982) and in later research by O'Brien (2004) and Smyth et al., (2004). While administratively, the Education Passports

have gone a long way in bridging the gap between school levels, the findings from this study question their capacity to support the transition process.

International studies have criticised transfer documents for being ineffective, and for not being provided in a timely manner, or not provided at all (Capel et al., 2004; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008; Mackenzie, 2012) (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4). The data show that these international criticisms of both the content and administration of the transfer documents are replicated within an Irish context (Chapter 5, Section 5.6.1). The content of these documents has been criticised as vague, lacking detail, and simply not passed on to the subject teachers. This study found similar patterns in Ireland, providing strong evidence that these issues cross educational borders. And while there have been other Irish studies investigating the EP, such as O'Connor & Flynn (2021) and Prendergast et al., (2019), these studies have been subject-specific (Maths) and with relatively small sample sizes (n=273 and n=55 respectively). The findings in this study are more representative as the data are based on a larger sample size and across more subjects. In short, this study gives a more widespread view of the overall understanding and usefulness of the EP.

Although the EP is generally rated as 'moderately to very useful' by the users in this data (who are mainly in roles linked to transition), this is mainly in relation to AEN and even though respondents' feedback leaned towards more positive (85) than negative (48) comments, the nature of their comments is revealing.

In line with existing research, the usefulness and value of the EP in highlighting AEN is commented on positively by a significant number of respondents. The EP is also viewed as effective in providing background information and highlighting individual strengths and academic standards, particularly for class formation in First year. (Chapter 5, Section 5.6.1). This highlights the dual function of the EP as its function extends to creating

mixed-ability classes, thereby reducing concerns about academic tracking, as noted by O'Brien (2004) and Smyth (2004). The EPs also assist in forming friendship groups, helping students tackle potential anxieties about changes in their social circles. This aligns with points raised by other researchers such as Topping, (2011); Smyth, (2017); Ng-Knight et al. (2019). In this regard the function of the EP seems more positive than the data of Phase 2 interviews might suggest.

While the positives of the EP are acknowledged, and despite the negativity, the current information within the EPs is not exploited to its full potential. Respondents had varying views on the EP's effectiveness. References in the survey data to the EP are not glowing. While there is only one reference to the resource as 'excellent' in the qualitative comments, the remainder, both negative and positive, share a common language with descriptions criticising the EPs for their lack of detail ('some, ... basic... general...very basic... very general...vague... very bland, safe info...' etc. see Chapter 5, Section 3). The survey confirmed exploratory interview suggestions that the EP comes with a 'heavy health warning'.

The criticisms raised in this study are similar to smaller-scale studies where issues like restricted distribution and inadequate sharing among staff members have been identified (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, (2008); McGee (2003), Foley et al. (2016). O'Kane & Murphy (2016b) similarly identified these issues in Irish pre-school to primary transfer documentation suggesting that such issues are not just international but universal across education settings. The findings also raise questions as to whether the EPs will follow similar downward paths.

The role of the teachers was determined to be a key factor when it came to the effectiveness and use of the EP. This was confirmed by further statistical analysis

revealing a significant association between the role of the teacher (Management, AEN or Year head/tutor) and knowledge of the EP and echoes points raised in Phase 2 interview findings.

Specifically in relation to the transfer documents, General Data Protection Rights (GDPR) was the third highest barrier to successful transition indicated by survey respondents (p.65), which echoes references in Phase 2 interviews to ‘locked cabinets’ and ‘CIA files’ (p.19). Although allusions to privacy might have been briefly mentioned in earlier research regarding ethics, GDPR would only have influenced studies after its implementation in May 2018. However, poor understanding of GDPR may be contributing to its sense as a barrier. Therefore, data protection is an added barrier to contemporary information dissemination. GDPR constrains the sharing of data, but data can be shared when it is necessary. This interpretation may not be used in schools or perhaps, as the EP contains both sensitive and non-sensitive information, it may prove difficult and time-consuming to deselect sensitive/non-sensitive information as necessary information before sharing.

While respondents indicated relatively good knowledge of students’ AEN requirements, their awareness of more personal aspects, such as hobbies and learning preferences, all of which are included within the EP, was comparatively poor (Section 5.6.1). The findings suggest that the practical impact and use of this additional information appears to be limited with respondents indicating a lack of knowledge of students’ hobbies, the information on how they self-report as their preferred way to learn and their interests. Incidentally, the expansion of the EP to include such aspects was deliberate and took place against the context of both UK recommendations from OFSTED (2016) to simplify

the information requested and global research questioning the efficacy of such documents.

But restricted access for teachers is not the full story. The decision to access the documents may come down to personal choice. Some respondents made a conscious decision not to seek out information. The data indicate an almost even 50:50 split between those who wanted to have access and those who didn't. In the quantitative survey, there were comments that showed preference for a 'fresh start' approach for students. The analysis indicates that this choice was made irrespective of their chosen definition of transition. This again indicates a contradiction between their general understanding of the value of a smooth transitional process and their practice that followed discontinuity. The ambivalence is summed up in a comment in Phase 2 interviews on the EP, "What its aims are, are fabulous, but on the ground, it is not useful unfortunately, and secondary schools don't use it" (Hegarty).

In the research on teachers' familiarity with and understanding of the Education Passport, a notable observation is that the deficiency in knowledge about the EP is not specific to any particular subject or school status. This confirms O'Connor and Flynn's (2021) findings in relation to the core subjects, and also reveals no significant association between school status and EP knowledge. On average 35% (118/341) of fully registered respondents are unaware of the EP regardless of school status or subject. The only significant variable is the age of teacher; however, the source of knowledge on transition was found to be personal rather than professional (see Chapter 5, Section 5.6.6).

The survey data also extend the findings of smaller subject-specific studies. For example, 35% of Maths teachers in this dataset are unaware of the EP, which is lower than the average for the core subjects of Irish and English. Specifically, the survey data suggest

that awareness has improved since Prendergast et al., (2019) study where 72% of post-primary Maths teachers were unaware of the Education Passport.

Triangulation of data with student interview responses in Phase 2 and teacher survey responses (Phase 3) would also suggest that this lack of knowledge could be pervasive across school types and geographical areas and merits further research. The broad spread of the sample across DEIS and non-DEIS contexts, and across subjects and regions, seem to align with the explorative interviews and support O'Connor and Flynn's (2021) findings that 72.7% of respondents were unsure or felt that it had not informed their practice as a First-year teacher (p.545). Yet, as stated, the data in this study reveals that there is no difference in EP knowledge (or lack of) across school types. In Phase 2, all students, except for one student in a DEIS school, felt that their post-primary teachers were unaware of their strengths or weaknesses at the beginning of First Year. In the case of this one student participant, they felt the teachers did know about their strengths and weaknesses, and interests, and this in turn had a positive impact on their attitude to school. This exception highlights the potential role that such information can and could play in smoothing the transition process for all students and the importance of teachers in that process as recommended in Longaretti (2020).

A further contribution of this study is the insight into the understanding of student teachers as well as fully registered teachers in relation to transition processes and structures. Unsurprisingly, pre-service teachers did not know what the transition processes in their current schools were with regard to interviews, etc. (Chapter 5, Section 5.6.1). However, the data highlights that over a fifth (21.6%, 72/333) of fully registered teachers did not know whether interviews are held in their school for first year students. This distinction holds statistical significance. Comparable noteworthy associations are

discerned for awareness of entrance assessments (approximately 24% among fully registered teachers and 34% among not-fully registered teachers), as well as knowledge of access to information and knowledge of the types of activities included within induction programmes at their respective schools. This suggests that subject teachers have little involvement with the transition process – unless they are directly involved, there is no need to know. Student teachers are encouraged to partake in all aspects of school life and may find themselves drafted in during induction.

6.3.1 Impact of policy

The introduction of policies specifically designed for disadvantaged schools has proven to have positive results in school retention rates (Weir & Kavanagh, 2019), and the importance of the HSCL is clearly apparent in the findings of Weir and Kavanagh’s study. Such importance is underscored in the qualitative data references to their involvement in transitions and the impact of School Completion programmes, but also in the favourable evaluation of communication dynamics between feeder primary and post-primary schools. These were expressed by teachers who identified as working in DEIS status schools (cf. Chapter 5, Section 5.6.1). As Jindal-Snape & Cantali (2019) found in their small-scale study, effective community communication is crucial because schools often fail to make use of the natural support network within the home and community during transition planning. This oversight has significant implications for transition practices, highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts among all stakeholders. To address this issue, explicit discussions about how transitions are perceived and how practice can be improved through shared understanding are essential.

This is particularly crucial considering that students who went from DEIS primary to DEIS second-level schools reported greater transition challenges and negative experiences (Smyth, 2017). However, as Smyth states, most students from disadvantaged

backgrounds do not attend DEIS schools (ibid.). Therefore, while teachers in DEIS schools have a perception of better community ties, (Chapter 5, Section 3.6) not all students who require such support have access to it in non-DEIS schools.

To address the research questions specifically, the introduction of the EP and *Mo Scéal* recognises the importance of information sharing at an official policy level and is a step in the right direction. The survey findings extend and support international and national research, confirming significant points about transfer documentation and the Education Passport for student transitions. While the EP is appreciated for its use in class formation and background information, specifically for AEN students, criticisms stem from its basic nature, limited content, and teachers' lack of awareness. Dissemination to subject teachers is uneven across schools, indicating room for improvement.

Furthermore, the findings of the GUI report by Smyth (2018) in relation to the use of these documents at pre-school to primary level suggest an uncertain future for these transfer documents as they stand. The EP as it stands is trying to cover two functions – an administrative and informative. However, it functions adequately as an administrative document used to create mixed ability and support friendship groups. However, to avoid similar findings to Smyth (2018) for primary to post-primary level, interventions are needed.

6.4 Section 3: Teachers and social, emotional & academic supports

(Bridges: Social, emotional & Managing learning)

This section discusses the findings in relation to Bridges 2 and 5 (Social, emotional & Managing learning). There are strong parallels between the newly emerging data generated by this study and existing research. While studies from teachers' perspectives are less prevalent within an Irish setting, there are comparisons with international

research. Galton and McLellan's (2018) finding that the social and emotional bridge was well supported compared with other bridges, is equally true in the context of this study. Over 87% of respondents indicated an 'extremely' or 'somewhat good' overall perception of social and emotional supports for students. This is regardless of the profile of the teacher.

Specifically, the data indicate that from the perspective of teachers, the organisational and mentoring supports designed to familiarise students with the school environment, to inform them of the expectations of discipline within the school, and to help them to make friends are well looked after in transition induction programmes (Chapter 5, Section 3.4). Such initiatives address two of three of Evangelou et al.'s (2008) elements necessary for a smooth transition - that of social and institutional adjustment.

6.4.1 Induction

As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 3, different students need different amounts of time to adjust to their new educational environment, implying that transition programmes should extend beyond the initial few weeks. However, there is little evidence of similarities in timing, length, or content in induction programmes across schools. Most respondents record that their programme activities last on average between one and two days. Less than 20% of teachers state that pre-September enrolment bonding or familiarisation activities for all students (excluding open days) happen before September (see Section 5.6.2). Notwithstanding this, the number of respondents who indicate that their schools offer specific tutor classes and student-student mentor schemes is very positive, with the data indicating that over a third of all initiatives continue beyond September. Of interest is that teacher-student mentor schemes are noted by approximately 17% of respondents. The existence of teacher-student mentoring is again a step in the right direction. In light of the studies on the positive impact of student-teacher relationships and transition

discussed in Chapter 2 (Smyth et al., 2004; Marshall & Hargreaves, 2007; Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008), this could be an area for development in transition initiatives. It is also noteworthy that sporting activities are recorded as the most popular activity of induction programmes which could suggest that more diversity in activities should be considered.

6.4.2 Managing learning

Galton's bridges include managing learning as its own bridge. However, within this study, many of the aspects that are included under this bridge were referenced by respondents within the induction programmes suggesting that transition programmes support students emotionally, socially, and academically as stated by Hanewald (2013). 38% of respondents record study skills sessions as part of the induction programme. It is not clear, however, if these are once-off or continuous, although some of the additional comments imply that these are ongoing rather than once-off.

While survey respondents recognise the fact that First years have difficulties taking responsibility for their own learning, assessing their own work and knowing how to study (Chapter 5, Section 3), the data indicate that provision of specific initiatives aimed at managing learning have not been developed to any great extent. In fact, 175 respondents indicated that no new initiatives had been introduced to help students to manage their learning (see Chapter 5, Section 5.6.5). It seems to imply that such metacognitive programmes to encourage students to guide their own learning are not widespread in schools, echoing that of Deakin Crick et al., (2010) (Chapter 2, Section 4). In addition, the growing awareness of the necessity for such programmes is acknowledged by teachers in O'Connor and Flynn (2021) where a majority of participants cited a lack of training on managing students' metacognitive skills and requested additional support in supporting students and managing their learning and organisational skills. What is odd here is that some respondents noted that study skills were included within the list of transition

programme activities; the data would suggest, therefore, that these study skills sessions seem to be provided as once-off events. However, considering the findings of Day and Sachs (2004) regarding “one-shot” workshops for teachers (Chapter 2, Section 2.5.2), the effectiveness of these student workshops is questionable.

Progress, however, by schools is evident with regard to social and emotional supports. The data clearly show that Irish schools have implemented improvements based on issues and recommendations highlighted in previous Irish studies. Survey respondents have mentioned various forms of support, including organisational assistance, adjustments to teachers’ behavioural expectations, and academic aids like taster courses. However, these forms of support often appear to be ad hoc rather than being integrated into official school policies, as outlined in Chapter 5, Section 5.4.4., 28% (78/281) of fully registered respondents are uncertain if there are any specific first year policies in place while 46% (129/281) confirm the absence of such specific policies.

Changes in entrance academic assessments have also reduced the stress associated with entrance exams, as identified by O’Brien (2003; 2004). These assessments (not exams) are no longer seen as barriers to acceptance to a school by students and teachers alike (Smyth, 2017). Similarly, streaming of classes, previously identified as a concern, is now less widespread, and entrance exams, while still held, are used to form mixed-ability class groups (as explained by the participants in Phase 2 and referenced by Smyth, 2018). While such changes may not have been caused by the need to address students’ anxieties and may be linked to amendments to the Education (Admissions to School) Act (2018) which states that “a student’s academic ability, skills or aptitude” (p.25) and subsequent Government Circulars (Circular No. 0007/2020, DES, 2020), their effect is nonetheless positive. Organisational changes are also noted in the data; these include supporting

students during the transition such as the inclusion of peer and tutor mentoring systems as recommended by Maunsell et al., (2007), the adoption of a home base classroom, as suggested by Naughton (1998). Meanwhile Maunsell et al.'s (2007) recommendations for specific class tutors for first years and increased induction activities have been implemented more widely.

In the classroom, the incorporation of wellbeing into the official curriculum has drawn praise, but also criticism for potentially encroaching on valuable class time. Despite concerns as highlighted in the data, the initiative seems to have fostered a heightened sense of awareness and care for students at a broader level. This outcome closely aligns with the perspectives put forth by McGarr et al., (2023) in their review of the new Junior Cycle. However, as indicated earlier, the variety, length and content of induction supports vary and are determined at local school level. While there is no specific indication in the documents reviewed that research or policy intervention brought about these changes, such proactive changes reflect the concerted efforts made by schools to enhance the transition experience for students.

In conclusion, comparison between data collected from Phases 2 and 3 and the existing research identified in Chapter 2 highlights strong parallels. Strong social and emotional supports and areas for improvement in mentorship and activity diversity are consistent findings. Stress, evident from entrance exams, has been reduced; streaming is not prevalent, and induction activities are popular. Irish schools have been proactive in their supports for students and the adoption of recommended strategies demonstrate alignment with prior research. This affirms the value of research in shaping and enhancing transition practices.

6.5 Section 4: Continuity in curriculum and pedagogy

(Bridges 3 & 4: Curriculum & Pedagogy)

This section examines the perceived continuity of curriculum and pedagogy from primary to post primary (Bridges 3 and 4). Specifically, it considers the findings in relation to teachers' knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy at primary and the possible implications on students' learning. It also considers the implications of the finding in Chapter 5 that age plays a significant role in teachers' knowledge.

6.5.1 Knowledge of curriculum continuity

If we accept that the more teachers know about each other's programmes, the easier it is to target the individual needs of students and support them through the transition (Hawk & Hill, 2001; Hopwood et al., 2016), then the lack of attention to, and knowledge of, this element by certain categories of teachers ignores elements that can smooth the transition for students. Prior knowledge by teachers of what students have previously learned is recognised as a competence required for effective teaching in the 21st century (European Commission, 2012b). To reiterate the 1999 primary curriculum, 'the detailed statement of content in the primary curriculum, and the assessment procedures inherent in it, will greatly assist in facilitating communication between teachers and schools at both levels' (DES, 1999, p.31). This implies an expectation that teachers at primary and post-primary levels are aware of curriculum content across sectors. Yet, it is clear from the data in this study that knowledge of the primary school curriculum is limited among post-primary teachers. Overall, knowledge of the curriculum is low in their rank order of knowledge of aspects of primary education (Table 5.11). As could be expected, respondents displayed the least awareness regarding Aistear given its focus on the pre-school to primary sector. However, it is concerning that around a third of respondents stated that

they have no knowledge of the primary school curriculum, and only a slightly larger group (137 respondents) reported having ‘some knowledge’.

The findings of this study reveal a common lack of knowledge about the primary curriculum across subjects, similar to what was observed in the case of Maths teachers in Prendergast et al., (2019). Respondents agreed that there was little intersection between primary and post-primary curricula (119 - agreed; 84 - disagreed), indicating a prevailing perception of a lack of alignment. For example, nearly one-third of Maths teachers (5 out of 16) and approximately 25% of English teachers (13 out of 51) had no knowledge of the primary curriculum in their subject area, with an additional 37% of English teachers (19 out of 51) being uncertain. This finding aligns with Prendergast et al. (2019), who also recorded high levels of uncertainty among teachers regarding curriculum continuity, (34% of their respondents).

There seems to be a divergence in opinion as to who is responsible for ensuring curricular continuity when compared with other studies. A significant proportion of respondents in Phase 3 believed that post-primary teachers/sector should bear the responsibility of preparing students for post-primary education. 111 respondents did not choose either option, indicating a lack of a clear consensus on this issue. However, this contrasts with the findings in Prendergast et al., (2019) where 16% of primary teachers mentioned reciprocal knowledge as a suggestion for improving transition, while only 8% of post-primary teachers mentioned it.

The findings of this study also strongly suggest that, presently, there is not the knowledge base of the primary curriculum at post-primary to support continuity across school levels. This finding implies that the benefits of curriculum continuity during the transition process are being lost; benefits that can address “boredom in school, low interest, and

perceived irrelevance of the curriculum [which] are associated with poor attention, diminished achievement, disengagement and alienation from school” (Eccles & Roeser, p.410). Quite simply, without knowledge of the primary curriculum for their subject, post-primary teachers cannot successfully employ strategies to encourage curriculum continuity within their classrooms.

6.5.2 Pedagogy

Although the data indicate that there is a higher awareness of teaching methods in primary education compared to the awareness of the primary curriculum (as evidenced in Chapter 5), a greater number of respondents still indicate being unaware of the teaching methods in primary.

While Hargreaves and Dalton (2002) suggest that a lack of change in teaching methods can disappoint advanced children who were looking forward to a more complex learning experience, Symonds et al., (2011) highlight the fact that a ‘start from scratch’ attitude in learning methods can lead to frustration and declining interest in learning. As discussed in Section 1 of this Chapter, there is certainly a preference for a fresh start in pedagogy evident in this dataset. And for those teachers who state that it is a good idea to know about each other’s curriculum and pedagogy, their knowledge is too limited to implement continuity in any effective way.

In the classroom, teachers confront a decision regarding how to address students’ prior knowledge: whether to revise and build upon it or begin anew. 68% of the surveyed respondents expressed a preference for the ‘fresh start’ approach, often using terms like “blank canvas ... ground zero... [or] as if they have never encountered the material before.” 66% of respondents indicated that revision is not consistently integrated into their teaching practice.

The comments gathered from the survey suggest that some teachers deliberately opt for minimal revision. They do so to enhance student engagement by prioritising early involvement in new material, rather than immersing students in material that they may have covered before. This choice aligns with their belief that students benefit from an approach that avoids overwhelming them with excessive revision at the beginning.

However, the data suggest that a majority of teachers who participated in this survey are unaware of the primary level curriculum content. This could imply that their approach to revision is based more on their expectations of students' knowledge rather than their actual understanding. Additionally, feedback from Phase 2 students indicating that revision can be overly lengthy, along with findings by Hawk and Hill (2004) suggesting that students find revision boring at times, might be attributed to this lack of clarity on what exactly should be revised. This inference is supported by a comment from a respondent in the survey (refer to Section 5.6.4).

For other teachers, revision is plainly impractical. Like Marshall and Hargreaves' (2007) findings, and the third 'back to basics' approach identified by Mills (1996) in music education, many teachers find it necessary to start from scratch. For this dataset, we can see that the number of feeder schools and inconsistencies in curriculum coverage and primary school preparation make it incumbent upon some teachers to put everyone on a level playing field from the beginning.

Conversely, the same argument was used in support of revision. The rationale varied from equality in learning by establishing a common baseline to a more strategic decision to assume no knowledge. As evidenced in Phase 2 interviews, assumption of knowledge or of none is a common theme.

However, some teachers take a more conscious supportive approach by referencing the need for some students to have a fresh start similar to Comber and Galton (2002). The underlying theme arising from these findings is that, in the absence of clear indications to the contrary, many post-primary teachers choose not to rely on prior knowledge of their students as they cannot be certain of how the primary teachers will have prepared them in their subject area. This is all the more important considering the importance of primary teachers' expertise on students' future engagement with subjects as outlined in Smyth (2017).

However, according to the data, teachers do not totally ignore previous learning. They are conscious of it, with the majority agreeing with the importance for students of recognising prior learning in the first few weeks. The emphasis is on *reference* to it rather than *using it to plan* as expressed in this comment: "I teach my specification and the department agreed scheme of work - regardless of the learning from primary school but use the prior knowledge of students in the class to help the teaching and learning process when particular topics arise". Brand (2009) suggests a smoother transition can happen when teachers value or use previous learning to plan.

While recent curriculum changes have drawn greater coherence and alignment between primary and post-primary, this is not always leveraged by teachers for transition. As evidenced in Chapter 4, continuity between subject specifications and an alignment of key skills in primary and post-primary frameworks is evident in the policies. Its enactment, however, between schools on the ground may lack the same coherence.

Such differences between the aims and implementation of policies are not new. Curricula too can be viewed as technical, a process or the practice (Looney, 2014) and "curriculum aims are rarely a good guide to curriculum experiences" (ibid., p.8). Yet, as Elliot (1998)

reminds us, it is the student experience of this curriculum that matters. With the New Junior Cycle and the focus on continuity, therefore, it is in the best interest of students to support continuity in curriculum and pedagogy.

6.6 Section 5: Knowledge on transition

Teachers' personal experiences and interactions wield greater influence in shaping their understanding of transition and primary education than structured professional development (CPD) or institutional affiliations. This finding (Chapter 5, Section 5.6.6) accentuates the pivotal agency of individual teachers in driving their professional growth and knowledge acquisition, with far-reaching implications for policy and educational practice. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is limited understanding of where teachers acquire knowledge about primary schools and the transition process, particularly within an Irish context (O'Connor & Flynn, 2021). The findings from this study provide new insights into these sources of knowledge.

6.6.1 Acquiring professional knowledge

As discussed in Chapter 2 Section 4, how teachers acquire professional knowledge is a dynamic process shaped by interactions and ongoing reflection, with professional growth often emerging unexpectedly in diverse contexts. This growth is a fusion of limited theoretical insights, personal encounters, beliefs, and practical experiences. Additionally, these sources propose that teachers' knowledge is interwoven with their personal, physical, and psychological dimensions, collectively impacting their professional identity (Maskit, 2011; Toom, 2017; Blömeke & Kaiser, 2017).

Personal influences are by far the main source of knowledge about primary schools. First and foremost, their own children, followed by family and friends, and lastly, their own experiences of primary school (Figure 5.16). This underscores the strong influence of

personal factors over formal professional development within school or from other CPD opportunities in relation to transition. In fact, all CPD opportunities as represented by the data would imply that CPD is fourth in rank order (19%), just above media and personal studies. It is interesting to note that respondents are most familiar with primary assessment reports and national assessments in primary than they are of Aistear or the primary curriculum. This can be attributed to the age of the teacher and the fact that the majority get their knowledge from their children (a strong significant association between the older age groups both in the 36+ and in the 46+ categories and their children as a source of knowledge, Table 5.11 and Figure 5.14). As mentioned earlier it can be assumed that respondents in their mid-to-late 30s would have children in primary school would be familiar with the junior side of primary school reports. However, the 2021 figure is the highest in over 40 years (cso.ie, 2023).

It is not surprising, therefore, that there exists a significant correlation between a teacher's age and their familiarity with primary education. The findings from Phase 2 interviews reinforce this; references were made by participants to the unique perspective of First years that arises from being a parent.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 4, a teacher's past can inform their teaching personae (Chapter 2, Section 4). However, it is concerning that the third highest sources of a teacher's knowledge about primary school is that of their own experience in primary school. Considering the age distribution of the survey sample, their experience pre-dates a wide range of curricular reforms described in Chapter 4 and so reflects a primary education that is no longer current. Interesting, the media such as RTE school hub is highlighted as a significant source for those in the 26-35 age group, while those in the younger age categories refer to siblings over ITE. Experience of working in a primary

school environment is also significant for those in the 19-25 age category. However, the reliability of these knowledge sources is questionable.

Lack of structured knowledge on transition is needed to compensate for an over-reliance on personal experiences of primary school as a source of knowledge. In addition, lack of reliable information sources on transition may be a barrier to any entrants to the teaching profession who did not complete their education in Ireland. Given the growing diversity of the Irish population, diversity in our teacher body is important and such barriers need to be explicitly addressed through ITE or CPD.

While acquisition of knowledge of primary school curriculum and environment relies on the personal, knowledge on the topic of transition exhibits slightly different sources. Jindal-Snape and Cantali, (2019) suggest that teachers often derive their primary school knowledge from colleagues and meetings. The empirical evidence from the survey confirms this assumption to a certain extent (Chapter 5, Section 5.6.6). Almost half of the respondents get their knowledge on transition from colleagues, and approximately a third from subject departmental meetings in school. However, the lack of knowledge on the topic is concerning with just over one fifth of all fully registered respondents (85/370, 23%) indicating that they had either never encountered the topic of transition or had become aware of it solely through this survey.

It is notable that older age groups rely more on gaining information from colleagues in school. This highlights the significance of professional networks and collaborative relationships in professional development and suggests that educators with more experience place considerable importance on learning from their peers. This underscores the role of peer interactions in enriching teaching practices. Indeed, the successes of such collaboration in teacher professional development has been reported by Uí Choistealbha

& Ní Dhuinn, (2021) with regard to the Droichead induction programme. The consistent preferences for ‘JCT / PDST in-service days’ and ‘NIPT’ across all age groups also point to a shared dedication to continuous learning and ongoing professional growth. Despite variations in age-related preferences, the data strongly suggests a collective aspiration among educators to continuously enhance their skills and knowledge throughout their careers.

6.6.2 Professional development

The landscape of CPD opportunities on the topic of transition is limited and varies significantly across different subjects. While the findings of the survey indicate that post-primary teachers of Maths, English, and MFL teachers indicate more CPD opportunities in relation to transition, they also tend to report a higher level of confidence in their students’ preparedness. For example, 26 of 37 (70%); 29 of 68 (43%) English teachers and 15 of 37 (41%) of Irish teachers agree that their students are prepared for their subjects at second level. This raises the question as to whether this increased perception of their students being prepared is linked to a better understanding of students’ knowledge and more realistic expectations. Conversely, teachers of subjects like Business (5%), Geography (14%) and History (28%) with less CPD have lower levels of agreement on student preparedness (Figure 5.20).

There is, however, limited availability of specific CPD sessions related to transition as evidenced in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2, where only one session from the ESCI in one academic year relates to the topic of transition. This highlights a potential area for improvement in teacher development and support.

For NQTs the situation is similar. While the opportunity to register for a workshop with the NIPT exists, (Table 4.2) it is only one of many options. As also evidenced in the

statistics provided by the NIPT, when topics are more relevant to the teacher, they are more attended and, as the DEEPEN report finds, transition from primary to post-primary is not one of the topics that concern NQTs the most, but rather it is for those who mentor them (Uí Choistealbha & Ní Dhuinn, 2021). This confirms Darling-Hammond and Richardson's (2009) findings that CPD sessions are more successful when they address specific needs. Historically such needs have been driven by curricular change (Harford, 2010; Halbert & MacPhail, 2010); they have been a need rather than a school-driven want. Yet as the data show, transition is not a top priority for all practitioners due to lack of time and demands on teachers. The survey asked teachers if transition was a relevant topic for them and very few stated that it was. Considering the fact that transition relates to a certain time frame in the school year, and that student information becomes 'obsolete' very quickly, it is understandable that transition is a short-lived concern in the eyes of the teacher and does not merit attention. In addition, the barrier that might prevent all teachers understanding the process and achieving best practice during transition reoccur again and again – that of time.

As noted in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2, the provision of CPD for teachers is now being centralised. Several changes are currently evident in the provision of CPD through Oide, notably in the accessibility of events and courses for both primary and post-primary teachers, without regard to their specific sector. This inclusivity extends to the NIPT workshops, providing opportunities for professional development to educators across the board. Such an improvement is a small step towards elucidating their Principle of shared professional learning. However, there appears to be a limitation in the diversity of events and courses listed as available for post-primary teachers interested in learning about teaching and learning in the primary sector. In fact, as of January 2024, the single topic for primary teachers scheduled nationwide is on the teaching and learning of

Relationships and Sexuality Education from Junior Infants to Sixth Class which is open to two teacher nominees from each primary school for which substitution is provided if necessary (accessed 19/01/24). In addition, the NIPT workshop specifically on transition from primary to post-primary is still categorised as post-primary rather than cross-sectoral.

Considering the pronounced focus on professional development within the Continuum of Education and the renewed policy emphasis on facilitating smooth student progress through effective transition, it is interesting to observe that Initial Teacher Education emerges as an information source about the transition process for nearly a quarter (78/301) of the respondents. This rating is higher than for CPD, and more than the exploratory teacher interviews might have suggested. This finding contrasts with the levels of non-ITE engagement noted in O'Connor and Flynn (2021) and even stands as a departure from findings in Phase 2 interviews of this present study.

The significance of ITE in equipping teachers with comprehensive knowledge about all facets of the transition process becomes even more pronounced in light of the fact that a substantial 62/73²² (See Appendix 5.8) or 85% of PME's or undergraduates are involved in instructing First-year students and are more likely to be involved in transition activities. Moreover, there is no substantial difference in the average contact hours between student teachers and their fully registered counterparts, with both groups averaging slightly over four hours. While policies regarding ITE ask that students teach across all levels during their placement, this finding suggests that this may not be the case and affirms O'Connor and Flynn's supposition that student teachers are almost always given first year classes, an issue that raised concerns during Phase 2 student interviews where one participant

²² Excludes '10 other' in Appendix 5.8

(Feale) recalls having up c student teachers while another sixth year, stated that student teachers never get junior classes.

6.6.3 Collaboration as effective knowledge

Only 1% of respondents reported engaging in shared CPD between primary and post-primary sectors compared to 44% in the TALIS report (OECD, 2019) referenced in Chapter 2. While collaboration between primary and post-primary schools received positive descriptions from 45% of the participants, the data illustrates an important distinction: functional communication, which encompasses activities like sharing facilities and extending invitations to events, is relatively prevalent. However, professional communication involving the sharing of expertise, educational resources, or collaborative teaching is noticeably less frequent. Surprisingly, though, initiatives involving primary students joining secondary classrooms are more common than Phase 2 data might have initially suggested. Nevertheless, it is particularly striking that, within the realm of professional collaboration, combined CPD emerges as the least emphasised element. This is not surprising given the description by Lynch, Hennessy and Gleeson (2013) of CPD in general “as historically fragmented, underfunded and poorly implemented” (as cited in Lynch et al., 2017, p.442).

While the calls for cross-collaboration come from research (Prendergast et al., 2019; O’Connor & Flynn, 2021) and policies alike, and the benefits for in-situ observation included within ITE guidelines (Teaching Council, 2020), the reality is somewhat different. As noted in Chapter 4, the NIPT workshop for NQTs on transition between primary and post-primary is only available to post-primary teachers, not to primary teachers. Observation in primary schools is only noted in one of the PME consecutive programme, and the education support centres have limited transition-topic related

workshops available. However, minor adjustments can potentially open pathways for collaborative communication. The NIPT workshop, for instance, should be accessible to all, both primary and post-primary, encompassing both fully registered educators and NQTs. Moreover, holding the workshop in person would facilitate subject-specific discussions. As Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) suggest, active participation and hands-on experience rather than abstract discussions lead to successful CPD. Additionally, this study has highlighted a number of commendable school-specific transition initiatives that have the potential to be implemented across multiple schools; however, the first step is to share these initiatives widely.

In terms of ITE offerings, progress is relatively gradual at post-primary consecutive programmes, it is plausible that this dynamic could shift over time. This anticipation arises from the growing significance of the transition topic within a broader European context, especially in the light of Ireland's reference to European reports in the past for educational guidance. In particular, the ten principles for policy development outlined in '*Continuity and transitions in learner development*' (European Union, 2017, revised 2018) focus on learner development over the segregation of educational levels, and as evidenced in research, teachers are in the perfect position to alleviate transition challenges encompassing social, emotional, or academic dimensions.

6.6.4 Responsibility

The issue of where the responsibility lies for inequalities in students' knowledge in subjects as they enter post-primary point to deeper underlying attitudes. Is it with the primary teacher or with the post-primary teacher? Sutherland et al., (2010), Braund (2009) and Strand (2020) all found levels of trust as an issue; it was also found in this data. While students in the exploratory interviews put the responsibility on the primary teachers as they need to prepare them for future subjects, the teachers in the survey see it

slightly differently with more respondents indicating that post-primary teachers should know about their subjects at primary (127) rather than the other way round (75). That said, a considerable number chose neither. The free-text comments indicate that it should be a shared responsibility.

However, as evident in the analysis of policies and documents in Chapter 4, responsibility is clearly being laid with the post-primary principal for administration and the post-primary teacher for pedagogy and curriculum. Yet, it is also clear that there is a lack of an official structure for transition and the suggestion of an over-reliance on expectation of best-practice and leadership by principals (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3.). Over the decades the agency given to teachers has increased both at primary level and at post-primary with the Junior Cycle. While agency allows teachers to move away from what Lynch et al., (2017) call “submissive and technicised teacher response” to become collaborators (p.448), lack of oversight and co-ordination can also cause problems. For example, at primary level, the apparent flexibility in the school timetable and the discretionary choices made by individual teachers when allocating time to specific subjects were mentioned by students in Phase 2 (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2). Students also noted that certain subjects received minimal emphasis during their 6th class year, potentially placing them at a disadvantage when transitioning to post-primary. Despite mandatory teaching hours and guidelines for primary schools, this variety in agency during the 6th class year contributes to the disparities in subject knowledge and continuity encountered by teachers and students in first year. While the survey indicates that some subject departments within schools collaborate on topics, few collaborate on teaching methods, and hardly any collaborate with primary school teachers. Equally the freedom allocated to JC teachers in the specifications (Chapter 4, Section 4.2) also cause a potential for a gap.

Concerns regarding the disconnect between primary and post-primary teachers, which surfaced during the Phase 2 interviews, were substantiated in the survey data. A total of 193 respondents either ‘strongly’ or ‘somewhat agreed’ that primary teachers and post-primary teachers were like ‘separate tribes’. They were also described by another respondent as ‘two worlds’, which is similar to Sutherland et al.’s (2011) ‘two cultures’. Another stated that communication should ‘be two ways’. There is, however, a significant contrast between primary and post-primary teachers as revealed by McCauley (2010) and Hopwood et al., (2016). They noted that more primary teachers were open to communication and advocated for more frequent school visits as potential solutions to bridge the gap between the two educational levels.

The source of such disconnect between primary and post-primary teachers within an Irish context has been attributed to the historical division and separate development of primary and post-primary education in Ireland (DES, 1982; Walsh, 2016). This has also continued through separate initial teaching institutions. However, the division, as rooted within the minds of teachers, and proliferated through separate policies over the years, needs to be overcome. Possibilities include the implementation of cross-teaching practice between senior primary and first years in ITE as advocated in the Teaching Council guidelines (Teaching Council, 2020) and evidenced in the B. Mus Ed. programme in TCD (Kerin, 2019). Similarly, the emphasis by the Teaching Council on bridging the research gap between ITEs and schools through the Research in Residence Scheme (RiRS) introduced in 2020, could be widened to include cross-sectoral research projects such as McCormack et al., (2014) that resulted in growth in teachers’ knowledge and in increased achievement for students. Throughout the data in this study, there are also numerous comments that reference aspects of transition in a negative light (see Appendix 5.22). This aligns with findings of research described in Chapter 2. Steps towards creating a more positive

perspective on transition by teachers could include bursaries as part of the RiRS to promote action research on developing transition programmes.

We must remember, as set out in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3, the responsibility for sustaining and improving the quality of professional practice is clearly part of the teacher's personal responsibility (The Teaching Council, 2012). Professional practice and learning are envisioned as 'more teacher-led and less provider-driven' (The Teaching Council, 2016, p.5). O'Connor and Flynn's (2021) participants were not always aware of who was responsible for transition in their schools. Addressing such issues could involve the establishment of a national framework to guide the transition process in a more structured way, potentially alleviating concerns and ensuring greater consistency in pedagogical approaches within schools and for all students. However, as research suggests, such a framework should be implemented according to the local needs of a school and create school-based policies rather than the top-down approach evidenced in Coffey et al., (2011).

6.7 Section 6 Implications on policy and practice

Chapter 4 underscores the acknowledgement within policies of the pivotal role transition plays in the educational journey. However, findings from this study suggest a disjunction between policy rhetoric and classroom reality. While educators grasp the importance of transition for students, a preference for a tabula rasa approach is evident in classroom practices. This section delves into the ramifications of these findings on both transition policy and practice. It specifically scrutinises four key areas: the implications for cohesive communication between sectors, the prospective trajectory of the Education Passport initiative, the repercussions for ITE, and the profound influence that educators' diverse

experiences can wield on their grasp of primary school curriculum and pedagogical strategies within secondary level classrooms.

6.7.1 Recognition of the importance of transition

It is crucial to understand that the process of transition for the primary school student encompasses more than just their physical movement from one institution to another. It involves the transfer of their subject knowledge, past experiences, familiarity with the post-primary school environment and teachers, the formal information from application forms and school visits, and more informal sources like siblings or primary teachers. Alongside these elements, these young students carry their apprehensions, worries, and enthusiasm for the journey that lies ahead. As Hargreaves et al., (1996) describe it, it is a triple transition of school cultures, friendship groups, and the transition from childhood to adolescence. Student experiences of this transition can be smooth or not, and teachers are tasked with facilitating this transition for all students. The student experience is central, but research must also focus on the school systems around the child (Downes, 2019).

This study, therefore, set out to examine the questions:

- What knowledge do post-primary teachers possess regarding transition, including the process, pedagogical approaches, practices, and curriculum?
- How is the policy landscape in Ireland structured to enhance teachers' capabilities in facilitating the transition of students from primary to post-primary education?

The data has presented new knowledge about the process of information transfer between primary and post-primary schools and its usage, as well as concrete evidence of the source of teachers' knowledge on transition and primary education. Against the background of unprecedented educational policy development of the last 15 years (Chapter 4, Section

1), the challenges of transition are numerous. While policies promote progression for students in their journey, the documents also promote teacher agency in pedagogy and professional development (Section 4.2.3). Within this context, gaps have emerged between theory, policy, and practice. Among these gaps are the challenges faced by teachers who lack a designated role in the transition process. These educators may not have, or value, access to documents relating to the previous history of the First-year students. Furthermore, they might be unfamiliar with how a teacher prepares a 6th-class student for post-primary school, particularly if they lack a parental role or connections within the primary school sector. The study findings also highlight pressing issues such as time constraints and resource limitations, alongside a lack of specific transition related CPD opportunities.

In addition, this discussion has highlighted that post-primary teachers' knowledge of transition is inadequate and is very much framed by their individual experiences and age-related factors over professional ones (Section 5.6). This knowledge is also underpinned by quite different interpretations of the concept of transition and application of transition in practice (Section 5.6.7).

6.7.2 Shared communication - the Educational Passport (EP)

The Primary Framework's (DES, 2023) move towards its curriculum areas becoming "more differentiated into subjects to reflect children's growing awareness of subjects as a way of organising the world", (ibid., p.16). This could address issues that were raised in Phase 2 data where students failed to see the links between tasks in primary school and subjects in post-primary school. This may impact levels of anxiety about 'new' subjects as they enter post-primary and understanding of curriculum continuity addressed in Bridges 2 and 3. However from a post-primary teacher's perspective, unless they receive CPD on developments at primary, the gap will continue to exist. For example, the

language used to describe ‘The Continuum of Assessment’ such as intuitive assessment, planned interactions and assessment events, are not currently used at post-primary level. In addition, terms of reference for planning such as “visible, invisible, and recorded preparation” (ibid., p.23) are not familiar. Teachers cannot communicate across sectors if they do not share a common professional language. This must be addressed through CPD for both sectors and / or the gradual introduction of a common professional language. Similarly, the Education Passport reporting needs to be reformed to engage and inform the many stakeholders as outlined in the Primary Framework (see Figure 6.1a).

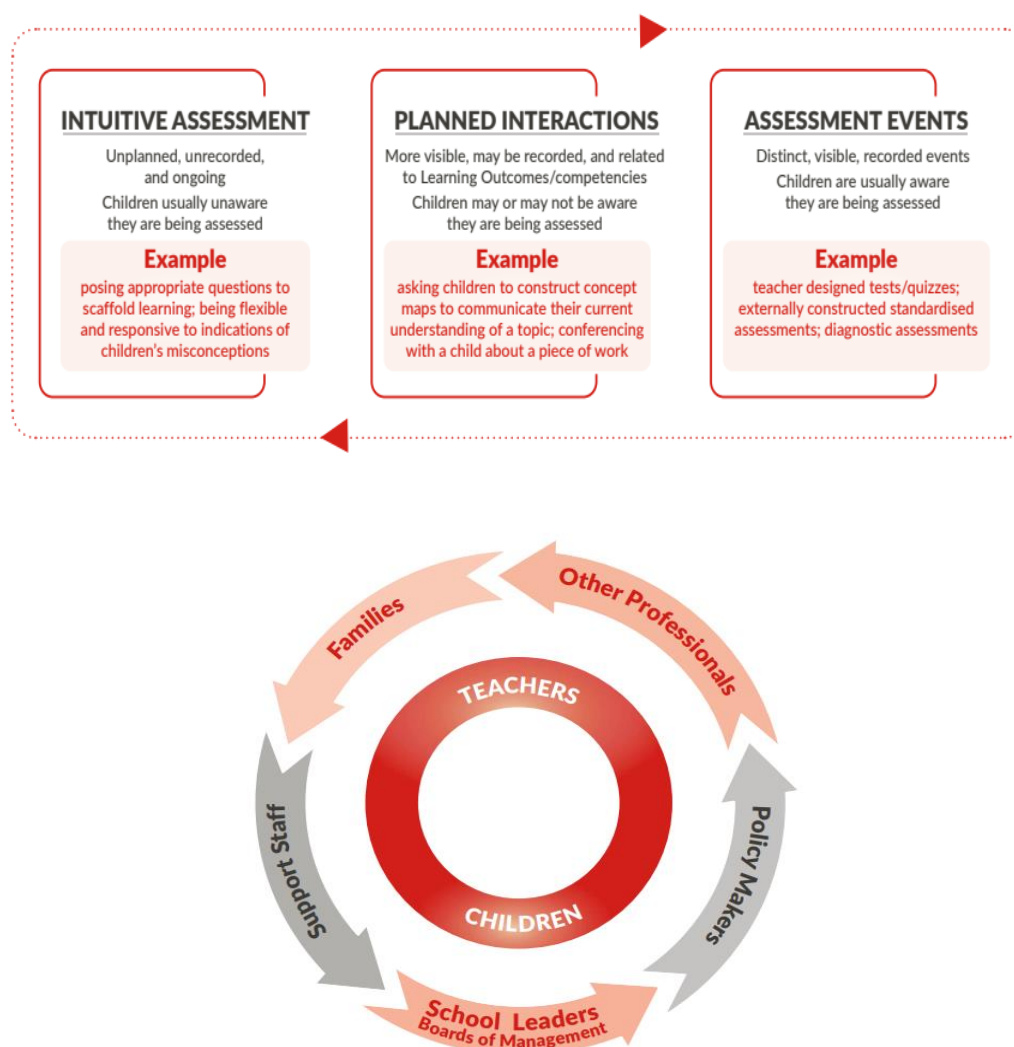


Figure 6.1 (a) Assessment levels and (b) Key Skills, Primary Framework, (DES, 2023)

In its current format, the EP is informative, and it is a useful document, but not for everyone. On the one hand, aspects of the EP (such as the parents' and student contributions) offer insightful information from the parent and the student on how they learn, while on the other hand, the EP Report Card offers an insight into the academic achievements of the students in their respective primary schools in the 6th Class Report Card. As evident in the data, information on AEN and other important health information is very important and is shared. The EP in this regard is informative for certain stakeholders in the outer ring of Figure 6.1(b).

Yet the question arises if the other information is informative for post-primary subject teachers who share the centre of the ring (Figure 6.1b) with students. Given the criticisms by Kirschner (2017) and others with regard to self-reported learning styles, this information may not exactly be useful or accurate. The data from management participants (see Section 5.3.1) and teachers (see Section 5.6.2) in this study would strongly suggest that the information in the EP is not well tailored to the post-primary teacher population in terms of content, interpretability and relevance. The lack of consistency across schools and teachers and the lack of shared assessment understanding across sectors are significant factors in this.

The language of assessment is still different between primary and post-primary. As discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1, the Education Passport 6th Class Report goes some way to bridging the descriptor gap between primary and Junior Cycle, for example, the word 'expectations' is used as per the Features of Quality used in assessment in the Classroom Based Assessments of the Junior Cycle. Yet, they still are different. The Features of Quality span the range of 'Exceptional', to 'Above expectations / In line with expectations' or 'Yet to meet expectations'. And, as mentioned in chapter 4, primary

summative assessments are expressed in terms of STen scores on the EP report cards etc. compared to the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement that employs terms such as Distinction, Higher Merit, and Merit etc. to describe results.

Name: _____
 Likes to be known as (if different): _____
 Date of birth: _____
 Parent(s)/guardian(s): _____

your child has a plan to support learning, an extra 'P' is placed in the column marked 'P' beside any item(s) that relates to this plan. 'P' is used in place of the word 'plan'. Information shared about your child's learning reflects progress based on this plan.

Your child as a learner

1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Most of the time 4 Always

	P	1	2	3	4
Interested in learning	P				
Listens attentively					
Works well on his/her own					
Works well with other children					
Keeps trying even when tasks are difficult					
Homework is completed to his/her ability					

Your child's social and personal development

1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Most of the time 4 Always

	P	1	2	3	4
Manages and expresses feelings well	P				
Is sensitive to others' feelings					
Mixes well with other children					
Behaves well in class					
Behaves well in the playground					
Participates well in Religious or Ethical Education					

Your child's learning

In general, information shared about a child's learning reflects expectations based on the primary school curriculum objectives for 6th Class.

1 Working towards expectations
 2 Meeting expectations
 3 Ahead of expectations

English

	P	1	2	3
Communicates with others in a clear and effective way	P			
Understands what is said by others				
Reading				
Writing				

Gaeilge Exemption: No ☐ Yes ☐
 Certification of exemption will be forwarded with this report card to the post-primary school.

	P	1	2	3
Communicates with others in a clear and effective way	P			
Understands what is said by others				
Reading				
Writing				

Mathematics

	P	1	2	3
Understands and uses mathematical knowledge	P			
Understands and uses mathematical skills				
Uses knowledge and skills to solve problems				

Figure 6.2 Extract from EP Report Card for 6th Class (NCCA, 2020).

While this would suggest continuity in assessment terms between primary and post-primary reports, there is no transparency in illustrating how one assessment criteria correlates with another. It is interesting to note that the data in this study indicate that there is a good flow of information regarding AEN. In fact, it is very clearly indicated in this report that 'P' refers to support learning plans and that this student requires support. However, other indicators in the reports are not as clear cut. NCCA guidelines for

completing the 6th Class Report Card for primary principals and teachers advise “In general, your judgements about the progress and achievement during the year should be referenced to expectations based on the content objectives/outcomes in the primary school curriculum for 6th class. This common reference point is important to ensure consistency in the information shared with post-primary schools” (NCCA, 2020, p.2). However, if, as indicated in the data, post-primary teachers are mostly unaware of the curriculum for 6th class, then this would not be beneficial to them. This lack of cohesion not only confuses parents and guardians but also hampers teachers’ ability to consistently understand grading systems across schools. It is not a matter of understanding meaning, but rather its application to their specific context. It is, therefore, important to establish clearer connections between different assessment criteria and ensure uniformity in terminology across educational levels to address this issue. Without such efforts, the distrust between primary and post-primary sectors (as evidenced in previous literature, Chapter 2, and in the data of the survey (Chapter 5, Section 5.6) that stems from the lack of transparency in assessment and reporting practices is likely to persist. In this context, it is understandable from an administrative perspective that they may prefer the information gleaned from internal entrance exams to guide class formation rather than reports or a reliance on STen results in Repot cards that they may or may not receive in a timely manner as indicated by the data in Phase 3.

Secondly, The NCCA guidelines also suggest that the 6th class teacher could:

list key teaching, learning and/or assessment practices that were effective in supporting the child’s learning, e.g., group work, one-to-one feedback, Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). ...[and could] identify any key area(s) where development may be needed. The suggestions may relate to the child as a learner, the child’s social and personal development or the child’s learning across the curriculum. [They could also] briefly identify one or two actions to support the child’s future learning in post-primary school.’ (NCCA, 2020).

However, the two text boxes on the reverse side of the report card and headings – ‘How you can further support your child’s learning’ and ‘Additional information to support your child’s transition to post primary school’ are clearly aimed at the parent/guardian and not the post-primary schools or teachers. Therefore, to live up to the new Primary Framework and its principles of learning and assessment, the EP should be reviewed to be informative for all stakeholders. In its current format it cannot offer insightful information to professionals.

Recommendations for the development of the EP include:

- For future iterations of the EP, I propose dividing it into three distinct templates.
- Management template: This template would be designed exclusively for school management and should include information relevant to their needs.
- Staff sharing template: This template is intended to replace existing information-sharing practices and prevent unnecessary duplication of effort and resources among staff. It should contain details relevant to the teacher in the classroom (see Figure 6.3).
- Primary student portfolio: For students the EP should become a portfolio that should consist of an example of work in at least three subjects that they are proud of. These would then be handed over to their new subject teachers in their new school. Specifically in the areas of English and Irish, this would show level and ability. It also acknowledges eight years of learning, and as described by one participant in Phase 2, has been very successful.

Practical examples of how schools could develop continuity

- Structural changes to the division of class time in 6th class to a more post-primary format would again ease the transition to longer classes and clear breaks in subjects.

- While sharing of teachers with post-primary may not be feasible, an easier option is to use the expertise within the primary school and introduce the concept of multiple teachers for different subjects at senior primary.
- From the post-primary perspective exchange of information regarding with feeder schools the minimum subject topics that are needed to be covered in 6th class would facilitate a basic level of shared knowledge expectation.

Student's EP Shared information			
Name		Class:	
Name preference	SHE	HE	THEY/THEM
AEN		YES	NO
Interests:			
Student learning preference template			
	YES	NO	
Works well in groups.			
Works well independently.			
Prefers to work alone.			
Can be quite chatty.			
Is very quiet.			
Needs clear instructions.			
Thinks visually.			
Prefers to make notes.			
Likes to learn through doing.			
Likes to learn through listening.			

Figure 6.3 Example of an Education Passport template for teachers.

6.7.3 Other professionals - ITE programmes

Central to the teaching profession lies the role of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). As detailed in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1, the Teaching Council Guidelines include a suggestion for fostering cross-sectoral engagement, though it remains discretionary rather than mandatory. While this guideline holds merit, its feasibility across all ITE programmes may vary.

For instance, undergraduate teaching degrees typically entail a brief placement in a primary school, albeit for a limited duration. However, such opportunities are not universally integrated into all consecutive postgraduate PME programmes. Having been involved in consecutive ITE programmes for over two decades, it becomes apparent that incorporating extensive cross-sector placements within the confines of a demanding two-year programme poses significant challenges. The workload is already substantial, and students often juggle commitments between academic studies and placement schools. Therefore, while the notion of cross-sectoral engagement is commendable, its implementation across all ITE programmes requires careful consideration of practicality and workload management.

Navigating placements and coordinating them can be a source of significant stress for both professionals and students. Particularly during the induction phase of teaching, student teachers are often primarily focussed on the act of teaching itself, sometimes neglecting the broader context of their relationship with the continuum of education. Nevertheless, this period presents an invaluable opportunity for post-primary teachers to grow and develop. Ideally, such experiences should be integrated into programmes like Droichead, where teachers face fewer financial constraints and have greater flexibility to engage with feeder schools. One potential approach to integration could involve subject-

specific placements, where teachers spend one day per week in a primary school for a term, focusing on teaching their specific subject to 6th class students. This approach not only alleviates stress during the postgraduate course, but also fosters better professional communication and collaboration, benefitting both the teachers and the post-primary schools involved. This must be promoted at a policy level rather than at a local level.

6.7.4 Variety of experiences

It is evident that primary school policies outline specific allocations of time for both core and non-core subjects in the curriculum, with Irish mandated to be taught through the medium of the language, as outlined in the Primary Framework (DES, 2023). However, there are instances where student participants of this study perceived that they have experienced an imbalanced approach in certain subjects such as Irish, Geography or Science (see Section 5.2.3). Although these may be isolated occurrences, it raises concerns.

There is also a suggestion that some primary teachers prioritise subjects they personally enjoy. While acknowledging the importance of teacher agency, recently advocated in policy documents for curriculum and teacher development (Sections 4.2 and 4.3), it is imperative that this autonomy does not come at the expense of providing students with an equitable educational experience.

Furthermore, considering the well-documented research on students' anxiety upon transitioning to First year, an imbalanced approach to subject interaction could exacerbate students' concerns about their readiness for this crucial transition. Moreover, such imbalances may lead post-primary teachers to perceive primary teachers as contributing minimally to students' academic preparation, potentially fostering distrust between educational sectors. To address these issues, continual oversight of time allocation across

subjects at the primary level is crucial. Additionally, fostering communication between primary and post-primary teachers through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) initiatives would enhance mutual understanding and collaboration.

While it is evidenced that transition from primary to post-primary is being addressed in recent educational policies over the last 15 years (Chapter 4), and in particular in the most recent Primary Framework (DES, 2023) where ‘Transition and Continuity’ is listed as one of the eight Principles of Learning and Assessment, there is still work to be done in ensuring that policies and practice converge.

6.8 Section 7 Towards a new framework for action

As expressed in Chapter 3, Section 1, my philosophical standpoint aligns with pragmatism, which demonstrates a commitment to resolving issues by identifying practical and adaptable solutions within the confines of real-world constraints and complexities. Pragmatists inherently seek to tackle challenges by devising implementable remedies. Potential solutions to a disconnect between primary and post-primary and gaps in teachers’ knowledge around transition include more cross-communication and a national framework on transition to inform school policies. Yet, time constraints will not always accommodate these aspirations. The principal starting point, therefore, is to consider how the different existing frameworks could be used to engage teachers in the process. This study has allowed me to consider the existing frameworks for transition.

Having worked with the framework of the Bridges in this study, a number of points come to mind. The framework was extremely useful for categorisation and thematic analysis, and its use to organise, evaluate and analyse how transition is organised within schools is effective. However, at times, aspects of the Bridges merged, and the restrictive nature of the themes did not allow for crossover. This was evident in Bridges 2 and 5, Bridges 3

and 4, and (at times) Bridges 4 and 5 as noted in Chapter 5. Downes (2019) described the Bridges as “more passive” (p.1469) compared to Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems. Perhaps ‘static’ is a more suitable adjective. In addition, the Bridges, although originating from educational research on transition, and stemming from an understanding of transition as change with continuity and discontinuity, does not easily promote multiple truths. It views transition from an organisational viewpoint rather than a personal viewpoint, and in this regard fails to engage with the student or with the teacher.

The data indicate that from the perspective of the teacher, transition is viewed as a ‘process’ in theory but as an ‘event’ in practice. The Bridges framework, while focusing on the areas that need to be considered to allow students get over the bridge, do not focus enough on where the students come from in terms of education. The framework, therefore, does not lend itself to address the considerable number of teachers who are unaware of either their subjects in primary school, or the pedagogy used or even how transition happens in their school.

To develop teachers’ professional knowledge of transition as a process that embraces multiple perspectives – that of the primary teacher, the student and the post-primary teacher – the following new framework is proposed, one that potentially bridges the gap between what Jindal-Snape et al., (2021) describe as “the naive conceptualisation of transition as change and the higher-level conceptualisation of transition as a life event” (p.12).

Researchers frequently employ theories and frameworks, as detailed in Chapter 2, Section 1, to analyse transitions. However, translating these concepts into practical tools for teachers in the classroom remains a challenge. According to Overton (2015) what elevates a common-sense level to a higher level of conceptualisation is reflection. What is needed

is a practical framework that empowers teachers to become ‘reflective practitioners’ (Schön, 1983), to reflect on various aspects, such as students’ backgrounds, their own role in facilitating transitions, and ways to enhance their teaching practices to align with educational guidelines (as discussed in Chapter 4).

Such a framework should also support continuity in both research and practice, in line with the Teaching Council’s objectives. Given the pragmatic context where multiple realities coexist (Chapter 3, Section 1), and considering the time and workload constraints identified in this study (Chapter 5, Sections 5.6.6 & 5.3.6), an ideal framework should be practical, user-friendly, and easily comprehensible for teachers.

The various models of transition presented in Chapter 2 offer diverse perspectives on the subject. However, these models often lack practicality and do not readily translate into actionable frameworks for schools and teachers. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2, only two of these theories, the XII Pillars and Cantley et al.’s model, specifically pertain to educational transition. The Twelve Pillars (Jindal-Snape, 2023) emphasise aspects like disposition, beliefs, support systems, and environmental factors. Cantley et al.’s (2021) model focuses on teachers, schools, and society. The former is quite broad and challenging to break down into manageable components, while the latter emphasises the role of the teacher only within the process and therefore has limited application beyond the classroom.

I propose a new Framework for Action called the ‘Three Ts of Transition.’ It leverages teacher familiarity with Black and Wiliam’s (1998a) categorisation of assessment ‘for’, ‘as’ and ‘of’ learning. I categorise transition into transition ‘for’ (TfL), ‘as’ (TaL), and ‘of’ (ToL) learning. ToL is concerned with information and formal learning; TfL is

teacher facilitation of transition through curriculum and pedagogy, and TaL is learner development through the process of transition.

6.8.1 ‘Three Ts of Transition’

The ‘Three Ts of Transition’ are Transition of Learning, Transition for Learning and Transition as Learning and are defined in Table 6.1. The aim of this model is to offer a view of transition as a process. By encouraging reflection and independent learning the new framework allows teachers to see their role across the continuum of the transition process. Teachers can use this model to guide their reflection through consideration of the questions such as: How do I / can I / should I support, build upon and develop ToL, TfL and TaL for my students? None of the existing frameworks discussed in Chapter 2 support teachers to actively engage with the transition process between primary and post-primary.



Three Ts of Transition	
Transition of Learning (ToL)	<u>ToL</u> can be defined as the ways in which information about the specific school and the specific student is <u>passed from primary to secondary and secondary to primary in formal and informal ways</u> between all stakeholders
Transition for Learning (TfL)	TfL can be defined as any student learning and teaching that prepares and promotes continuity of curriculum and pedagogy and development of students’ learning.
Transition as Learning (TaL)	<u>TaL</u> can be defined as any learning from the transition from primary to post-primary that results in a modification or change in behaviour and personal development (mental, social, emotional) through experience. It can be either positive or negative.

Table 6.1 The Three Ts of Transition.

At the heart of this new model is the fact that bridges are man-made structures that can ultimately bridge a gap, and, as Downes (2019) posits, aid ‘temporal understanding’ (p.1471). In summary, the proposed framework embraces the Five Bridges as illustrated in Figure 6.1, but it also acknowledges the role of the teachers, their beliefs, experiences, and the context in which they operate, (as advocated in the XII Pillars), as it is created for use by teachers in their schools. This study’s primary focus on teachers offers valuable insights tailored to their perspective. However, the use of the action framework extends beyond teachers to encompass individuals in management and policymakers alike. This study underscores the interconnectedness of education, highlighting the collective role of all stakeholders in fostering educational advancement. Therefore, further development of this framework could serve as a potent reminder of the continuum of education and the collaborative efforts required for meaningful progress in the educational landscape.

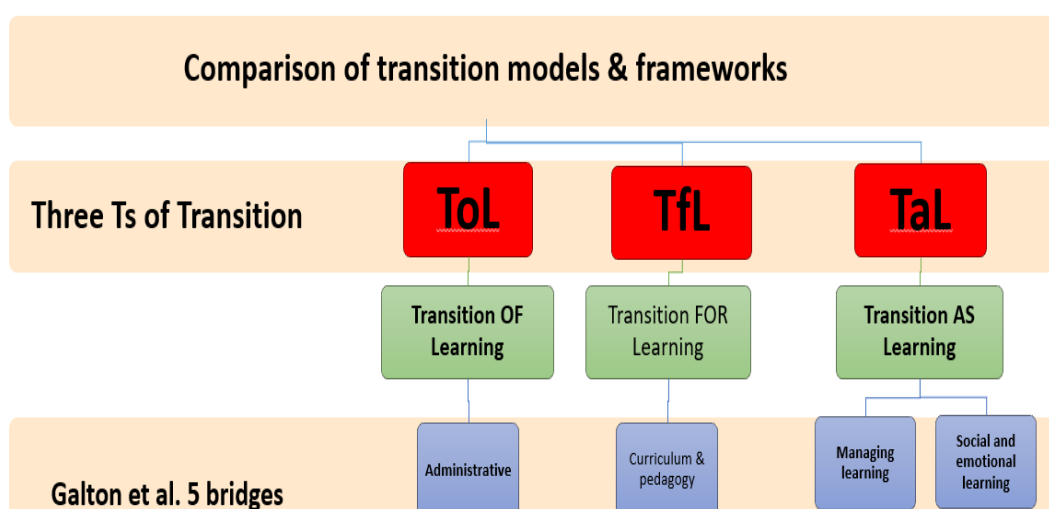


Figure 6.4 Comparison of proposed model and the Five Bridges framework.

One of the strengths of this proposed model lies in its flexibility and simplicity. As discussed in the section about the benefits of discontinuity (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.4), there is a discernible overlap with aspects related to managing learning and fostering learner independence. This overlap exemplifies the concept of Transition as Learning

within the proposed model, where modifications in the learning process occur. Additionally, while it maps to the XII Pillars, this model is intentionally designed to be more straightforward as it offers a simplified entry point for the teacher. The action model strives to bridge the transition gap but also to offer a deeper understanding of the process.

Transition of Learning (ToL)

ToL can be defined as the ways in which information about the specific school and the specific student is passed from primary to post-primary and post-primary to primary in formal and informal ways between all stakeholders before transition. These can be categorised into two areas, administrative and informative knowledge. Administrative knowledge includes entrance assessments and EPs as well as *formal and informal* transfer of learning from 6th class teacher-talk, friends, siblings etc. While formal information transfer through open days and visits is well advanced as a transition support, the informal aspect is not as recognised.

The first “T” in this model firstly acknowledges the empirical evidence indicating that both students and post-primary schools rely not only on formal information but also on informal sources. As highlighted in Chapters 2 and 5, research conducted by Naughton (1998) and O’Brien (2004) underscores the significant reliance of students on sources like siblings, family members, and friends for information about post-primary schools. Similar to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (EST), the action model recognises the intricate interplay of systems, such as family and school dynamics mediated by personal teacher-student interactions.

Furthermore, the present study reveals the importance of these informal sources for teachers to gain insights into primary schools. Several previous studies, along with the data in this study, emphasise that post-primary schools value informal information from

primary schools but often refrain from documenting it. ToL acknowledges these informal sources for all stakeholders. Therefore, going back to the key self-reflective questions (How do I etc.) teachers are shown how they might approach the action framework in Figures 6.5; 6.6 and 6.7. Addressing such questions on teacher expectations and the impact on their practice takes an initial step of reflection in addressing reported challenges of different expectations in behaviour, knowledge and skills discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.4.

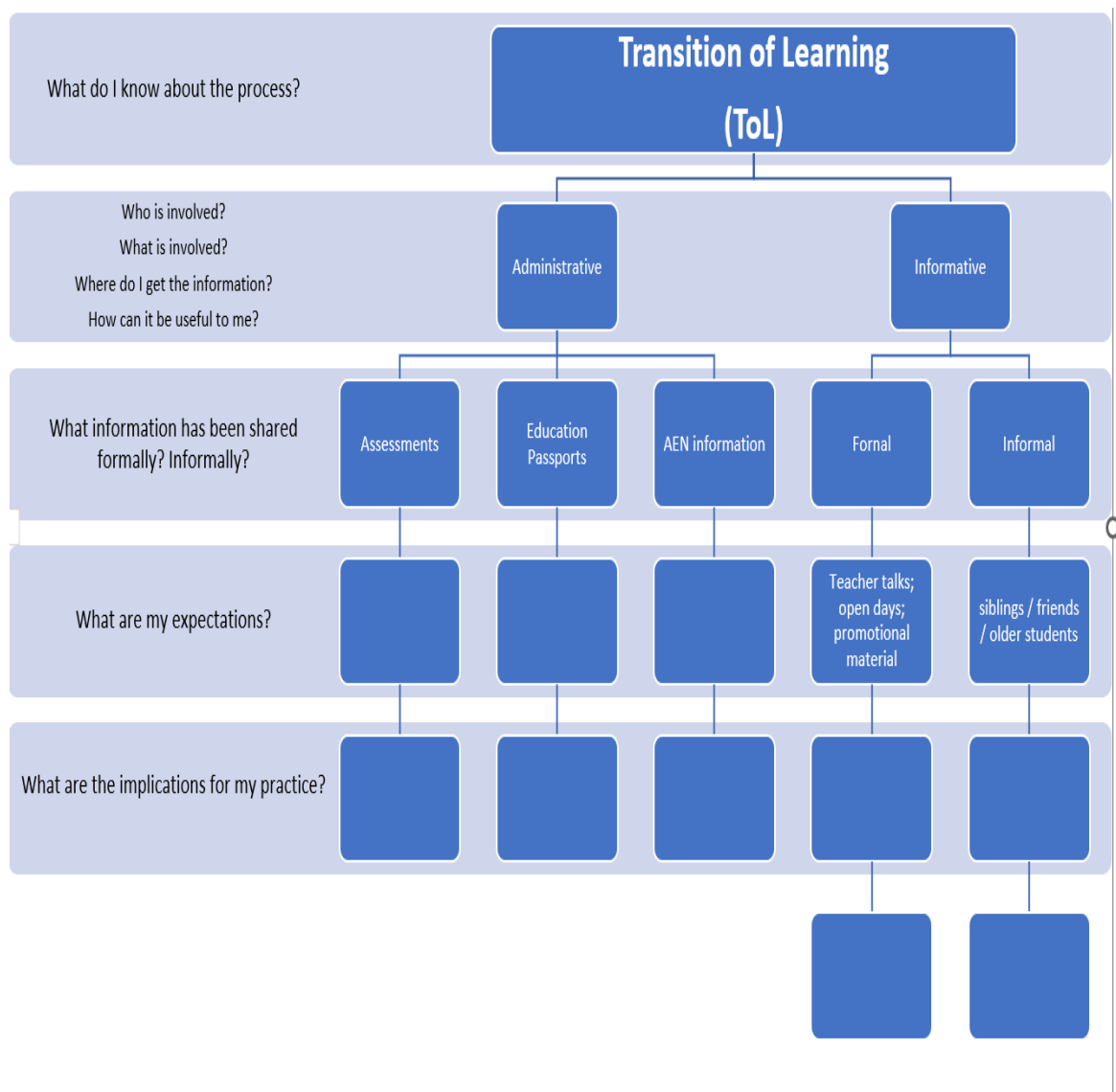


Figure 6.5 Transition of Learning.

The ToL aspect of the model acknowledges the crucial role of primary teachers in preparing students for the transition. The framework, therefore, is equally applicable to primary teachers. It underscores the importance of primary teachers conveying positive and supportive messages rather than resorting to derogatory remarks. The role of 6th class teachers in shaping students' perceptions should not be underestimated, as outlined by Waters et al.'s (2014) findings, which demonstrate that positive expectations can lead to positive transitions for students. Cross-sectoral localised CPD using this framework would not only encourage reflection but also result in shared knowledge and approaches. Reflecting on the work of both sectors can contribute to addressing trust issues and bridging the gap between 'separate tribes'.

The flexibility extends to the use of the model for other stakeholders. A student-friendly version might address questions such as 'What does the school website say? What information do I want to know? When is the open day? What are my three important questions that I want to find out during the open day/evening? What are my expectations? How might my daily routine change? Who do I know who attends the school? Liaising with Student Councils on the development of a template would not only address transfer of information from a student's perspective, but also encourage student voice.

Similarly, the model holds potential for engaging parents as well. A member of The National Parents Council, integral to the Expert Group in this study, demonstrated significant interest in the role of parents and guardians during the transition process. Enhanced collaboration with parent support groups in refining this adapted model could empower parents and guardians to actively participate in facilitating transition. Employing a uniform model across all stakeholders would further enable local schools to

comprehensively grasp transition dynamics from various viewpoints, thereby effectively addressing associated concerns.

Transition for Learning (TfL)

TfL can be defined as any learning and teaching that can promote and/or cause concerns for continuity in curriculum and pedagogy. This includes knowledge of content, level, methods, knowledge of AEN students or their level in the subject. Furthermore, awareness of how terminology usage across both senior primary and post-primary in all subjects would promote a sense of continuity between subjects for students and for post-primary teachers and eliminate inconsistencies in approach arising from numerous feeder schools. Furthermore, ensuring clarity in school guidelines on homework at both primary and post-primary levels and reaching an agreement on teaching methods, such as in Maths, can contribute to curriculum continuity.

While many initiatives arising from questions in Figure 6.6 could be achieved through collaboration between teachers at both levels, time constraints may present challenges. Therefore, an effective approach could involve the development of online surveys designed by post-primary subject teachers for primary teachers. These surveys, conducted at a national level, could provide concrete information that teachers can utilise at the departmental level in post-primary schools. This approach could also be integrated as part of a Droichead task, where Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) within a school or across schools in both primary and post-primary education collaborate during the first week of school to gather information. This not only facilitates the exchange of knowledge but also informs teachers about primary schools in their initial education stages while aligning with recommendations by the Teaching Council.

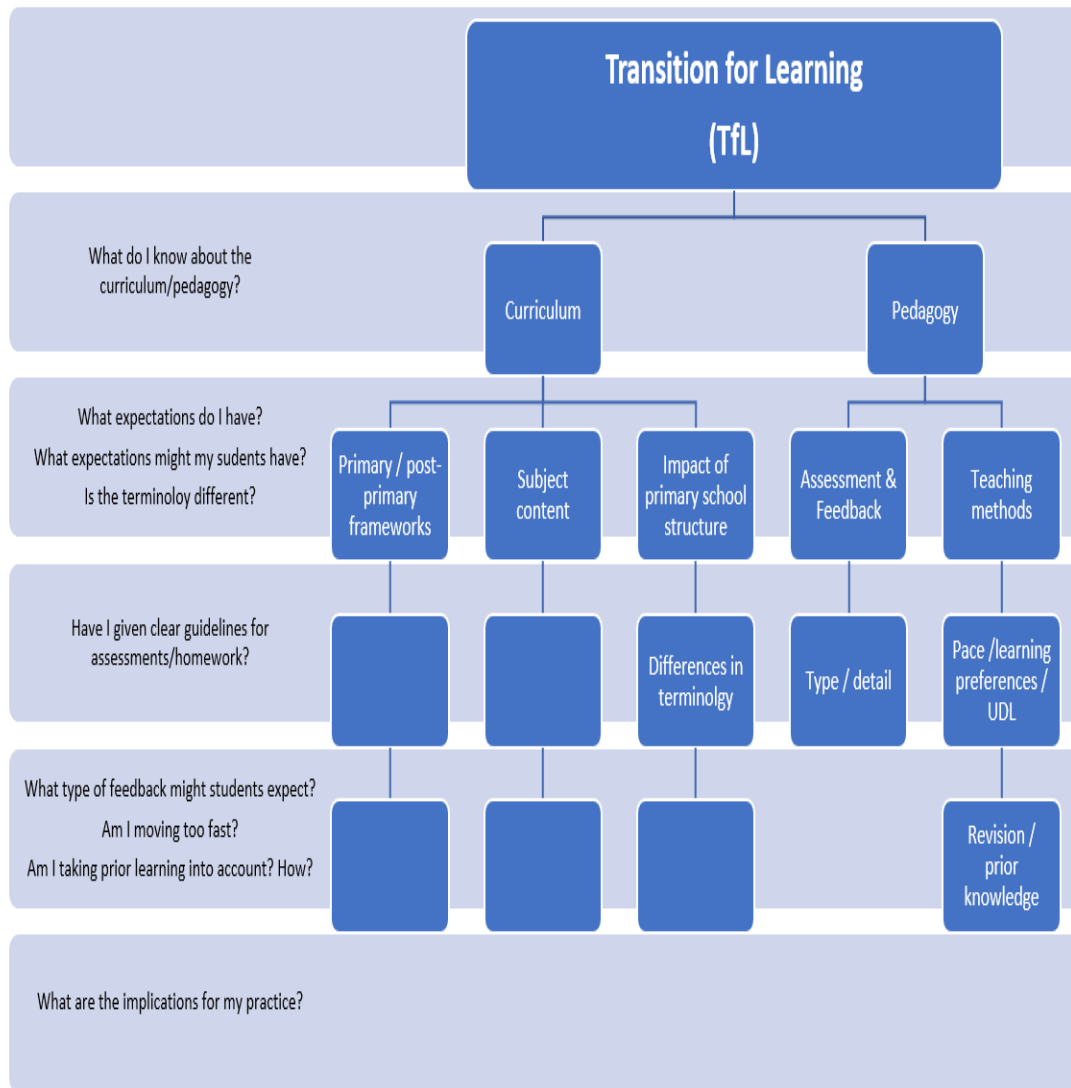


Figure 6.6 Transition for Learning.

Transition as Learning (TaL)

In this proposed model **TaL** can be defined as any learning from the transition process that results in a modification or change in behaviour (see Figure 6.7). It includes personal development (mental, social, emotional) through experience and can be either positive or negative. This area comprises Bridges 2 and 5, the Social and Emotional bridge and Managing learning. It encompasses aspects of Evangelou et al.'s (2008) social and institutional features of successful transition and is similar to Ding's (2008) description of transition as a time of new routines where previously accepted behavioural patterns are

modified to align with unfamiliar environments. It also echoes Thursdon et al.'s (2010) definition of transfer (Chapter 2, Section 1). On a practical level, TaL serves to alert primary teachers of the necessity of promoting responsibility and maturity in 6th class students. It asks them to question how they prepare their students for the organisational aspects of post-primary school, and what opportunities they can use in 6th class to develop such skills and autonomy. From the perspective of the post-primary teacher, it again asks for reflection about their expectations of the skills and abilities of first year students, and perhaps to modify such expectations.

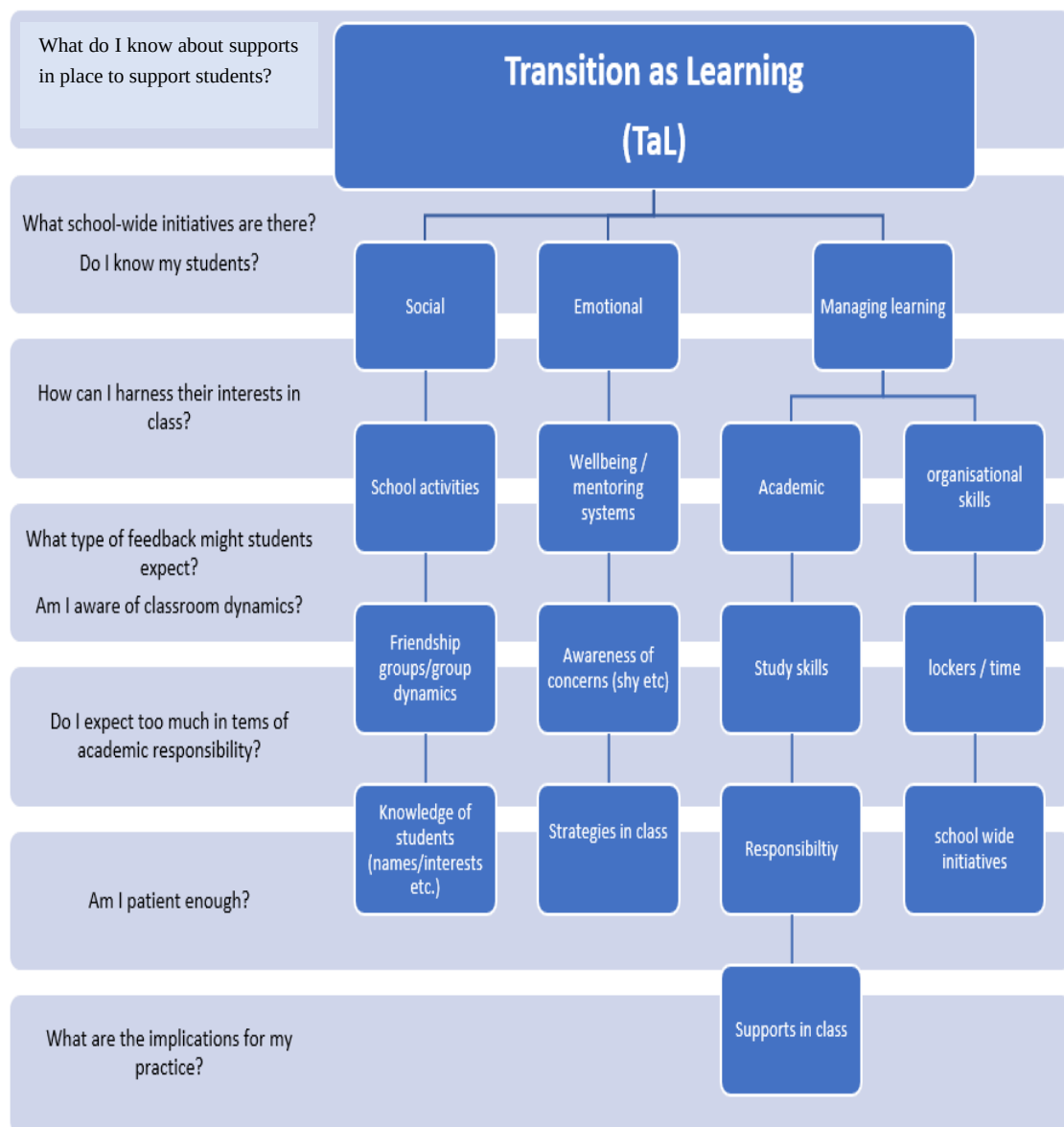


Figure 6.7 Transition as Learning.

Summary of framework

In summary, this framework provides teachers with a valuable lens to understand the transition process comprehensively. It aligns with the trend towards promoting independent professional development, as advocated in frameworks and professional development documents like Cosán (Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1). Moreover, it underscores the importance of self-reflection in teaching.

The Three Ts can facilitate self-reflection, prompting teachers to assess their own teaching practices, experiences with transfer documents, and student transitions. This reflective practice can lead to adaptive strategies that continuously enhance the effectiveness of transfer processes. It can also be integrated into school self-appraisal forms and eventually contribute to the development of more formal school policies regarding transition. The examples provided in this section of the study, can serve as a starting point for teachers who will ultimately go on to incorporate their own strategies, foster sharing and utilisation within schools, and to establish comprehensive transition policies.

6.8.2 Conclusion

This chapter delved into the exploration of teachers' knowledge and understanding of the transition process, addressing the research questions posed. The findings revealed that Irish teachers' grasp of transition is influenced by their roles and age, and despite their foundational awareness of it as a process, this knowledge does not consistently translate into classroom practices. In response to this disconnect between theoretical understanding and practical application, and between primary and post-primary schools, pragmatic solutions and recommendations have been suggested in the form of a new transition framework for action. The Three Ts of Transition builds on previous frameworks (such

as Galton et al., 1999) but simplifies them and tailors them to involve teachers. Within the context of this study, the model seeks to immerse the teachers in the complexities of the transition journey, guiding them toward a more holistic understanding of the various elements that converge to shape transition dynamics. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their practice according to the Three Ts of Transition. By promoting this deeper engagement, it is envisioned that a smoother experience can be fostered for both educators and students.

7 Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

At the heart of transition from primary to post-primary is the student, but the role of the post-primary teacher in facilitating transition is of considerable importance. The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of post-primary teachers' knowledge and understanding of transition to inform future practice. This research was guided by two overarching research questions:

- **Research question 1:** What knowledge do post-primary teachers possess regarding transition, the process, pedagogical approaches, practices, and the curriculum within primary schools?
- **Research question 2:** How is the policy landscape in Ireland structured to enhance teachers' capabilities in facilitating the transition of students from primary to post-primary education?

Specifically, RQ1 focussed on exploring teachers' understanding of the concept of transition; the knowledge they have; the source of this knowledge, and how this knowledge impacts on their practice. RQ2 looked at how transition is addressed in educational documents and how they inform and support teachers' understanding. Researching these questions has revealed new and interesting insights into post-primary teachers and transition, along with action points that could move towards addressing these points. Some of these are included below.

1. There is an increased emphasis on transition nationally and at a European level, as recognised in educational policies and documents over the decades. The emphasis is shifting from 'physical' movement or 'transfer' of students from one school to the next, to the progression of learning from one school level to the next.

Action point: As discussed in Section 6.6.4, raise the profile of the topic through dissemination of information and best practice at local level through the Education Centres and at national level through dissemination of research by all teachers involved in research.

2. While curricula and frameworks and related policy documents increasingly acknowledge and focus on the transition from primary to post-primary, there are, however, no formal guidelines for the transition process nationally. The study reveals that while policy frameworks and teacher development advocate school and teacher agency, this agency can result in variations in transition experiences for students because school policies on transition and inductions are inconsistent or non-existent.

Action point: Introduce national guidelines for schools on best practice that can be adapted to the individual school's needs, as discussed in Section 6.7.

3. Previous research had not studied teachers' understanding of the concept of transition. The findings of this study show a divergence between their general perception of transition and their practice. Most post-primary teachers perceive the concept of transition as a 'process' rather than as a 'once-off event.' However, in practice in the classroom, they are more inclined to treat it as a once-off event by taking a fresh start approach to teaching their subject (see Section 5.6.4 and as discussed in Section 6.6).

Action point: Introduce Action template of the 'Three Ts of Transition' to encourage change through reflective practice as described in Section 6.8.

4. Teachers' discourse on transition is more negative than positive.

Action point: Encourage a more positive attitude through shared research between the two sectors through Teaching Council research initiatives.

5. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the transition process is influenced by two key factors: firstly, their role in positions such as year head, form tutor, AEN Departments or management. Teachers in these roles process greater familiarity with the transition process, while most subject teachers remain uninformed unless they have a specific role in management or AEN coordination. This is not dependent on teachers' qualified status or DEIS status of a school. Such factors do not influence the knowledge as much as the role (though NQT/student teachers show more knowledge than might be expected due to their involvement in a range of school activities). Secondly, as evidenced in the data, better understanding of the transition process comes with age and experience both personally through family and friends and professionally. Teachers' main source of understanding remains informal, through family, friends, and their own children. There is also a tendency for them to rely on their own experience of primary school, which is problematic due educational changes and development.

Action point: Encourage links with feeder schools either virtually and or through shared CPD opportunities or closer links between First years and 6th class through shared initiatives.

6. The Education Passport performs two functions – transmission of administrative documentation (enrolment, class formation, formal reports etc.) and informative knowledge (information regarding strengths and weaknesses, learning styles, interests etc.). However, with post-primary schools, the trickle-down dissemination of all students' information to teachers does not always happen. This function of the EP needs to be addressed to ensure it performs its original intention.

Action point: Re-engagement at a national level with this document to collate an information template with information that is actually needed between schools. A student-portfolio should replace aspects of the EP as discussed in Section 6.7.2.

7. Communication between primary and post-primary schools remains at a functional (sharing of facilities etc.), rather than at a structured and professional level where sharing of expertise through local collaboration or combined CPD opportunities might occur.

Action point: Shared CPD. Involvement of primary teachers in Post-primary Cluster days for specific subjects.

8. Integration of wellbeing into schools has increased awareness of social and emotional supports for students but places extra constraints on teachers who have limited tuition time for subjects as referenced in Section 5.3.2 and 5.6.3.

Action point: Review wellbeing hours; potential to include time within each subject and extend the teaching time for subjects accordingly.

9. In ITE programmes, the extent to which continuity is supported varies. There is a disjunct between ITE guidelines and actual practice in how continuity between the two sectors is addressed in consecutive programmes.

Action point: Consider alternative ways (virtual links to classrooms etc.) of engaging with primary schools within the timetable of consecutive programmes particularly.

In summary, the findings collectively underscore the differences between teachers' perceptions, policy dynamics, and the practical realities of implementing effective transition strategies on the ground.

7.2 Originality

In the context of Irish educational research, there has been a noticeable absence of comparable studies on transition and the role teachers play (outside of specific subject areas). This study offers a broader perspective on teachers' understanding and implementation of transition across all subject areas. This study adds new knowledge to international and national research on teachers' perception of the concept of transition. It also provides empirical evidence on teachers' sources of information on transition that has not previously been researched. The study reveals a disparity between teachers' beliefs about transition and how they implement these beliefs in their classroom pedagogies. This research also contributes new insights to the Irish educational landscape by gaining specific knowledge on the use and usefulness of the Education passport. In doing so, it brings attention to missed opportunities associated with this valuable resource.

7.3 Recommendations for policy and practice

As discussed in Section 6.7, this study has implications for many stakeholders. The study reveals that more could be done for students during the transition phase, not only by formal school structures and events, but in the classrooms by the teachers. The study presents a number of recommendations for policy and for practice, both at school, teacher and at national level. Some of these recommendations echo previous work on transition in the Irish context, and they highlight that transition has been, and remains, an area for focussed development in the Irish education system. Other recommendations stem from original contributions of this research. What they all have in common, however, is that they are practical and cognisant of challenges, such as time constraints and resource implications as identified by stakeholders who contributed to this research.

1. Improve Education Passport dissemination:

As evidenced in the data the Education Passport strives to fulfil a formal and an informal role in documentation and information transfer. However, valuable and useful information is not effectively conveyed to subject teachers, and access seems to be limited to specific roles. To facilitate the distribution of information contained in the EP to all teachers, and to make the transition process more transparent for the entire school community, the following is recommended:

- Implement a user-friendly online template for EPs to facilitate information sharing with all teachers (See Section 6.7.2 for sample).
- Develop school policies on transition to ensure transparency and clarity around the process.
- Encourage teachers to seek knowledge about students during their self-reflective activities as part of ToL.

2. Enhance curriculum and pedagogy continuity:

As part of teachers' self-reflective practice in TfL, encourage them to –

- Use cross-sectoral questionnaires between local schools to foster curriculum and pedagogical consistency.
- Explore technology, such as live streaming, to connect 6th-class and first-year secondary school classes.

3. Promote cross-sector professional development:

As noted in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2, the provision of CPD for teachers is now being centralised through Oide, the new support service for teachers and school leaders. This consolidation will hopefully offer an integrated perspective on all aspects of CPD for educators and enable the identification of gaps in various areas. However, as pointed out

in Section 4.3.2, certain accessibility issues are still evident at this early stage of Oide's development. Further recommendations follow from this merger:

- Monitor the evolving landscape of teacher professional development through the newly formed 'Oide' support service launched 1st September 2023.
- Designate at least one combined primary and post-primary CPD day annually to encourage collaboration among educators.

4. Develop a transition communication model:

There is a clear need to formulate a comprehensive transition communication model that bridges the gap between post-primary teachers and teachers in feeder schools which can be adapted to suit the needs of individual schools. Its purpose is to establish links between teachers, management, and students in local school communities. This can be achieved through professional collaboration and social integration. (Due to the significant interest generated among educators involved in this study, I have been invited to collaborate with a post-primary school to create and execute a transition communication model, which is scheduled to commence in 2024.) The following is therefore recommended:

- Create a comprehensive transition communication model which can be adapted to bridge the gap between post-primary teachers and feeder schools adaptable to individual school needs.
- Establish links between teachers, management, students, and local school communities to promote collaboration and social integration.

These recommendations aim to improve the transition experience for both students and teachers while considering practical implementation within the constraints of time and resources.

5. Transition framework for action:

The ‘Three Ts of Transition Framework for Action’ discussed in Chapter 6 (Section 7) offers a structure within which to operationalise recommendations. The Three Ts provide *teachers* with a structured perspective on transition, clearly identifying the scope of their role in facilitating smooth transitions for students. It offers primary and post-primary schools a structure within which to engage with transition, and ensures that not only information, but also an understanding of the role of teachers across the continuum in the transition process is shared. It can be applied by researchers in future studies, but also by teachers to reflect on the overall transition process and to consider their role in it. Finally, a student-focussed version could be developed to support parents and students to consider, and address, the range of aspects of transition.

7.4 Research process: From limitations to opportunities

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Cohen et al., (2017) describe educational research as a process “in which there are typically trade-offs between what one would like to do and what is actually possible” (p.3). Like any doctoral thesis, this journey has been a collaborative effort between two individuals: the supervisor and the researcher. We have interpreted the data in a certain way but there always exists the possibility for diverse interpretations of the findings by others, or the possibility that certain research studies have been overlooked. This thesis is being submitted at a point in time while the *Children’s School Lives* and *Growing Up in Ireland* studies are on-going and will continue to generate new findings on students’ experiences of transition in Ireland.

An unexpected limitation was the pandemic. The timing of the data collection phase partly coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and may have impacted the Phase 2 data as some of these students transitioned during 2020. However, it also necessitated a change in methods moving from planned in-person interviews to online, and from focus groups

to individual interviews. This adaptation proved advantageous, affording participants comfort within their familiar settings and enabling a broader national sample. While I would have liked to add another dimension to this study, like Galton et al.'s ORACLE study, and conducted observational research within a school, the constraints of the pandemic made this impossible at the time.

While the sample size is larger than other studies in this area and geographically spread (See Chapter 5, Section 5.6; Appendix 3.10), the survey intentionally did not ask teachers to identify their schools. This was a deliberate choice made to maximise survey participation. However, this approach limited the ability to conduct detailed comparison of findings in relation to specific school types. This is an area for further research.

It also seems logical that this researcher should cross to the other 'tribe' and conduct the same research with primary school respondents to gain a rounded picture of attitudes, knowledge, and practices in relation to transition from primary to post-primary in Ireland.

As affirmed by other researchers and referenced in Chapter 3 of this thesis, it is essential to recognise that one of the constraints inherent in Mixed Methods Research is the sheer volume of data it generates and the challenges it presents in the distillation of data. I also encountered this challenge. However, this difficulty will, in due course, also present me with an opportunity to dig deeper into the data and share additional findings through publications beyond the thesis.

While the benefits and challenges of using the Bridges as a structural device throughout this thesis was identified in Sections 2.2.7 and 3.6, its use was advantageous. Through this structured methodology, I came to recognise its inherent limitations in addressing the subject comprehensively. This restricted perspective enabled me to acknowledge the

constraints and, subsequently, to explore alternative avenues of thought. Consequently, the concept of the Three Ts of Transition emerged. Rather than supplanting the Bridges, these were devised to assist both teachers and students in traversing them. Marshall and Hargreaves' (2007) analogy of 'crossing a humpback bridge' does not capture the essence. Transition, in reality, resembles a suspension bridge where the destination is clearly visible, and it is the supportive elements—social, emotional, academic, curricular, and pedagogic—from the school, teachers (both primary and post-primary), family, and friends that facilitate the gradual transition from primary to post-primary education.

7.5 Navigating my journey

At the start of this journey, my eldest child had just begun their First year in post-primary school. Now, all four of my children have navigated this transition. I, too, have embarked on a journey — one that parallels teachers' perceptions of transition. It was, and is, a process.

Reflexivity and reflection have guided this study, assuring its content and minimising bias. These experiences have broadened my perspective on my professional life. As I reflect on this journey, I realise that I have become more finely attuned to the importance of prior learning when instructing First-year students and student teachers. I aim to share my research with fellow educators through teaching and future publications.

7.6 Closing insights

Anne Looney (2014) describes the aspirations of the 21st century curriculum in practice as the educational equivalent of 'The Great Oz' (p.13). In the context of primary to post-primary transition, the journey is certainly underway. When students move from primary to post-primary and, like Dorothy and Toto, realise that 'they're not in Kansas anymore', how will they be supported to find their way forward through the unfamiliar landscape?

Will they see the new landscape signposted by a helpful amount of familiar language, teaching methods, and references to familiar topics? The policy landscape has already set the scene for productive and inclusive approaches. Every teacher and teacher educator has the power to bring transitional supports and signposting alive in their schools and classrooms in small ways. They, too, just need to be shown the way.

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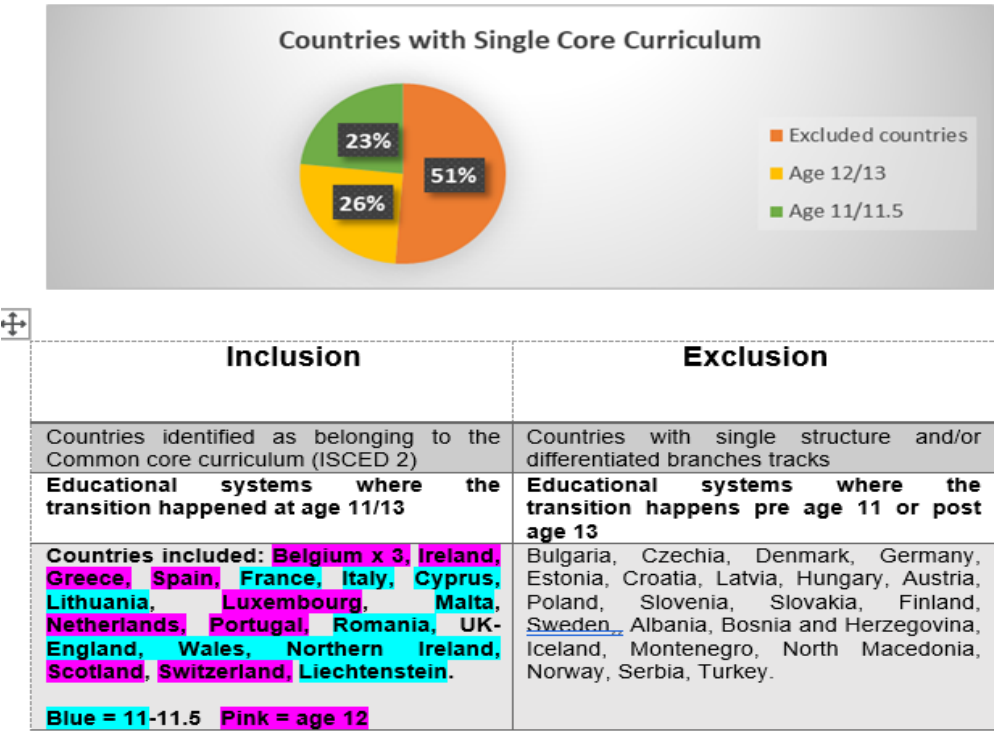
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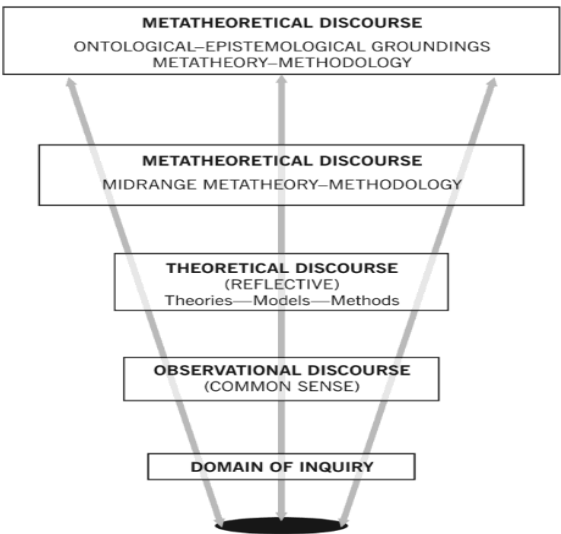
9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix: Chapter 2

Appendix 2.1 Breakdown of European countries according to age of transition



Appendix 2.2 Levels of discourse in scientific research.



Source: Overton, (2015), p.21

Appendix 2.3 Note on additional frameworks

In addition to the categorisations presented in Figure 2.5, there are other frameworks that offer distinct perspectives on educational transitions. One such framework, proposed by Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, and Splittgerber (2000), centres on the notion of discontinuities during transitions. They describe two primary groupings that encapsulate issues arising during transitions - 'organisational discontinuity' and 'social discontinuity'. The first grouping, organisational discontinuity, pertains to changes within the school structure and environment. This includes factors such as alterations in school size, granting more autonomy to students, and elevating academic expectations. Such changes may introduce new challenges for students as they navigate through novel educational settings and requirements. On the other hand, the second grouping, social discontinuity, delves into the social aspects of transitions. This category encompasses factors like the diversity of the student population and the sense of belonging within the new academic environment. Social discontinuity can significantly impact students' social interactions, relationships, and overall adjustment to the new school community.

9.2 Appendix: Chapter 3

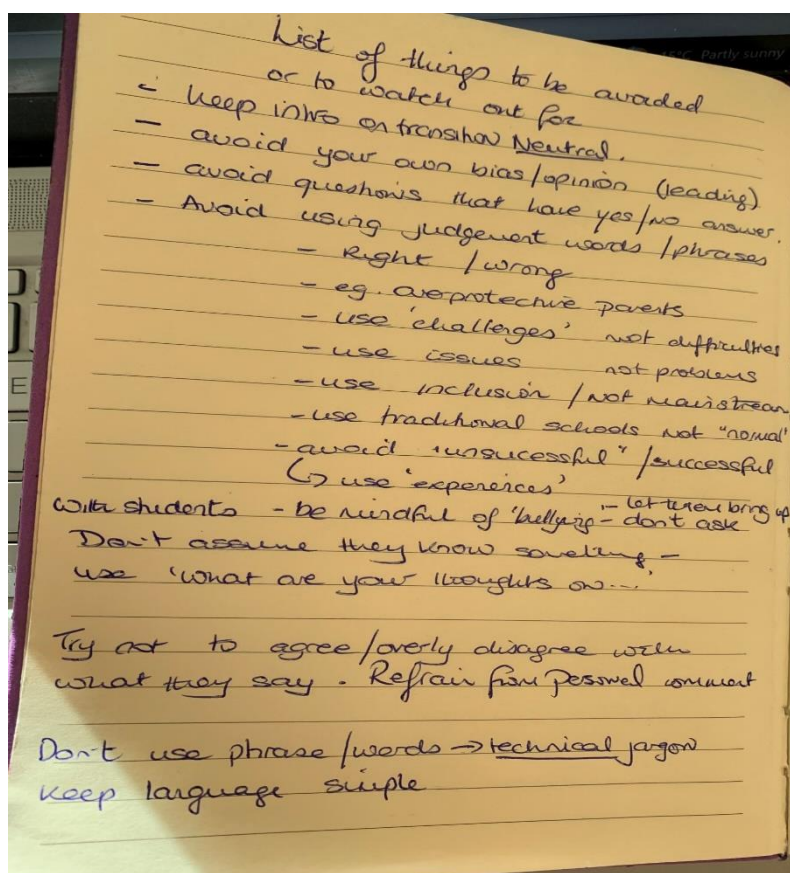
Appendix 3.1 Overview of design approaches

	This study	Action Research and DBR (Kurt Lewin, 1946)	Case Study	Experiment/ quasi-experiment	Longitudinal	Ethnography	Evaluation
Function	Exploration	Change	Exploration Description	Prediction	Description	Description	Evaluation
Purpose	to explore research and practice of a specific area to contribute to policy and practice through findings	To develop practice change problem solving intervention	In depth research Gain a rich and detailed understanding	Seek out cause and effect and understand control ; Isolate variables	to collect data relating to variables do not attempt to manipulate variables	to describe and interpret a cultural /social group	assessment of impact, effectiveness or other consequences of newly introduced initiatives /policies etc.
Methods	documents Interviews survey	Mixed interviews observations found and generated images reflective diaries interventions	Mixed methods interviews observation etc.	testing Structured and standardised tests observation	survey important mixed methods	mixed methods observation documents artefacts images etc.	Interviews observation documents surveys images
Generalization	possibly due to survey, but with limitations	No. Usually linked to practitioners in specific field	Not possible due to restricted sample	yes, but danger of assumptions due to impact of variables	can be examined for trends etc.		no assumptions made; specific to a certain programme etc.
Participants	focussed and random captures varying perspectives	Individual or group focussed	Individual or group Usually comprises subject(s) and object for analysis / focus	random or specific 'natural' groupings (quasi)	large numbers of individuals or groups		already have taken part. Set number
potential concerns/ challenges	time amount of data decision of what to focus on	localised	generalisation not possible	number of variables	attrition amount of data time	time in field	evaluation looks mainly at before and after elements; not always looks at intervention variables

Appendix 3.2 Overview of research timeline

Overview of Research Timeline					
Year 1 2019-20	Year 2 2020-21	Year 3 2021-22		Year 4 2022-23	
Literature review and methodology Assessed modules Confirmation		Interview schedule	Sept 2021		
		Piloting	Sept/Oct 21		
		Student interviews	Nov - Dec 2021		
		Analysis	Jan/Feb 22		
		Teacher & management interviews	March-May 2022		
		Analysis	June- Sept 2022		
				Survey drafting	Sept/Oct 2022
				Survey checking	October 2022
				Expert group Consultation	Oct/ Nov 2022
				Survey pilot (technical and content)	Early Nov 2022
				Survey Window -	28th Nov- 20 th December
				Survey analysis	Dec /Jan 2023
				Findings & discussion	Feb - June

Appendix 3.3 Notes to avoid bias during interviews



Appendix 3.4 Overview of methodologies in Irish transition studies

Overview of studies on transition conducted in Ireland* (PRIMARY TO POST-PRIMARY)				
Methodology	COUNTRY	Methods	Sample size	Specific focus
Original surveys	2019	Prendergast et al., (2019)	296 primary teachers; 171 PP teachers	Maths teachers
	1998	Naughton (1998)	101 pupils in 4 schools in one county	Primary pupils
	2007	Downes et al., (2007)	230 pupils (p); 162 (PP)	DEIS pupils
	2010	McCauley (2010)	39 post-primary teachers	Teachers in post-grad SEN programme
Semi-structured interviews	2003	O'Brien (2003)	86 female pupils	gender
	2004	O'Brien (2004) 'Making the move'	11 schools (pupils – 153); 35 primary teachers; 29 post-primary teachers incl. management and specific transition roles)	Longitudinal Across stakeholders Equal DEIS/Non-DEIS pupil numbers
	2007	Maunsell et al., (2007)	8 pupils	SEN / DEIS
	2013	O'Toole et al., (2013)	N=192; pp teacher n = 16	Pre-school to primary and p to PP
Multiple or mixed methods	2019	Lowe (2019)	9 teacher in 9 post-primary schools	Information transfer
	2013	Barnes-Holmes et al. (2013)	32 pupils with SEN from 30 schools	SEN focus
	2016	Foley et al. (2016)	58 primary pupils 63 post-primary pupils from 2 schools Interviews and survey with key stakeholders	SEN focus but general too Pupils Cross-sectoral
	2004	Smyth et al., (2004)	multi-phased mixed methods 567 post-primary principals surveyed, interviews with 103 key personnel 226 post-primary teachers, 916 first year students 81 parents were interviewed. stemmed from 12 case study schools.	First major longitudinal study Part of a three part study
	2008	Darmody (2008)	Surveys/interviews/case studies 765 principals 912 pupils	Comparative (Ireland v Estonia)
	2006-ongoing	GUI (2006-)	8,000 9-year-olds (Cohort '98) and 10,000 9-month-olds	Ongoing Pupils/all levels
	2018	Prendergast & Tracey (2018)	Interviews with 5 maths teachers and testing	Maths only (algebra)
	2019 - ongoing	CSL (2019 -)	4000 children in 189 primary schools	Children ongoing
	2021	O'Connor and Flynn (2021)	55 teachers	DEIS core subjects (English/Irish /math s teachers
Testing	2021	O'Ryan et al., (2021)	249 pupils	Maths specific; tests; pupils
Research reviews	2022	Taur et al. (2022)	Literature review	Maths
Action research	2014	McCormack (2014)	6 secondary schools with 11 feeder schools	Science only Teachers

Note this list is not exhaustive but is presented here for clarity and for reference.

Appendix 3.5 Ethics Information and Consent forms



Parent Consent Form

STUDY NAME: *Transition & eTwinning: A bridge for Initial Teacher Education providers to navigate the transitional waters of primary to second level in terms of language and literacy, policy and practice.*

Una Murray, D.Ed. Candidate, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin and Dr. Ann Devitt (Supervisor), School of Education, TCD.

There are 3 sections in this form. Each section has a statement and asks you to initial if you agree or in the case of section 2, initial yes or no. The end of this form is for the researchers to complete. Please ask any questions you may have when reading each of the statements. Thank you for participating.

Please initial the box if you agree with the statement.

Section 1: General	Initial box
I confirm I have read and understood the Participant Information Leaflet for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I understand that this study is entirely voluntary , and my son/daughter is not obliged to take part and can leave without providing a reason.	
I understand that all information about my son/ daughter's part in this study will be kept private and confidential and that her/his school will not be identified. I also understand that the researcher must report any information that might be inappropriate and that in these circumstances confidentiality cannot be assured.	
I understand that my son/daughter will not be paid for taking part in this study.	
I know how to contact the research team if I need to.	
I agree for my son/daughter to take part in this research study having been informed of risks and benefits which are set out in full in the the information leaflet which I have been provided with.	
I give my consent for my son/daughter to take part in a recorded Focus Group.	YES

Section 3: Data processing
I understand that personal information about my daughter/son, including the transfer of this personal information outside of the EU, will be protected in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.
I understand that I will have the opportunity to review/amend/withdraw the focus group data for a two-week period after which it will be irrevocably anonymised and my son/daughter can no longer withdraw it.

Participant Name (PRINT)

Signature

Date

STATEMENT OF INVESTIGATOR'S RESPONSIBILITY
To be completed by the Principal Investigator or nominee.

I, the undersigned, have fully explained to the above principal the nature and purpose of this study in a way that they could understand. I have explained the risks and possible benefits involved. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them. I have given a copy of the information leaflet and consent form to the participant with contacts of the study team.

Researcher Name **UNA MURRAY**

Researcher Signature Date

Supervisor's Name (Block Capitals) **ANN DEVITT**

Supervisor's Signature: Date:

If you have any queries with regard to Data protection you may contact
Email: dataprotection@tcd.ie Post: Data Protection Officer; Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Participant Information Leaflet for adult interviews



Participant Information Sheet for Adult Participants

STUDY NAME: *Transition & eTwinning: A bridge for Initial teacher Education providers to navigate the transitional waters of primary to second level in terms of language and literacy, policy and practice.*

Una Murray, D.Ed. Candidate, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin and Dr. Ann Devitt (Supervisor), School of Education, TCD.

Introduction

Before you decide whether you wish to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what taking part involves. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

Research Project Goal: The over-arching goal of this stage of the study is to investigate the area of transition of primary to second level from the perspective of Initial Teacher Education.

What am I being asked to do?

As a person interested in supporting students and parents you are being asked to participate in a once-off interview. The interview is conducted online and last approximately 30-40 minutes.

What's the purpose of the interview?

The interview will form part of a D.Ed. research study into developing an understanding of the transition from primary to second level from different perspectives. The aim is to help the researcher devise an expert driven National Survey of PMEs by taking all perspectives into consideration.

What will taking part involve?

- If you agree to take part, a consent form must be signed and returned to the researcher before the interview can take place.
- There will be one interview.
- You may be asked to look at some documents in advance of these meetings.
- These meetings will be online and be a maximum of 45 minutes.
- The main questions will be sent to you in advance.
- The interview will be held online at an agreed time.
- The interview will be recorded and transcribed for references purposes only.
- You will have the opportunity to review and amend any of your contributions to the overall transcript of the interview. Once you are happy with the content, after two weeks the information will be irrevocably pseudo anonymised.

Do I have to take part?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You can choose to take part or not as you wish. You can withdraw your data from the study at any stage without reason until it is fully anonymised.

How will my identity be protected?

Participation is confidential. No names or other identifying information will be used when reporting the findings. All transcripts will be anonymised, i.e. any personal data that may have been entered will be redacted and deleted, irreversibly preventing identification of individual(s) or institutions to whom it related. Neither you nor your institution will be named in any presentation or publication relating to this research. However, in the extremely unlikely event that illicit activity is reported I will be obliged to report it to appropriate authorities.

Where and how long will my data be held?

Your consent form, recorded audio file and transcript will be stored on an institutional cloud service which is fully GDPR compliant. The files will be password-protected; and the interview dataset will be accessible only by the researcher and the supervisor of this study. The audio recordings will be retained for 10 years and then destroyed. The interview will be transcribed, and you will have the opportunity to review/amend/withdraw your transcript for a 2-week period once the transcription is complete. After that review period, the transcript will be irrevocably anonymised, and you will not be able to withdraw your data from the study. You can, however, withdraw at any time up to this point without reason.

Benefits

There is no payment for taking part in this research. This study aims to better the understanding of the transition from 6th to first year for the PME students to teach and the results may help inform practice of ITEs in this regard.

Disadvantages

I can foresee no risks or disadvantages associated with individual in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The findings will be used to help inform practice in ITEs when discussing and working with PMEs who teach first year groups. The results will be discussed in the finished D.Ed. research thesis, in conference presentations, peer-reviewed articles, policy briefings and other research communications. A summary of the findings will be made available to you once the study is completed.

Who can I contact if I have questions? Should you have a question or comment about this survey, please contact Una Murray at umurray@tcd.ie (0863244766) and thesis supervisor, Dr Ann Devitt devittan@tcd.ie

Note: This study received ethical approval from the TCD ethics committee on 29/7/21.

If you have any queries with regard to Data protection you may contact:

Email: dataprotection@tcd.ie Post: Data Protection Officer; Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Researcher Name: **UNA MURRAY**

Researcher Signature Date

Supervisor's Name: (Block Capitals) **ANN DEVITT**

Supervisor's Signature: Date:

If you have any queries with regard to Data protection you may contact Email: dataprotection@tcd.ie Post: Data Protection Officer; Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Participant information Leaflet for pupil

Screenshot of online consent in survey



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Participant Information Leaflet (Pupils)

STUDY NAME: *Transition & eTwinning: A bridge for Initial Teacher Education providers to navigate the transitional waters of primary to second level in terms of language and literacy, policy and practice.*

Una Murray, D.Ed. Candidate, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin and Dr. Ann Devitt (Supervisor), School of Education, TCD.

Dear Student,

My name is Una Murray and I am a research student with the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin. As part of my course I am doing research into how your experience in First year is similar to or different from your experience in primary school. The information you provide will help to make sure that we can train student teachers properly so that they understand what you are used to. In order to this, I need your help. You are in the classrooms. What do you think?

If you have recently moved from primary to secondary, I would like to have a chat about your experiences. Your Mom/Dad or Guardian would be with you.

What would you have to do?

- Have a 20-30-minute chat with me online via Microsoft Teams at a time suitable to you and your parent. This will be a very relaxed casual chat.
- I will send you some of the questions in advance so that you can think about what you want to say.
- The conversation would be audio recorded if you agree at the beginning of the interview.
- I will transcribe the chat afterwards.
- Don't worry, no names, or you, your school or anything that could identify you will be used. It will be totally anonymous.

What happens to the recording after the conversation?

Names and any information that could be identified will be taken out. You will have the chance to see your transcript and change, delete any information that you are not happy with. I will send this to you approximately two weeks after the conversation. You can view all of the information then and fix or remove what you want at that stage. After 2 weeks we will remove all the names from the written account of the discussion and make it anonymous. You will not be able to remove any of your information from the study after that point. We will not ask for any personal information during the discussion. Your identities will not be known. You will be referred to as pupil A etc in transcripts.

What about your information? How will you keep it safe?

All your information will be fully private. No information about you will be identified in the research. All information will be stored safely and securely with access only to me as the researcher and my thesis supervisor. The information will only be kept for as long as is necessary for the study.

So, what's the first step?

In order for you to take part in this research, you will have to do the following:

- Have a chat with your parent or guardian.
- If you'd like to take part, sign and return the consent form (attached).
- You can send it via post or scan it to me at murrayun@tcd.ie.
- Your parent/guardian needs to do the same. Again, this should be returned to me. Digital signatures are acceptable.

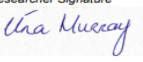
Once these are signed and returned, I will arrange a suitable time for our discussion.

Risks and benefits for you? It is your choice to be involved. It is voluntary. There is no payment involved. You can choose to participate or not participate in the project or parts of the project. If you change your mind before, during or after the discussion up to the point that your information is anonymised, that is no problem, and you don't need to say why.

What will we do with your information? The anonymous results will be presented in conferences or written reports about the study and help teachers teach First years. You can take time to think about this and if you want to participate, drop back in the signed form in a week if possible.

If you have any questions or queries, just give me a call at 0863244766 or drop me an email at murrayun@tcd.ie. Many thanks for your time. Una

Researcher Name UNA MURRAY

Researcher Signature  Date: 4th November 2021

Supervisor's Name (Block Capitals) ANN DEVITT

Supervisor's Signature:  Date: 4th November 2021

If you have any queries with regard to Data protection you may contact
Email: dataprotection@tcd.ie Post: Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office,
Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland.

Q1.1 Survey information

Are you or will you be a post-primary teacher?

Then this survey is for you.

Minding that gap! post-primary teachers and the transition from primary to second level: pedagogy and practice

The aim of this National Survey is to gain an understanding of what student teachers, NQTs and qualified teachers know about their pupils and the transition from primary to post-primary school.

Who is this for?

POST-PRIMARY teachers of ALL subjects (including qualified teachers, NQTs and student teachers)

What do I have to do:

- Complete the survey. It takes approximately 15 minutes.
- There are 4 sections and most questions are multiple choice.
- It is anonymous.
- You may exit the survey at any time.
- Your responses will only be recorded at the end when you click submit.
- No personal data is recorded during this survey

This study received ethical approval from Ethics Committee of TCD in July 2021. For further information please contact: murrayun@tcd.ie or devittan@tcd.ie

Please pass on the survey link to colleagues and friends.

Appendix 3.6 Interview schedules

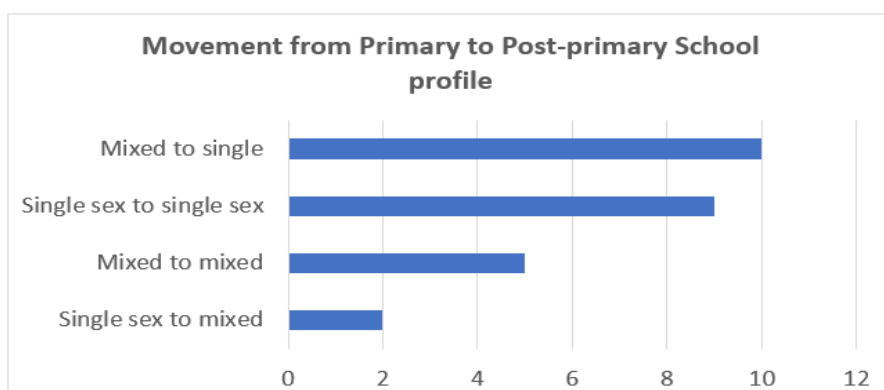
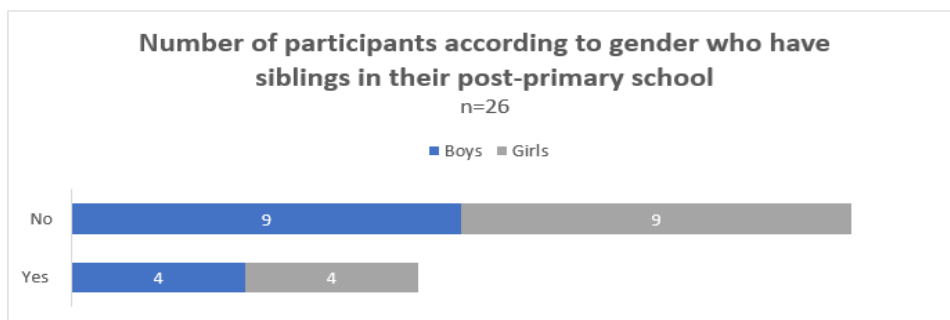
Phase 2 Student interviews

Question area	Questions	Rationale
You and your schools (siblings, favourite subjects, size, events to support transition etc.)	- Tell me a bit about your primary school and your secondary schools, if you had any favourite subjects in primary school? - Were you looking forward to starting secondary school? - How did your primary school prepare you for secondary school? - What was the most useful thing your secondary school did to help you integrate socially and academically?	- Outline the demographic and make up of group - impact of siblings on school transition - School subjects, transition, and impact on preference - How information on PP schools was attained - Communication between schools
Differences in subject content	- What subjects were you prepared for when you went into secondary school? - Do you think that the bridge between primary and secondary is strong?	To establish student perspectives
You and your teachers	- What differences did you notice about how the subjects were taught between primary and secondary? What difference do you notice about feedback? - Do teachers give you more or less support in secondary? - Should secondary school teachers know about primary school subjects and vice versa?	- Establish classroom routines, teaching methods etc. - Establish any variety in teaching methods or resources - Gives an indication of types of feedback
Advice for first year teachers, parents, 6 th class students and <u>student</u> teachers (asked by O'Brien, 2004; Smyth 2004)	- What advice would you give to pupils in 6th class before they move to secondary school? - What advice would you give to First year teachers of English for example? - What advice would you give to parents of students going into First year? - How do you know that a teacher is a student teacher and what advice might you give them?	- Gives an indication of areas that could have been of concern. - Gives an indication of what they see as typical pedagogical practices. - Gives an indication of their interaction with student teachers

Phase 2 Teacher interviews

Bureaucratic/ administrative	Social and Emotional	Curriculum	Pedagogy	Managing Learning
- Can you describe how information on students is transferred from your experience? - And in your subject area? - How useful is it? How knowledgeable are teachers of the first-year students about it? - Does the Education passport play a role? - Is there a community level approach between the schools? - A school approach ? - A subject department approach to topics? - Access to information?	- Can you describe the transition programme for incoming first <u>years</u>. - Are they well prepared do you think? - How are they supported? - What supports work the best from your perspective	- Would you say that first year students are prepared in primary school for first year in your subject? - What topics are they prepared for? Which ones in your subject area cause the most difficulty - How familiar would you say you are with the primary school curriculum and pedagogy? - Where did you other teachers in your school...get your knowledge from? - Do you think the primary curriculum is on the radar of second level teachers? And vice versa? - What about PMEs?	- Are there differences in how your subject is taught in primary and in first year? - What are the biggest differences do you think in terms of how your subject is taught? - Do you think textbooks cater for this transition in your subject area? Useful?	- And in terms of key skills? Which ones are first years in need of support or are well developed? - Are they able to manage their <u>learning</u> - Role of parents in the process?
- Whose responsibility is it overall? DES? NCCA ~~ie~~ curriculum reform? ITE? The primary schools? PP schools? Teachers? - Is there anything else you would like to add?				

Appendix 3.7 Phase 2 Overview of student participant profiles



Overview of school sizes in primary and post-primary of student sample

Primary School size	No. of Participants per primary school size	Transitioned to post-primary by school <u>size</u>										
		*One yet to move to PP										
Less than 50	0											
50-99	3*					600						1101
100-199	3						738					1023
200-299	10			500	567		702			915	998	
300-499	5	464	491				702	757	789			
500 - 699	6								820	915		
700-999+	0											

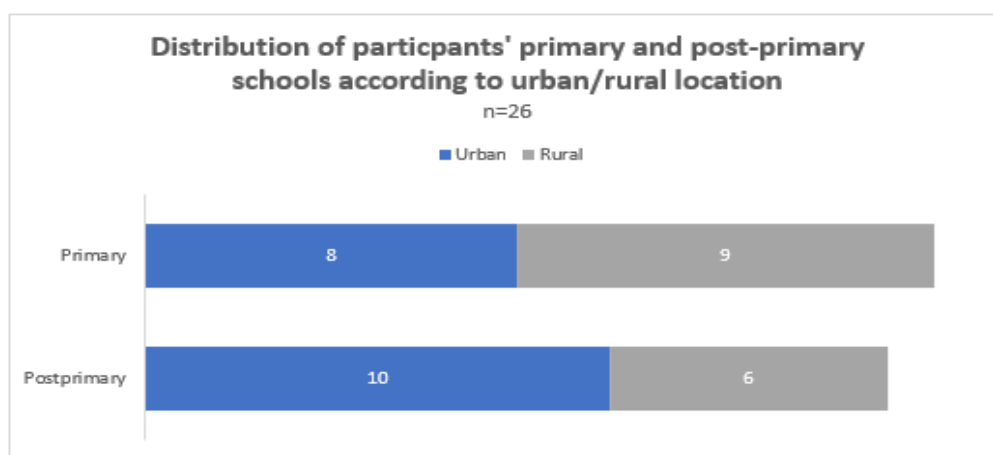
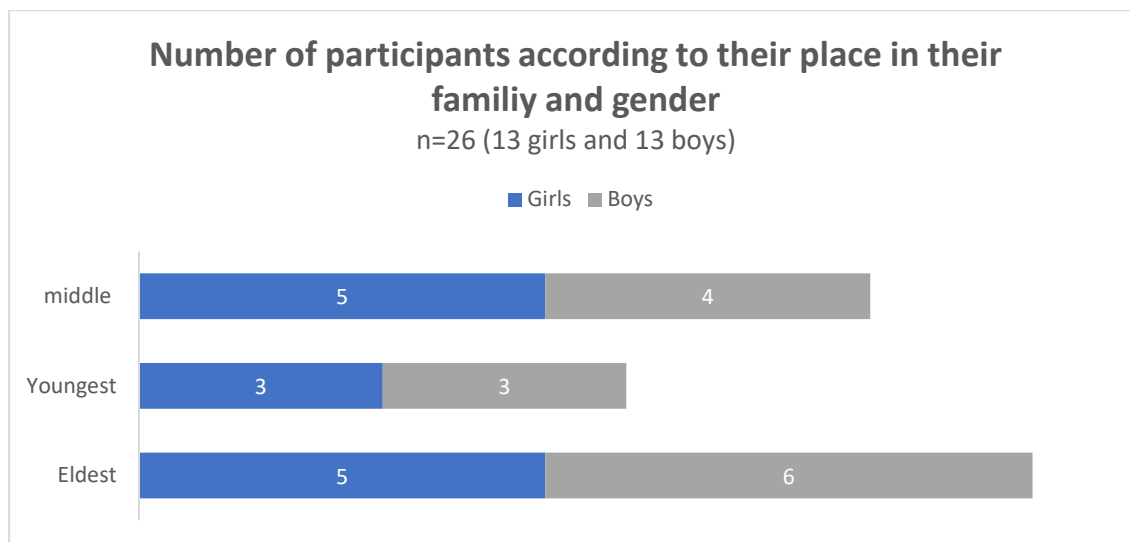
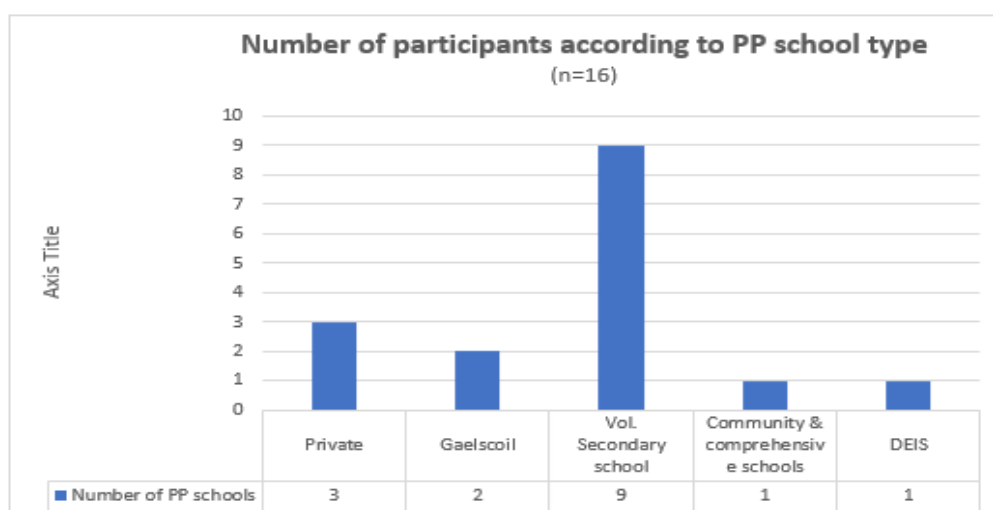


Figure 3:7 Breakdown of sample by location

The sample primarily comprised voluntary secondary schools at second level.



Overview of profile of student sample

INTERVIEW NUMBER	KEY	GENDER	YEAR	SIBLINGS	YOUNGEST	MIDDLE	ELDEST	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	NO. OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS	NO OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS	LOCATION
1	Liffey	M	5 th	no			x	1 (290)	1 (567)	3	2	u
	Blackwater	M	5 th	no			x	(290)	(567)			u
	Barrow	M	5 th	no			x	1 (432)	(567)			u
	Boyne	M	5 th	yes	x			1 (600)	1 (820)			u
2	Suir	M	TY	yes		x		(290)	(567)	0	0	u
3	Lee	f	3rd	no		x		1 (440)	1 (687)	2	3	u
	Slaney	f	2ND	no		x		1 (265)	1 (708)			u
	Maigue	F	2 ND	No	x			(265)	1 (988)			u
4	Bann	M	2 ND	no			x	(290)	1 (500)	0	1	u
5	Nore	M	5TH	yes	x			1 (146)	(290) 1 (1023)	1	1	u
6	Erne	m	2nd	yes	x			1 (220)	(1023)	1		u
7	Shannon	F	TY	no			x	1 (464)	1 (757)	4	3	r
	Luba	f	3rd	no			x	1 (208)	1 (1101)			
	Inny	M	2ND	no		x		1 (283)	1 (915)			
	Fergus	m	1st	no			x	1 (644)	(915)			
8	Avoca	f	2nd	no	x			(265)	(988)	0	0	u
9	Mourne	f	1ST	yes	x			(432)	(708)	0	0	u
10	Corrib	f	2nd	no			x	1 (410)	1 (789)	1	1	r
11	Dodder	f	1st	no			x	1 (278)	(708)	2	1	u
	Tolka	f	2nd	yes			x	1 (488)	1 (491)			u
12	Foyle	f	5th	yes		x		1 (70)	1 (600)	1	1	r
	Dargle	f	6 th class	yes	x							
13	Brosna	f	3rd	no	x			(432)	1 (464)	0	1	r
14	Moy	m	3rd	yes	x			1 (151)	1 (738)	1 (738)	1	r
	Lagan	m	3rd	no	x			(151)	(738)			
15	Feale	m	3rd	no			x	1 (80)	1 (904)	1	1	r
TOTAL		26			10	5	11			17	16	

Source: Irelandstats.com (accessed November 2021)

*Same colours indicate same school, but students may have had different teachers

** Number in brackets indicates number of students registered in that school as per official DES stats.

*** r / u refers to urban or rural school

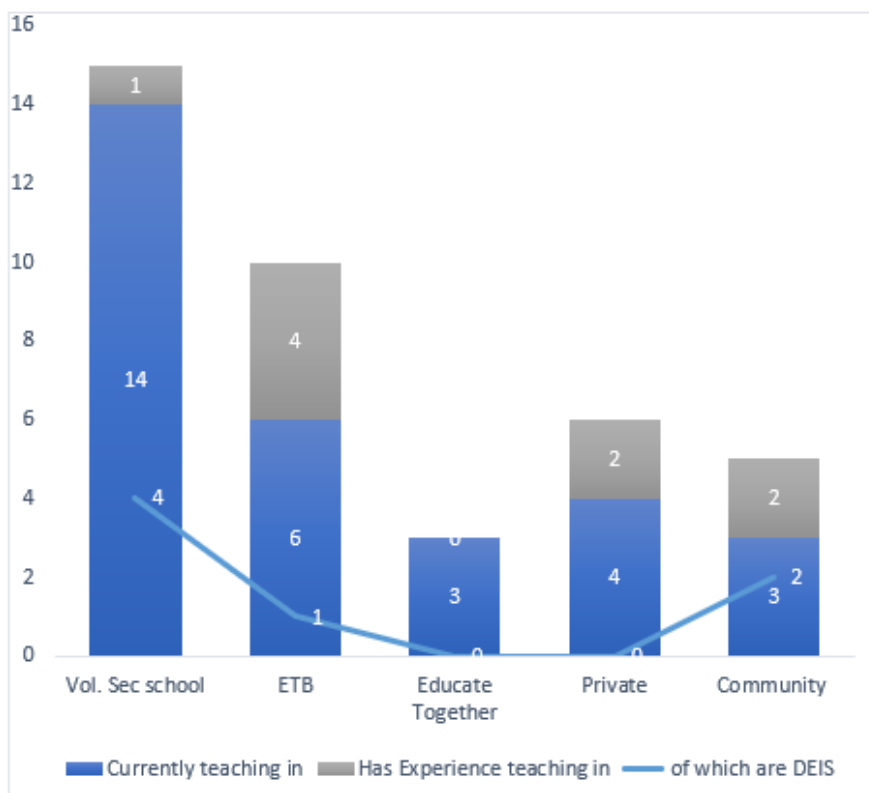
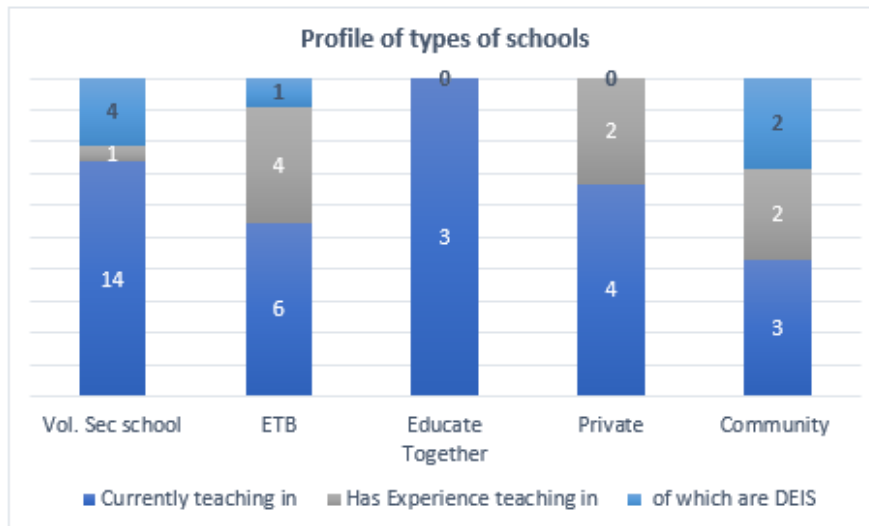
Overview of profile of primary schools in student sample

PROFILE OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF PARTICIPANTS											
SCHOOL KEY	ALL BOYS	ALL GIRLS	MIXED	PRIVATE	DEIS	GAELSCOIL	EDUCATE TOGETHER	SIZE	URBAN	RURAL	INTERVIEW NUMBER
A.			x					644		x	7
B.	x							600*	x		1
C.	x			x				220	x		6
D.						x		488	x		11
E.			x					464		x	7
F.		x		x				440	x		3
G.			x					432	x		1, 13, 9
H.			x					410		x	10
I.	x							290	x		1, 2, 4, 5
J.		x						278	x		11
K.		x						265	x		3, 8
L.			x		x			283		x	7
M.			x					208		x	7
N.			x					151		x	12
O.			x	x		x		146		x	5
P.			x					70		x	12
Q.			x					80		x	15

Overview of Post-Primary schools of student sample

PROFILE OF POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF PARTICIPANTS											
School Code	Urban	Rural (not in cities)	size	Gaeilscoil	DEIS	Private	ETB	All boys	All girls	mixed	Interview number
1.		x	1101				x			x	7
2.	x		1023			x		x			5, 6
3.		x	915					x			7
4.		x	904							x	15
5.	x		988			x				x	3, 8
6.	x		820					x			1
7.		x	789							x	10
8.		x	757						x		7
9.	x		738					x			14
10.	x		708						x		3, 9, 11
11.	x		687			x			x		3
12.		x	600							x	12
13.	x		567					x			1, 2
14.	x		500	x				x			4
15.	x		491	x					x		11
16.	x		464						x		13
	10	6		2	1	3	1	6	5	5	

Appendix 3.8 Phase 2 Overview of teachers and management sample



Appendix 3.9 Phase 2 Coding

Initial Code Memo

Code memo				
Administrative / Bureaucratic	Social and Emotional	Curriculum	(Pedagogy) Teaching	(Managing Learning) Learning
Personal data / Health records Academic records/reports Attendance records Files Between schools Educational passport knowledge Assessments - lack of understanding Parental concerns impact on EP content GDPR Attendance records Application Form Timing not useful Year-head/role dependent Inadequate information Assessment for first years (entrance exams) Learning Support – NCSE IEP Behaviour Plans Outside Agencies Info. Evenings Parent Meeting with PP school Family Structure Individual Interview Information from the students Principal visits AEN -specific communication Time bound	Topics SE literacy Belonging Care Team SPHE After School Programme /clubs Social literacy Friendships Being Safe Targeted Skills My New School – the Physical Space Health and Fitness Conflict Skills Adolescent Development Peer Support / Social Mentors Fear factor Induction programmes Visits by students Time bound	No bridging units Sharing of facilities No sharing of expertise Talking to Primary teachers about methodologies Shadowing common themes lack of communication knowledge not shared source of knowledge family/friends discontinuity / very different subject dependent	Scheme of work across subjects – not in methods Teaching Methodologies Perspectives on learning – attitude to each other Assessment language Assessment for Learning ICT Handwriting Practice Homework ideas Assessment Practice No Training CPD Fresh-start approach to subjects Prior Learning –school dependent No knowledge Different expectations Feeder schools dependent Primary school teacher dependent expectations either too low or high revision as standard different methods used in subjects	Thinking and study skills Learning logs Learning styles Inclusion activities Concentration skills behaviour Skills Parent(s)' support Learning Profile Able to verbalise learning style and strategies. Learning Mentors – Peer Reading Evidence of the learning Testing curricular projects across a number of schools Metacognitive skills Organisational skills (getting to class /books / lockers etc) Independent learning/autonomous learning Teacher student mentor programmes

[illegible]

addition subtraction there's a lot more of them whereas in secondary school there's a lot more of multiplication and different like topics like Law.

150 INTERVIEWER: Did I ask you did they agree on the initial themes that you had did they ask you to think back on what you did in primary school.

Boye: yeah they did.

INTERVIEWER: And, was that good or bad, did it slow the pace, speed it up or was it boring.

Blackwater: Well, it kind of took back over the feeling of what you did see, like, for example, like you did, maybe small questions that are pretty basic and then it kind of gets advanced throughout first year, so I guess kind of like a good kind of step progression if you know what I mean into first year.

INTERVIEWER: So, it was it was good to have the revision

270 Blackwater: yeah

INTERVIEWER: [redacted] what do you think?

Barrow: I don't actually remember doing any like looking back from primary school they must have done that in primary school, but I don't really think I did differently, I think I was different, not in

280 INTERVIEWER: was there much difference between how things were done in primary school or how the language is to describe mental, for example, or Irish in primary school and then a secondary, of the way, you did some things are the way, you did Irish.

Barrow: well, the questions are different in maths and like the vocabulary is very more than in primary school.

INTERVIEWER: and in how you actually and the marks was there any difference?

Barrow: different formulae that, that you did in primary school.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, and did any of you, what you were considering for classes, was the initial first few months of secondary, did you refer back to anything that you did in primary and say, well, actually, I did this in primary or did you just forget about primary and move on?

Boye: [redacted]

INTERVIEWER: And is there anything else that they didn't prepare you for.

Steffy: If we can go to late specifics, I think, going into like we'll probably never go, taught going into like, I was quite like going into maths it was quite like different to when I was in primary school, I think I might have lost connection for a minute, can you hear me, my theory and be basically.

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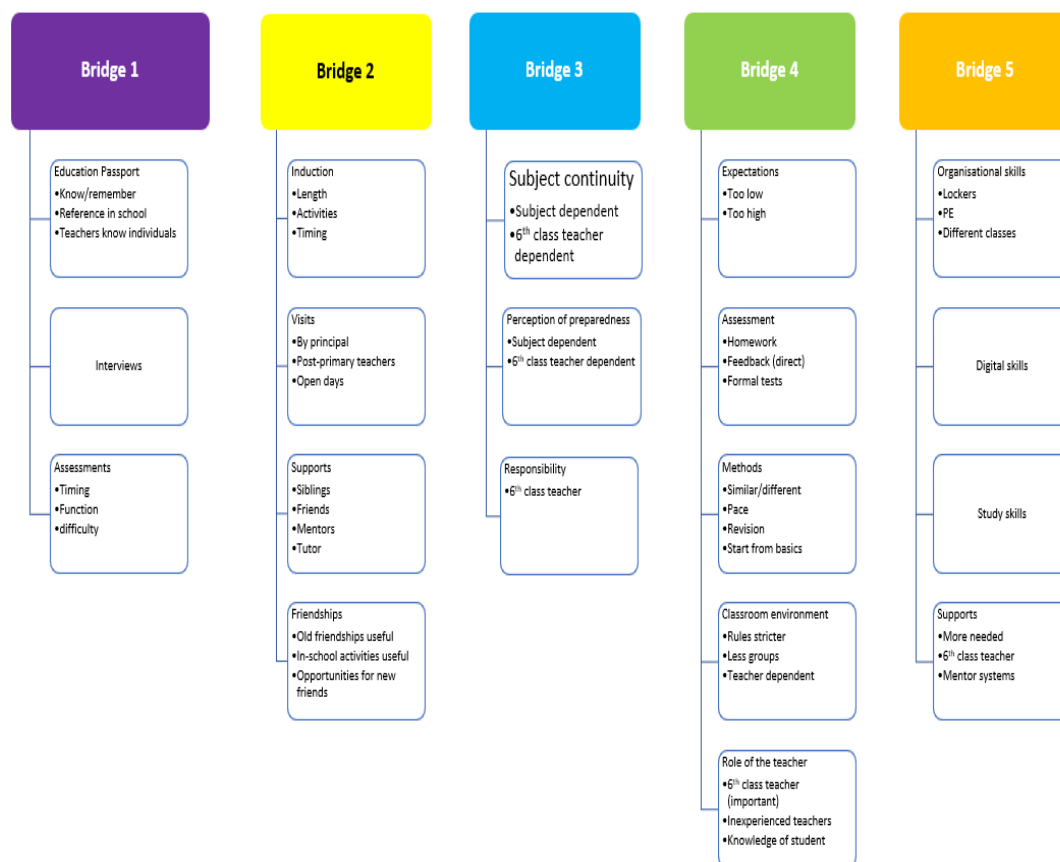
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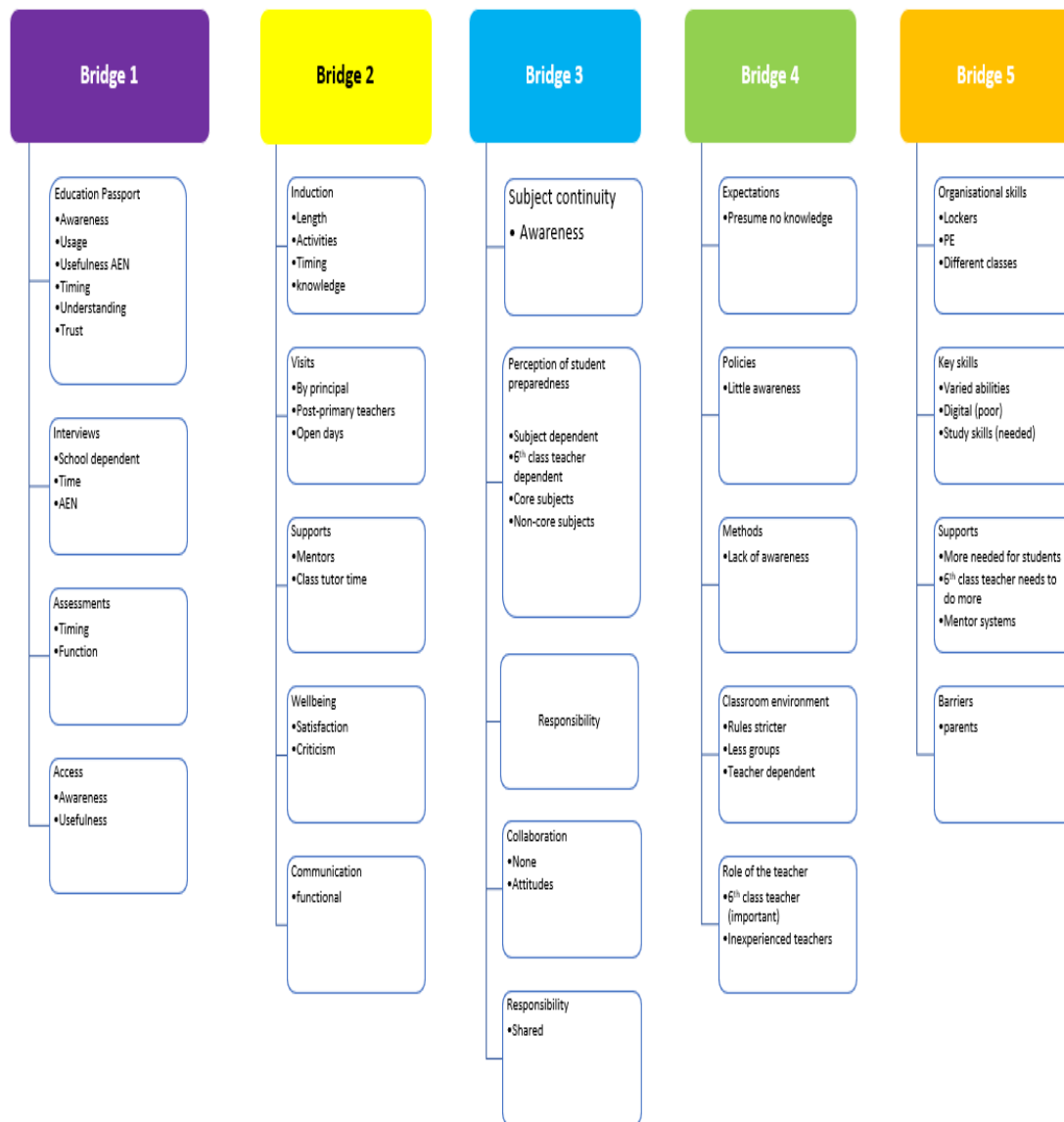
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Overview Code memo Students



Overview of code memo Teachers/management



Sample of word analysis ‘expect/expectation’



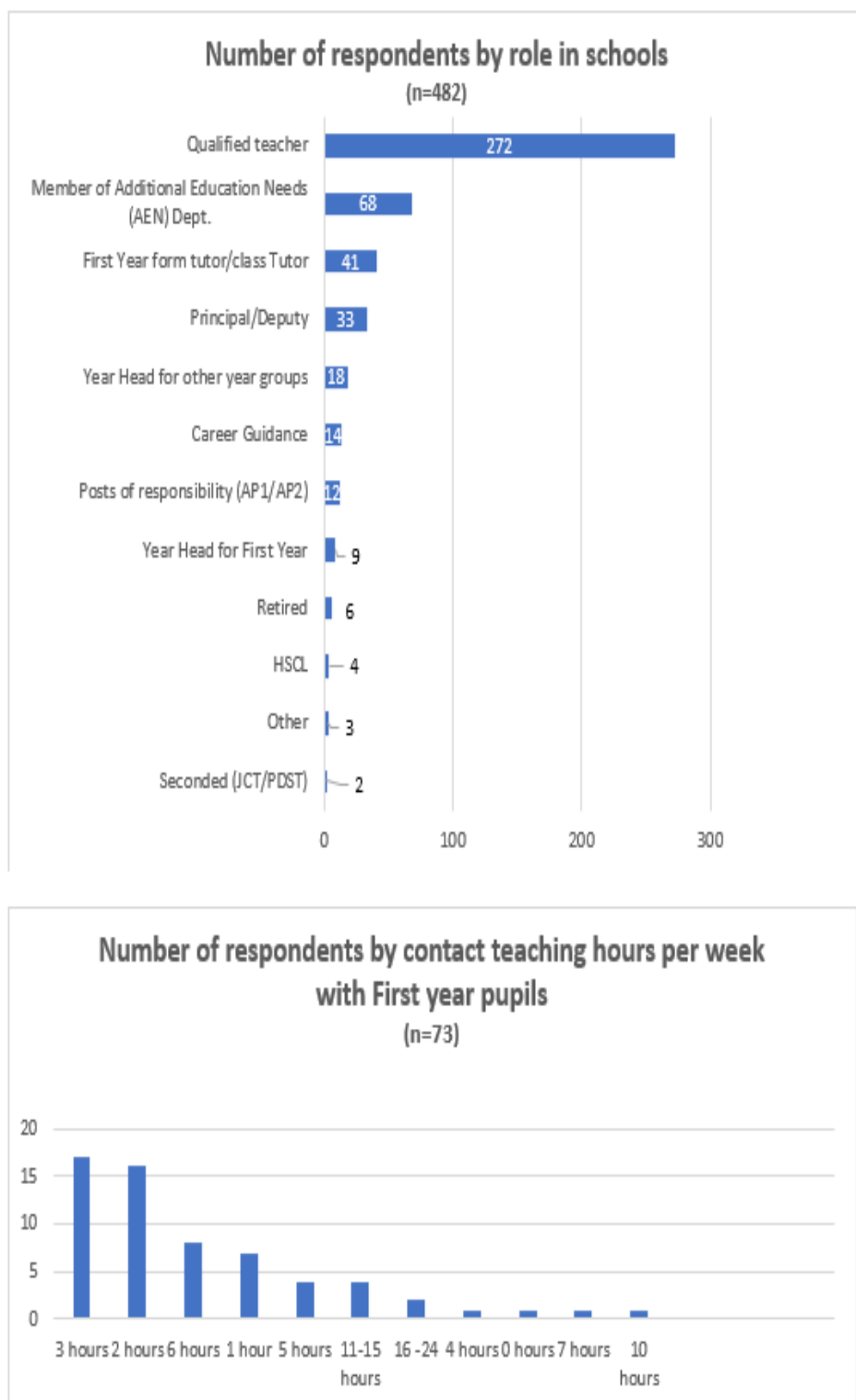
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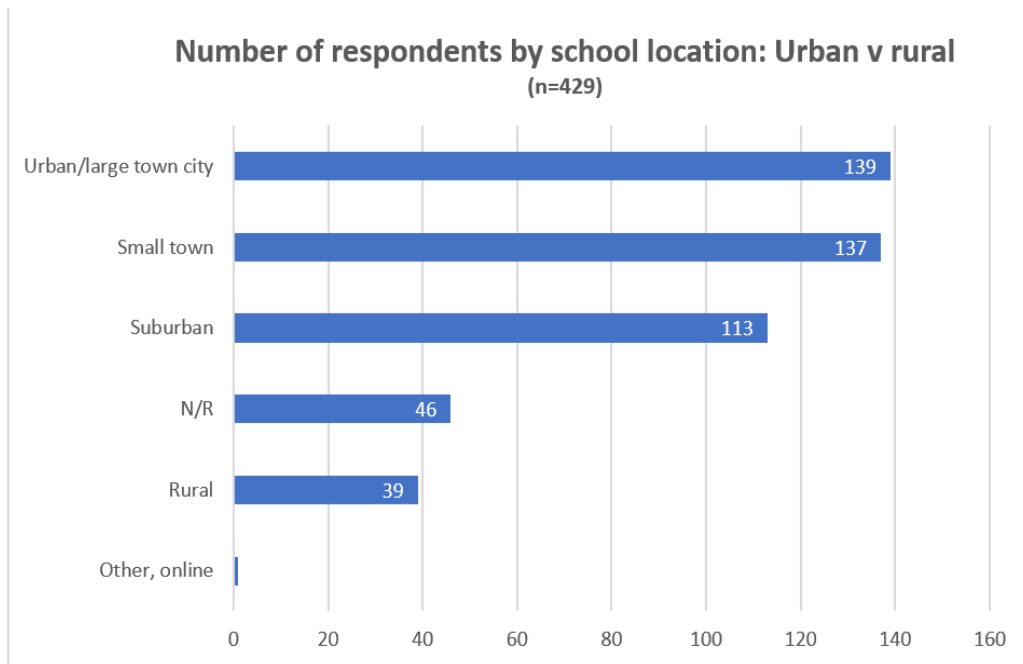
Bridge 1		
Mehon	Impact of prior knowledge of student on teacher expectations	Whereas if you just go out a blank slate, sometimes they can very much surprise you and you can go, oh, that may be like if I'd read something about that kid from before I might, I might have treated them, not treated them differently... I don't mean it like that, but that your expectations might have been different for them, where sometimes when you go in just. Quote like blank slate. Some kids will rise to it and will really enjoy it more so than primary school. <i>So</i> it's, I don't know. It's a balancing act between the two.
Gene	Teacher continuity and information transfer	And what happens then if somebody is just filling in for three or four months, they would even know what their expectations were.
O'Reilly	Information transfer	They weren't <i>actually</i> <i>quite</i> sure whether we were <i>expected</i> to see it or not.
Bridge 2		
Byrne	Student expectations of PP school	By the time they come in there they are ready for the change. They've been prepared for the primary schools. They're <i>expecting</i> XYZ and they've been talking about it all summer before they start.
Thorne	Expectation of issues	Primary schools, you know, have a do a good job and in the area at such thing as well-being... we don't want too many deficits and some of what we <i>expect</i> compared to other <i>places</i> .
Connolly	Student expectations of PP school, siblings	There's also like a lot of them, as I said to have siblings so they kind of know what to <i>expect</i> .
Bridge 3		
Adams	Expectation of communication between P and PP	secondary school should be <i>actually</i> <i>communicating</i> with primary schools as to where they are starting point is as well and what their <i>expectations</i> might be.
O'Reilly	Student subject knowledge	But when it gets a bit tougher and they've to learn more and apply more, they need to have that motivation to go off and do, you know, apply it themselves and do it themselves, and you would find that in a student in first year Irish because there's so much <i>expected</i> of them anyway.
Greene	Knowledge of student's abilities	I was interested to find out, I guess in terms of like when, when are they <i>expected</i> to, you know, be able to read a certain level of text, you know, so things like that. It is interesting to see.
Rynn	Expectations of student knowledge	But for me, it's just like it's like a worksheet with some keywords on stuff. Look, I would, whatever my first years, but I'd certainly <i>expect</i> my second years or my third years to know going towards the exam, you know I don't <i>expect</i> them to know everything about the floral geomorphology. My six years were doing the exam in two weeks, barely know about it. They're supposed to know about it.
Rynn	Expectations of student knowledge	Just but it's... just like simple small things that having taught it for as long as I taught it. Now I kind of go, God, I want it. And 11- or 12-year-old to know the mountains and the processes and the counties and where they sit because they do matter <i>intensely</i> in what we do.
Peters	Expectations and responsibility of PP	I think the responsibility of the primary 6th class teacher really to have an <i>understanding</i> of what is <i>expected</i> of them, I suppose that's at second level, but I mean it's also. It's also the responsibility of the primary school curriculum to know what this is <i>expected</i> of them at <i>upper</i> first year.

O'Loughlin	Expectation of PP Teacher subject knowledge	What I mean is so for example, in university maybe you don't do trigonometry at all. However, you're <i>expected</i> to teach it to Junior Cert and leaving Cert having not done it until you did your leaving Cert because that, which I think then that's what causes teachers to teach like how they were taught, because that vicious cycle is there because they don't have an in-depth or further depth knowledge of it.
Adams	Expectation of teacher's subject knowledge	<i>So</i> unless the teacher has an actual specific interest and specific knowledge in certain areas and has applied themselves to be up to date with what you know what's happening, what's <i>expectations</i> , and they going to secondary school in, they couldn't be ready for that at all.
Geoghegan	No expectations on primary teacher	There's a completely, you know, different level there and like that I <i>do</i> think the primary teachers it's again we're not <i>expecting</i> them to know everything. We're not <i>expecting</i> them to teach all these things to high detail.
Hegarty	Expectation of teacher knowledge/awareness	In my school my whole focus I suppose, is on the students and I'd the back of my mind <i>expect</i> that teachers are aware that they're coming from all these different primary schools.
Bridge 4		
Mehon	Student expectations of lessons	I find they are a bit more enthusiastic about group work than maybe two or six years ago when I would have started out, they nearly <i>expect</i> group work and I think they nearly <i>expect</i> you to like when you're doing notes and things with them, they <i>expect</i> a bit of a break after 10 or 15 minutes.
Rynn	Share expectations with students	But at the very least, it allowed you to get some idea of who you have, what you're playing with and how you could take that. I <i>guess</i> <i>to</i> engage [them] in the subject itself and what they can <i>expect</i> from that. In my mind there's continuity here.
Rynn	Shared student and teacher expectations of teaching & learning	I thought this was like the coolest thing ever because they came to us knowing what to <i>expect</i> from us. But we also know what to <i>expect</i> of them <i>and</i> it's credible because it would inform the planning we would make.
Capriotti	Sharing of subject expectations with students	It's not a whole school approach officially, but most teacher I think, nearly every single teacher does it where we kind of lay out what that is needed over the next while. What we <i>expect</i> from students to kind of the level of work and maybe examples of different bits.
Greene	Zero expectation of student knowledge	I know they know nothing, and I know there's an <i>expectation</i> that they know nothing as well. And if they have learned something.
Capriotti	Expectations of teaching methods and workload	because there is quite a jump from maybe the amount of work <i>expected</i> in not like the different types of work where it's a huge amount of note taking and regurgitating essay style answers from 6th class where it may have been for more. What the new junior cycle is trying to create, science should be allowed based, you know, they should be doing things. And they want to do things. They come in with the <i>expectations</i> of doing practicals. <i>So</i> you have to set them up to have fun.
Rinn	Student expectations of teaching methods	If you want P6s to teach science successfully, you <i>know</i> , you know <i>expect</i> that some of the kids will know you know their area of measurement and to <i>expect</i> you know to have you know to you know to not <i>expect</i> that they know it just in your mind they don't know how to do it.
Costello	Expectations of Student knowledge	You're going to be telling me you know what school did you come from? What sports do you play? What age are you? It's trying to think of easy sentences that you might. You'd <i>expect</i> them to know. But then on the other hand.
Mehon	Expectation of student knowledge	We should probably look a little bit more as to what they have done, but don't <i>say</i> or don't <i>expect</i> that they will have fully grasped it.
Rinn	Expectations of teachers' knowledge	But <i>actually</i> didn't know how to use that. You know, so it was. And that's not their fault... we <i>expect</i> , you know, there's <i>expectations</i> that people know these things and they don't, you know as I said, <i>expect</i> that most children can't do graphs.
Rinn	Expectations as 'assessment'	the same poor children will have awful reports, you know, and this business of Junior Cert. Yet to most <i>expectations</i> . Who came up with that? You know, that is outrageous, you know.

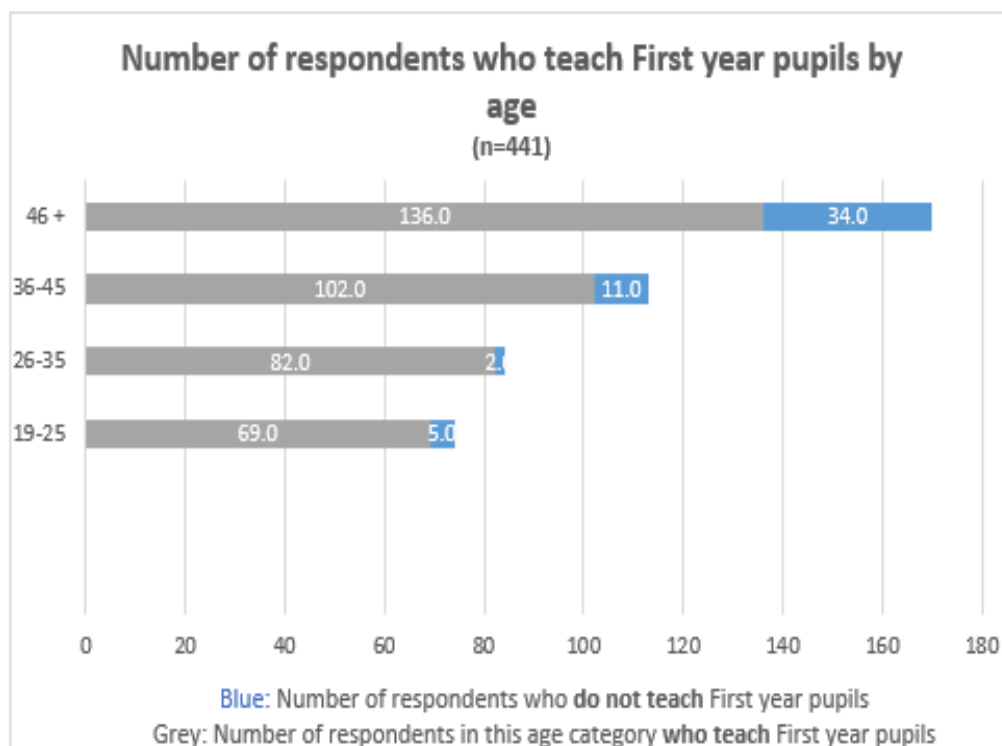
Appendix 3.10 Phase 3 Survey - profile of survey participants

Respondents by role in school and contact hours with First year students

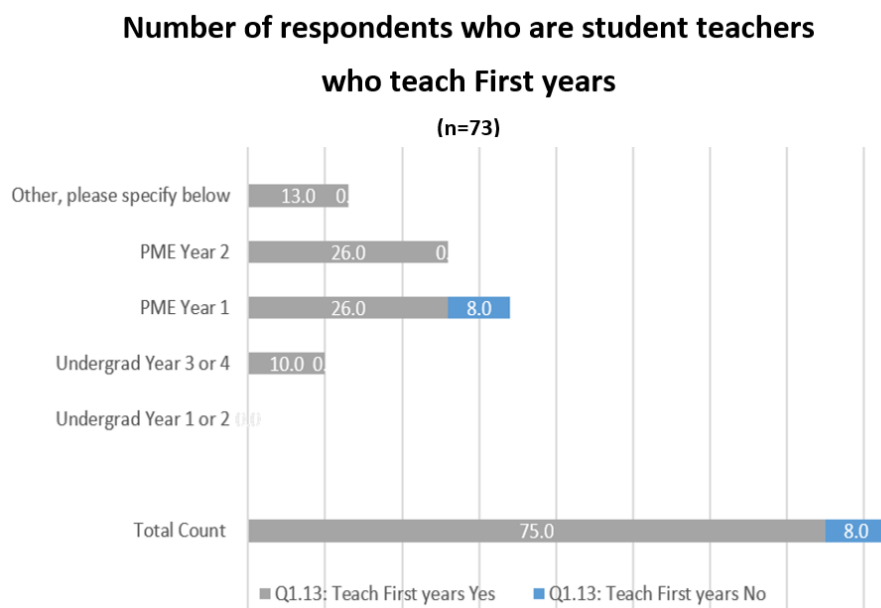




Student teachers and teaching First years by age

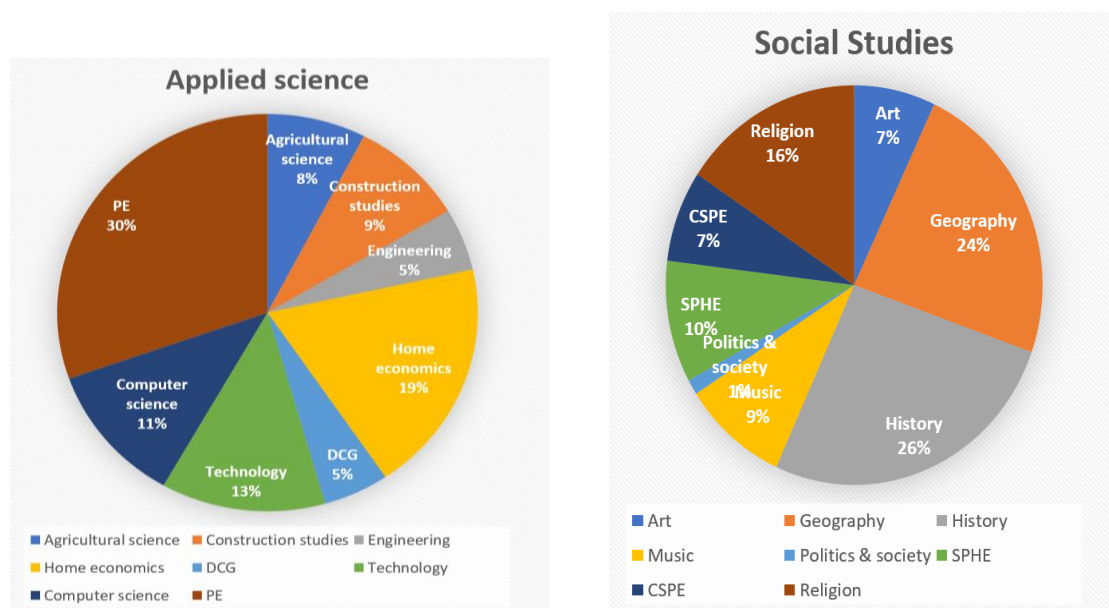


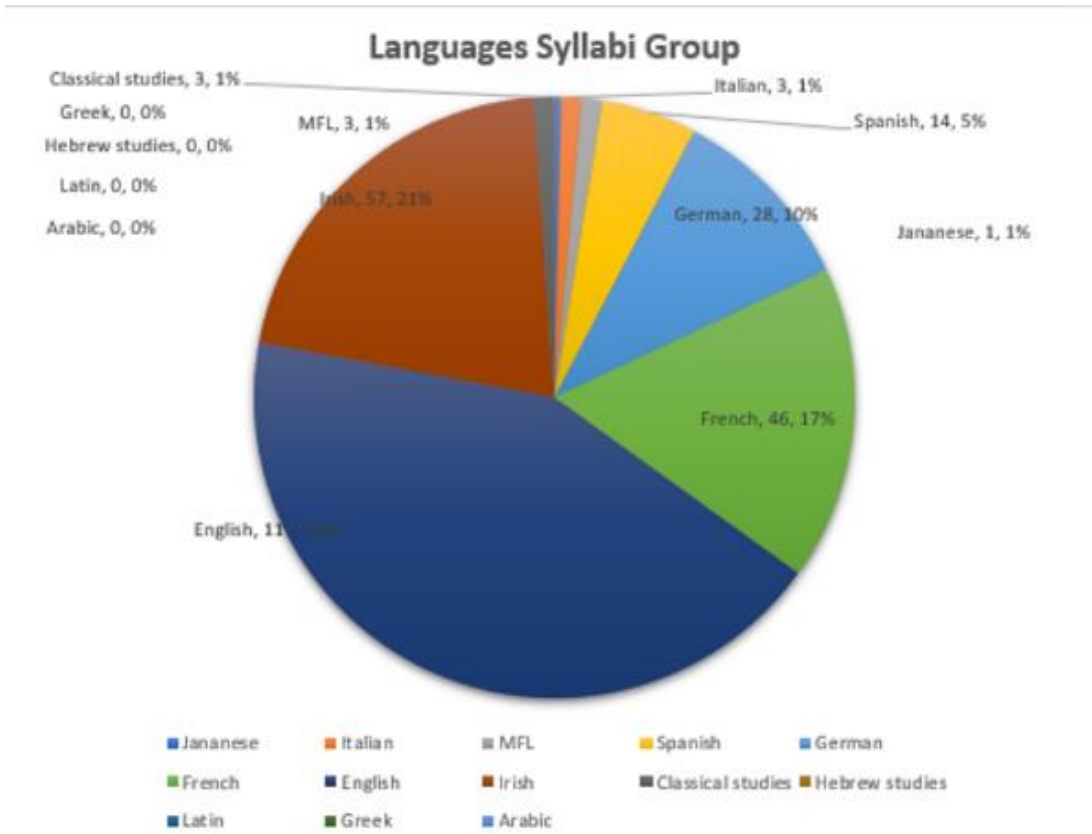
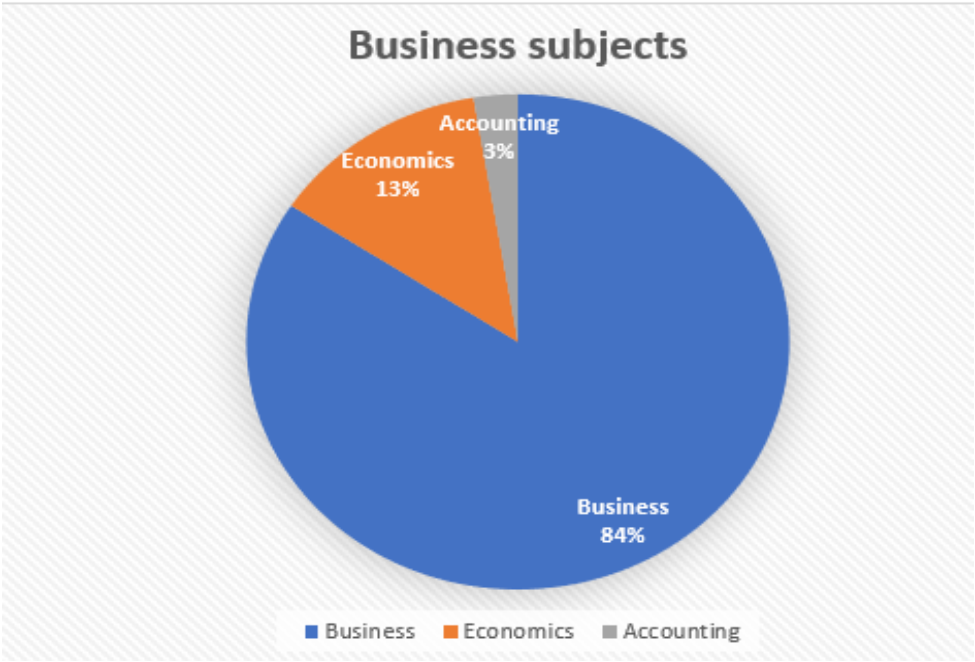
Respondents teaching First years by qualification



Respondents by location and school size

Appendix 3.11 Phase 3 Survey overview of subject breakdown





9.3 Appendix: Chapter 4

Appendix 4.1 List of documents and agencies

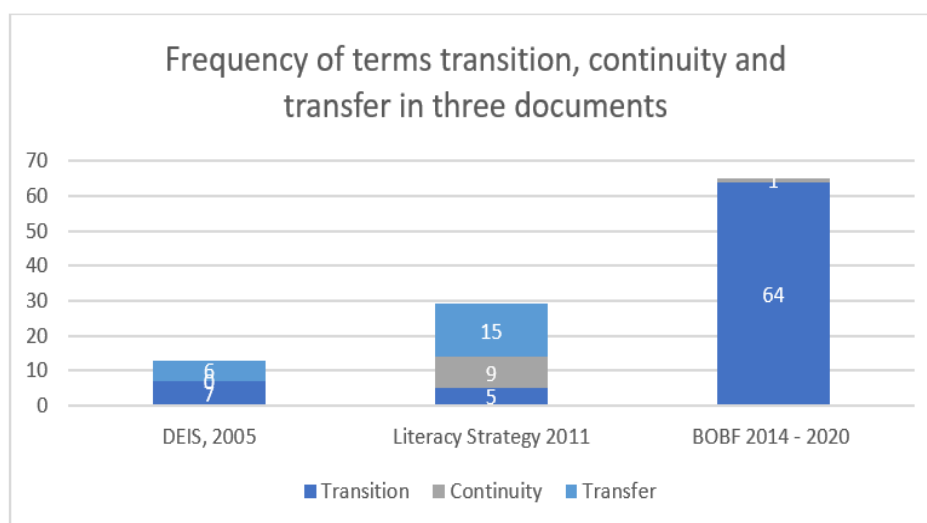
Refined list of documents and agencies
• Aistear (NCCA, 2009) • 1971 Primary Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1971b) • 1999 Revised New Primary Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999) • Framework for Primary (NCCA, 2023) • Delivering equality of opportunity in schools: An action plan for educational inclusion. Department of Education and Skills. DEIS (2005). • Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2015) • Specifications for Junior Cycle subjects (NCCA) • Teaching Council Guidelines for ITE providers (Teaching Council, 2011, revised, 2017) • Céim (Teaching Council, 2020) • Cosán (Teaching Council, 2016) • Action Plan for Education (DES, 2018) • National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People (DES, 2011) • Uí Choistealbha, J., & Ní Dhuinn, M. N. (2021). DEEPEN Report. Submitted to the Teaching Council September 3rd, (2021)
Relevant agencies NIPT; NCCA; PDST; NSCE, NPC, ESRI, TC.

Appendix 4.2 Sample of collation of references within documents

Continuity	Transfer	Transition	Post-primary
Primary Curriculum Teachers' Handbook (Government of Ireland, 1971b) No. 19/1967 – School Attendance Acts 1926-1967			
Continuity x 1 The Principal and the Curriculum Success or failure in implementing the curriculum will depend to a very large extent on the personal efforts of the <u>Principal</u> teacher who will now play a more important role than ever before. It will be his responsibility: (i) to hold regular conferences with his staff in order to discuss problems, to pool opinions and to evaluate progress; (ii) to outline a plan of work for the school as a whole which incorporates the principles of integration and environmental approach, and to ensure that the individual schemes of work prepared by his assistants subserve this general plan; (iii) to co-ordinate the work of the various classes so as to ensure continuity and avoid unnecessary duplication (ONE OF 10)	12 references The principal teacher should ensure that, when the child is transferred to another class, his record card is handed over to the new class teacher. p268 p15 his may have led to a certain uniformity of standards: it certainly resulted in a general uniformity of practice. Education was "curriculum-centred" rather than "child-centred", and the teacher's function, in many cases, was that of a medium through whom knowledge was merely transferred to his pupils. P When children have mastered the beginnings of reading and writing to a degree where the use of print script no longer brings special advantage, the question of transfer to cursive writing may be considered. Some schools never make such a transfer, since the fluency and grace of well-shaped print script allow for speed and for style in <u>handwriting</u> Language, whether as part of the English class or of the History class, is language still and the skills and attitudes acquired in one "subject" will transfer to the other. p111 115 It follows that there will be a considerable transfer of many of the reading skills already developed <u>e</u> P115 In writing, there will be an almost total transfer of handwriting and other subordinate skills from the work already done in Irish but, more important still, the pupil will understand the purpose and nature of the activity. P268 The principal teacher should ensure that, when the child is transferred to another class, his record card is handed over to the new class teacher.	2 references Written testing may be used later: it will incorporate direct, indirect, multi-choice and other forms of questioning, and it will help in the transition to the stage when the pupil no longer depends on questions as an aid to <u>try</u> P174 Types (ii) and (in) above are known as Block Charts and the transition to squared paper in type (in) should be gradual and undertaken only after plenty of experience of the previous type of work.	2 references P13 aims and <u>functions</u> The UNESCO publication, "World Survey of Education, III, Secondary Education" (1961), reminds us that education is "a continuous process . . . that gradually changes as the child grows and becomes mentally more mature and gradually differentiates as the child's interests take a more permanent form and differences in aptitudes and abilities manifest themselves and call for special attention." The lesson to be learnt here is that the child's education should be an organic development and should not involve a significant change of method and matter for him in passing from one stage to the next, from one class to the next or from the primary to the post-primary school. P125 (MATHS) The aims of the primary school will be to kindle a lively interest in the "subject", to give the child a grasp of basic mathematical structure and content and to lay a foundation for further work at post-primary level.

New revised Primary curriculum (Government of Ireland) 1999			
7 references Continuity and progression 9 heading] p19 The monitoring of continuity is one of the most important roles of the principal as a manager of curriculum. Occasions in the child's life in which discontinuity can occur include the transition from home to school, from class to class, and from primary to post-primary school. To maintain continuity for children at all stages, and in <u>order</u> to circumvent unnecessary duplication or gaps in information, principals need to ensure that procedures for consultation and liaison are put in place (p19) Sense of identity Irish education reflects the historical and cultural roots of Irish society and seeks to give children an appreciation of the continuity of the Irish experience and of their relationship with it. I (p26) History curriculum (p49) he development of historical skills, the beginnings of a concept of chronology, a realisation of the relationship of cause and effect, and an appreciation of change and continuity are, therefore, central elements in the child's engagement with history from the earliest years 5th and 6th Class strands (p49) Continuity and change over time	5 references Principles: skills that facilitate the transfer of learning should be fostered p.9 The transfer of learning [heqdingOp.16 One way to judge the effectiveness of learning is to look at the child's ability to apply what he or she has learned in dealing with problems, choices, situations and experiences that are unfamiliar. The acquisition of this ability to transfer learning is a central feature of the curriculum. Each curriculum area addresses the development of abilities and skills that will enable the child to react creatively to a variety of situations, to approach problems constructively, to communicate effectively, and to relate successfully to others. (p16) Social personal and health education p57 Through <u>it</u> children can explore issues, acquire relevant information and develop skills that are relevant to the social, personal and health dimensions of their lives. As they engage in these processes and work together, they begin to internalise what they have learned and are able to transfer it to situations they encounter in everyday living. Conclusion (p74) In providing the flexibility to fulfil such requirements, the curriculum emphasises particular <u>empowering</u> elements of learning. It stresses the importance of developing generic skills and abilities that help the child to transfer learning to other curriculum areas, to future learning situations, and to his or her life experience	7 references • facilitating the transition from primary to post-primary education (p9) Principles The monitoring of continuity is one of the most important roles of the principal as a manager of curriculum. Occasions in the child's life in which discontinuity can occur include the transition from home to school, from class to class, and from primary to post-primary school. To maintain continuity for children at all stages, and in <u>order</u> to circumvent unnecessary duplication or gaps in information, principals need to ensure that procedures for consultation and liaison are put in place (p19) Good communication between parents and schools will help build a shared understanding of the principles of the curriculum, the learning goals of the school, and the approaches and methodologies it adopts. It will also facilitate easier transition from home to school and later from primary to second-level education (p22) Effective education for children with special needs involves a balanced provision of education and care, the nature of which can vary as the child develops and progresses. It is essential, therefore, that it is flexible enough to accommodate both ease of movement between special and mainstream education and the transition from primary to post-primary level (p29)	8 references Member of council: Ms Nuala Henry (to 1996) National Parents Council—Post-primary Mr Seán Mitchell (from 1996) National Parents Council—Post-primary one of the functions of primary education is to prepare children for engaging effectively with education at second level. The importance of this function is acknowledged in the general aims of the curriculum. The transition from primary to post-primary education represents a significant and challenging step in the child's educational experience and may present difficulties for some children <u>p31</u> Transition from primary to post-primary (heading) p31 Effective education for children with special needs involves a balanced provision of education and care, the nature of which can vary as the child develops and progresses. It is essential, therefore, that it is flexible enough to accommodate both ease of movement between special and mainstream education and the transition from primary to post-primary level. P29 Literacy & numeracy The successful development of these essential skills during the primary school years will be crucial for educational success in post-primary school and in enabling every individual to realise his or her social and vocational potential Key issues in primary education

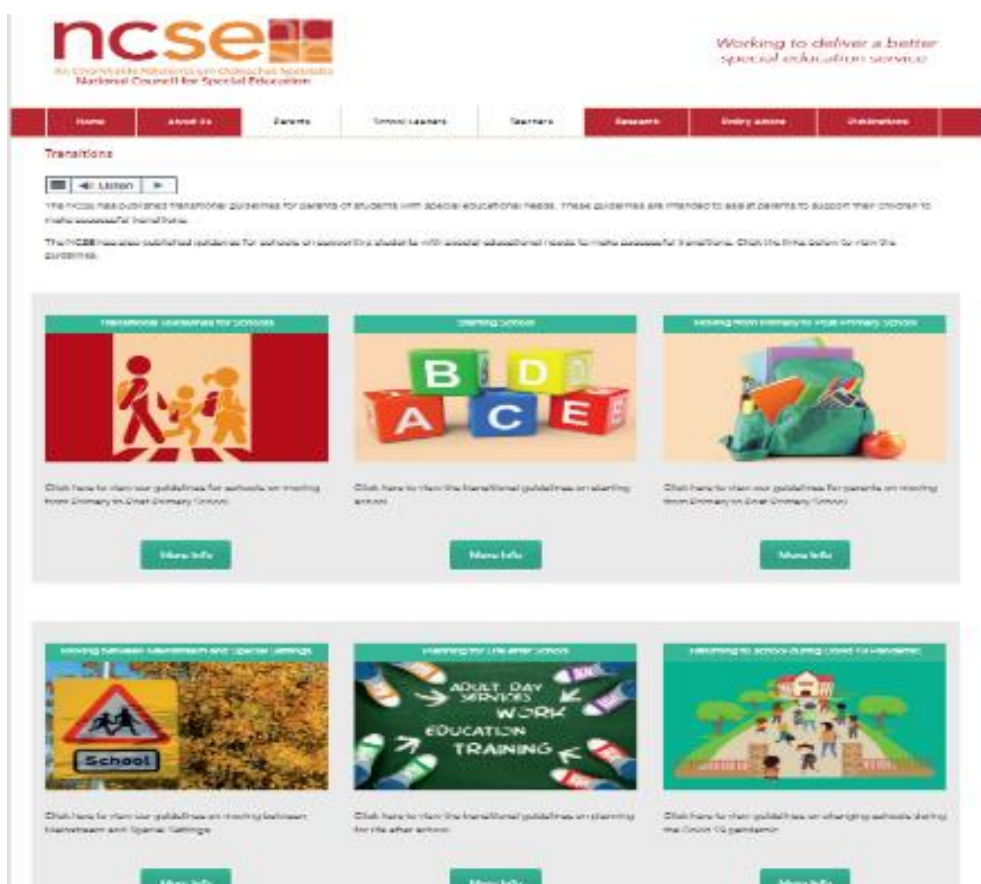
Appendix 4.3 Frequency of terms in three documents



Appendix 4.4 PME providers, consecutive programmes

PME PROVIDERS	
UCD	Prof Masters Education - Programme Details (ucd.ie)
DCU	https://www101.dcu.ie/registry/module_contents.php?function=4&programme=PME
UCG	universityofgalway.ie/courses/taught-postgraduate-courses/educationprofessionalmaster/downloads/PME-FAQs.pdf Observation/School Experience consists of 14 hours: 7 hours in a primary school and 7 hours in a post-primary school.
UCC	Professional Master of Education (Secondary School/Post-Primary Teacher Training) PME University College Cork UCC Courses
MU	https://apps.maynoothuniversity.ie/courses/?TARGET=QS&MODE=VIEW&TARGET_SOURCE=QUALIFICATION&QUALIFICATION_CODE=PMEDF2
Hibernia	No response, minimal information
UL	Professional Master of Education University of Limerick (ul.ie)

Appendix 4.5 Supports available from NCSE for professionals.



Screenshot of CPD and information for professionals from the NCSE website shot (22/05/23).

Source: <https://ncse.ie/transitions-2>

9.4 Appendix: Chapter 5

Appendix 5.0 Pre-service and in-service breakdown of data

Pre-service v in-service quantitative breakdown

Note: Tables with green headings indicate that statistically significant associations were found.

	TOTAL N=420	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=341	PRE-SERVICE n=79
EP AWARENESS	160	YES (155/341) 45%	5/79 (6%)
	76	No BUT AWARE (68/341) 20%	8/79 (10%)
	184	Never heard (118/341) 35%	66/79 (84%)
INTERVIEW AWARENESS	TOTAL N=410	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=333	PRE-SERVICE n=77
Yes	58	(52/333) 16%	6/77 (8%)
On request	59	(52/333) 6%	7/77 (9%)
AEN	77	68/333 (20%)	9/77 (12%)
NO	102	(89/333) 27%	13/77 (17%)
Not sure	114	(72/333) 22%	42/77 (55%)
Entrance assessment held - AWARENESS	TOTAL n=411	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=334	PRE-SERVICE n=77
YES	284	(243/334) 73%	41/77 (53%)
NO	77	(65/334) 19%	12/77 (16%)
Not sure	50	(26/334) 8%	24/77 (31%)
Entrance assessment content AWARENESS	TOTAL n=281	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=241	PRE-SERVICE n=40
YES	164	(147/241) 61%	17/40 (43%)
NO	117	(94/241) 39%	23/40 (57%)

Knowing hobbies of students	TOTAL n=366	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=300	PRE-SERVICE n=66
Extremely well	13	(11/300) 4%	2/66 (3%)
Very well	22	(17/300) 6%	5/66 (8%)
Moderately well	98	(79/300) 26%	19/66 (29%)
Slightly well	71	(61/300) 20%	10/66 (15%)
Not at all	162	(132/300) 44%	30/66 (45%)
Knowing learning preferences of students	TOTAL n=366	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=300	PRE-SERVICE n=66
Extremely well	7	(5/300) 2%	2/66 (3%)
Very well	29	(22/300) 7%	7/66 (11%)
Moderately well	81	(68/300) 23%	13/66 (20%)
Slightly well	84	(70/300) 23%	14/66 (21%)
Not at all	165	(135/300) 45%	30/66 (45%)

Communication between primary schools	TOTAL n=369	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=303	PRE-SERVICE n=66
Excellent	48	(43/303) 14%	5/66 (8%)
Very GOOD	118	(102/303) 34%	15/66 (23%)
Good	88	(75/303) 25%	13/66 (20%)
Fair	31	(29/303) 10%	2/66 (3%)
Poor	10	(5/303) 2%	5/66 (8%)
No idea	78	(49/303) 16%	29/66 (44%)



Results access AWARENESS	TOTAL n=283	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=243	PRE-SERVICE n=40
YES	165	(152/243) 63%	13/40 (33%)
NO	47	(40/243) 16%	7/40 (18%)
Not sure	91	(71/243) 29%	20/40 (50%)
Results access PREFERENCE	TOTAL n=42	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=35	PRE-SERVICE n=7
YES	22	(18/35) 51%	4/7
NO	20	(17/35) 49%	3/7
Knowing academic ability of all Students	TOTAL n=368	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=302	PRE-SERVICE n=66
Extremely well	35	(33/302) 11%	2/66 (3%)
Very well	81	(71/302) 24%	10/66 (15%)
Moderately well	135	(104/302) 34%	31/66 (47%)
Slightly well	39	(33/302) 11%	6/66 (9%)
Not at all	78	(61/302) 20%	17/66 (26%)
Knowing EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS of students	TOTAL n=366	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=300	PRE-SERVICE n=66
Extremely well	80	(74/300) 25%	6/66 (9%)
Very well	141	(114/300) 38%	27/66 (41%)
Moderately well	97	(77/300) 26%	20/66 (30%)
Slightly well	35	(26/300) 9%	9/66 (9%)
Not at all	10	(9/300) 3%	4/66 (6%)

Induction Knowledge	TOTAL n=361	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=298	PRE-SERVICE n=63
Yes	308	(262/298) 88%	46/63 (73%)
No	23	(20/298) 7%	3/63 (5%)
Not sure	30	(16/298) 5%	14/63 (22%)

Curriculum continuity is good in my subjects	TOTAL n=272	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=272	PRE-SERVICE n=60
Agree	84	(76/272) 28%	8/60 (13%)
Disagree	133	(105/272) 39%	28/60 (47%)
Not sure	67	(56/272) 21%	11/60 (18%)
Unaware of curriculum	48	(35/272) 13%	13/60 (22%)

Reforms in JC have strengthened curriculum continuity	TOTAL n=310	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=256	PRE-SERVICE n=54
Strongly agree	7	(3/256) 12%	4/54 (7%)
Agree somewhat	73	(57/256) 22%	16/54 (30%)
Neither Agree nor disagree	101	(81/256) 32%	20/54 (37%)
Somewhat disagree	54	(48/256) 19%	6/54 (11%)
Strongly disagree	75	(67/256) 26%	8/54 (15%)

Reforms in JC have strengthened pedagogy	TOTAL n=307	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=253	PRE-SERVICE n=54
Strongly agree	10	(7/253) 3%	3/54 (6%)
Agree somewhat	77	(61/253) 24%	16/54 (30%)
Neither Agree nor disagree	109	(83/253) 33%	26/54 (48%)
Somewhat disagree	44	(39/253) 15%	5/54 (9%)
Strongly disagree	67	(63/253) 25%	4/54 (7%)

Concept of transition	TOTAL n=302	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=249	PRE-SERVICE n=53
Phase	95	(79/249) 32%	16/53 (29%)
Rite of passage	32	(26/249) 10%	6/53 (11%)
Process	147	(117/249) 47%	30/53 (57%)
Other	28	(27/249) 11%	1/53 (2%)

Knowledge of Aistear	TOTAL n=318	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=261	PRE-SERVICE n=57
YES	94	87/261 (33%)	7/57 (12%)
No	153	118/261 (45%)	35/57 (61%)
Somewhat	71	56/261 (21%)	15/57 (26%)

Knowledge of Primary curriculum	TOTAL n=333	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=273	PRE-SERVICE n=60
Yes	85	72/273 (26%)	13/60 (22%)
No	111	86/273 (32%)	25/60 (42%)
Somewhat	137	(115/273) 42%	22/60 (37%)

Knowledge of Primary school textbooks	TOTAL n=334	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=274	PRE-SERVICE n=60
YES	111	(99/274) 36%	12/60 (20%)
No	122	(91/274) 33%	31/60 (52%)
Somewhat	101	(84/274) 31%	17/60 (28%)

Knowledge of Primary school reports	TOTAL n=334	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=274	PRE-SERVICE n=60
YES	126	(113/274) 41%	13/60 (22%)
No	109	(76/274) 28%	33/60 (55%)
Somewhat	99	(85/274) 31%	14/60 (23%)

Fresh start	TOTAL n=323	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=266	PRE-SERVICE n=57
YES	219	(186/266) 70%	33/57 (58%)
No	104	(80/266) 30%	24/57 (42%)

Prior learning recognition	TOTAL n=323	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=265	PRE-SERVICE n=58
Yes	294	(240/265) 91%	54/58 (93%)
No	29	(25/265) 9%	4/58 (7%)

Never consider	TOTAL n=323	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=264	PRE-SERVICE n=58
YES	85	(71/264) 27%	14/58 (24%)
No	237	(193/265) 73%	44/58 (76%)

Knowledge of Primary school routine	TOTAL n=336	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=276	PRE-SERVICE n=60
Yes	145	(120/276) 43%	25/60 (42%)
No	65	(53/276) 19%	12/60 (22%)
Somewhat	126	(103/276) 37%	23/60 (38%)

Knowledge of Primary school teaching methods	TOTAL n=334	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=274	PRE-SERVICE n=60
Yes	97	(82/274) 30%	15/60 (25%)
No	98	(75/274) 27%	23/60 (38%)
Somewhat	139	(117/274) 43%	22/60 (37%)

Knowledge of Primary school assessments	TOTAL n=334	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=192	PRE-SERVICE n=60
Yes	120	(102/274) 37%	18/60 (30%)
No	100	(77/274) 28%	23/60 (38%)
Somewhat	114	(95/274) 35%	19/60 (32%)

Knowledge of Primary school behaviour/expectations	TOTAL n=334	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=274	PRE-SERVICE n=60
YES	116	(95/274) 35%	21/60 (35%)
No	92	(73/274) 27%	19/60 (32%)
Somewhat	126	(106/274) 39%	20/60 (33%)

ALWAYS REVISION	TOTAL n=320	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=263	PRE-SERVICE n=57
Yes	110	(90/263) 34%	20/57 (35%)
No	210	(173/265) 65%	37/57 (65%)

Subject department approach	TOTAL n=322	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=265	PRE-SERVICE n=57
Yes	235	(198/265) 75%	37/57 (65%)
No	87	(67/265) 25%	20/57 (35%)

Responsibility	TOTAL n=313	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=258	PRE-SERVICE n=55
Primary	75	(61/258) 24%	14/55 (25%)
Post-primary	127	(106/265) 41%	21/55 (38%)
Neither	111	(91/258) 35%	20/55 (36%)

PARALLEL PATHWAYS	TOTAL n=315	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=260	PRE-SERVICE n=55
Strongly agree	18	(14/260) 5%	4/55 (7%)
Somewhat agree	101	(83/260) 32%	18/55 (33%)
Neither agree nor disagree	90	(77/260) 30%	13/55 (24%)
Somewhat disagree	84	(68/260) 30%	16 (29%)
Strongly disagree	22	(18/260) 7%	4 (7%)

SEPARATE TRIBES	TOTAL n=308	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=255	PRE-SERVICE n=55
Strongly agree	67	(63/255) 25%	(4/53) 7.5%
Somewhat agree	126	(101/255) 40%	(25/53) 47%
Neither agree nor disagree	42	(34/255) 13%	(8) 15%
Somewhat disagree	48	(36/255) 14%	(12) 23%
Strongly disagree	25	(21/255) 8%	(4) 7.5%

SOURCE OF INFORMATION	TOTAL n=460	IN SERVICE TEACHERS n=370	PRE-SERVICE n=90
Teaching qualification	78	(55/370) 15%	23/90 (26%)
Subject associations	44	(42/370) 11%	2/90 (2%)
School meetings	94	(89/370) 24%	5/90 (6%)
Colleagues	146	(119/370) 32%	27/90 (30%)
NIPT	10	(10/370) 3%	0/90
JCT	50	(46/370) 12%	4/90 (4%)
NPC	10	(10/370) 3%	0/90
SURVEY	113	(85/370) 23%	28/90 (31%)
NEVER	25	(19/370) 5%	6/90 (7%)

Appendix 5.1 Bridge 1: Examples of comments

Education passport comments
I remember the sheet, it ... didn't ask much information, but it would just say like, what's your favourite subject and then it was like who'd you know going into the school, with you, but that was the main question because I think they're like trying to sort out classes. <u>So</u> if you put like a few of your friends or people you know, going too they'd like try and put you in a class, with at least someone you know. (Liffey) Feel: <u>Oh</u> we did, yes, I forgot about that, in particular, we did a passport thing, and we wrote our friends that we had, they would pair us up with them so that we were in class with friends that we have. My mother made me like write down everyone in my class, you know that was neither here nor there, that wasn't a fault of the schools (Feel). CORRIB: In my in my old school in my primary school what they did was they had these letters ... The secondary school sent out these letters to my parents to say will you take out ~~xxxx's~~ strengths and her weaknesses and my parents did that, so I think that might be how they know, but like, I think, maybe they got a better idea once they talked to <u>me</u> but they definitely did because they know me. (I10, Lines 398-409)
Comments on interviews
Liffey: <u>Yeah</u> we met our Principal in the year before we came in. It was a bit scary, and I know I wasn't sure <u>what</u> I had to say or should say, but the Principal talked to me most of the time, not my parents and it allowed me to ask any questions I wanted and to tell the principal about what I liked or didn't like and hobbies etc. I think I made some of it up. The principal made notes and asked who we'd like to be in class with or not. It was <u>actually good</u> but quite long, almost an hour. Blackwater: yeah, it a bit scary but the principal talked to us as if we were adults and it was different. Boyne: We didn't have interviews but as I had a big brother in the school I ~~kinda~~ knew what it was like, so it didn't really <u>matter</u> SLANEY: Well <u>actually we</u> did do this book type of thing that was sent to our parents before we started school and we had to fill it in and bring it in on our first day in school. Interviewer: And what was it like? What was in it? SLANEY: To be honest I can't really remember but it like name your friends in primary school that are moving with you, do know anyone in the same school, older siblings or if you're friends have older siblings, what are you most nervous about and it had like a map of the school and stuff. I think it had questions about what after school activities are you going to participate in and then are you excited and stuff. And we had to put a photo of ourselves into it. Interviewer: And how was it used? Did you present it or talk about it? Did the teachers refer to it in the first few days? SLANEY: No, it was put into a time capsule for us to get when we are in sixth year. We also wrote a letter to our 6th year selves at the end of first year and that went in too and we were told you could write anything because no one would look at it except yourself unless you wanted to share what you wrote. We were told if we wanted, we could put in a covid face mask so we could look back and remember the covid times. We're going to look back on it on our graduation night and open them then.

Appendix 5.2 Bridge 2: Examples of comments

Comments on Mentor Systems
We had a teacher assigned to <u>us</u> but it was our maths teacher and every two weeks we'd have a class dedicated to chat about problems issues and things like that...[not useful] as our class was too quiet. She was just fishing for answers, and it wasn't very useful it usually only lasted 10 minutes and then the teacher would say, so it there's nothing else let's just get back to the maths, but I think it changed the year after us and all years now (Barrow)
Comments on Friendship
I wasn't overly looking forward to it, but it was, you know, kind of quite a small country school and quite a few people are kind of country, yes, so, there's nothing wrong with it, but just very farmery tractory types and I'm not farmery tractory type so it's not everyone was able to empathise with you whereas if there's 190 you can have statistically are bound to have more than that was looking forward to that yeah.
Comments on insider knowledge
Shannon: we had like students from the secondary school come in to speak to us and we got to ask some questions about secondary school which I thought was really, like it really helped, but not <u>really other</u> than that, we had open nights and all that but not really. Interviewer: <u>So</u> was that the main thing that actually worked preparing you? Shannon: yeah definitely, because I was <u>really anxious</u> about starting secondary school and just being able to ask like people who are in the school what they thought of it and how certain things worked really helped before starting. (I7, L225-245)

Comments on informal knowledge

Feel: I personally found the clubs more helpful for me because you got to talk to people from other years, they're also able to give like unofficial advice as well, like. I confess the principals or whatever can't say really say you can chance your arm on with whatever with Mr x didn't even think about crossing Miss Lee or something like that. (I15, Lines 174-184)

Comments on siblings: Interviewer: And did that make a difference to you?

SUIR: No, not really. He didn't really say much about it and the teachers in the first few days asked if you have any brothers in the school but I suppose it was good in the first few days when I could ask him what to do, or what's the best time to get on the bus and things like that but, actually even now and I'm in TY some of the teachers still don't know that I'm XXXX's brother, but that's also good because we are so different.

Interviewer: Good and different, how?

SUIR: Well. He's good at maths and I'm not, he's better at science and I'm ok but I'm better at English... sometimes the teachers might expect that just because your brother's good, that you are too or like my brother hated technical drawing and when the teacher first heard that I was his brother he thought I'd be the same and it took a while for him to realise that I'm actually a lot better and more interested than xxx was and I think x messed a lot in the class too. [laughter] (I2, Lines 347-387)

Comments on student -teacher relations

But one thing that really took me by surprise was how in primary school your teachers, your teacher knew you on a personal basis, however, in secondary school that's not the case at all, which is especially hard with some teachers you may only have once a week.

and how does that make you feel?

It doesn't bother me personally, but it definitely helps if the teacher makes the effort to know you on a personal basis, it's all good and well doing icebreaker challenges on the first day, but a lot of teachers, they just....., I have a teacher who I've known for two years, who still doesn't know my name, which was a real shock coming in from primary school where your teacher knew you by the second day. (Bann)

Comments on teaching principals.

Moy: Maybe like I remember in in maths they started doing algebra and they kind of expected you to know I certain thing of like when I went in it was all new to me the x's and ys and I wasn't quite like a few kids in my class, then they knew already so they clearly didn't know we did less than in my primary like.

Interviewer: And do you think there's a solution for that?

Lagan: there is a solution, our teacher was the principal of the school so she was rarely ever there Interviewer: that's in the primary school is this. yeah okay.

Lagan: She was busy so probably the principal should do their own job rather than two.

Appendix 5.3 Bridge 3: Impact of transition on subject preference

Impact of transition on subject interest/preference						
Participant	Subject	None specified	Same	Different	Reason	Comment
Erne	Art		√		Personal preference Subject specific teachers	I just enjoyed the subjects, there's like most of the time, even if you don't like that teacher, the subject is still enjoyable. difference was a good difference, it like a main thing was just it wasn't the same teacher always, but like I enjoyed just having a different teacher, because it meant they had more experience with the subject so you could ask more questions if you could say would most likely know the answer.
Brosna	Art			√	Content boring	First year art is very <u>boring</u> so I don't like that anymore
Boyne	Art			√	Subject choice	I don't do art any more
Suir	Maths			√	Personal ability	Curriculum too hard, just for me, I find it difficult
Liffey	Maths		√		Personal interest and ability	I just felt that, like since I was able to keep on top of maths and know what I'm doing it's not as hard as, like other subjects it's like a subject I find easier, so therefore I like, like it.
Boyne	Maths			√	Increase in difficulty	' <u>such</u> a big step and there's so much detail in it
Moy	Maths			√	Increase in difficulty	' <u>just</u> got too difficult and I lost interest
Blackwater	Maths			√	Discontinuity / increase in difficulty	Probably is such a big step and like maths problems and all of that, and it just got <u>really tough</u> and it's kind of frustrating so kind of just went down from there and gave up on it
Avoca	Maths			√	Personal preference / ability	I just like the subject and I'm ok at it
Inny	Maths			√	Discontinuity	Because it's a lot different, Primary maths and then secondary maths.

Avoca	Maths			✓	Personal preference / ability	I just like the subject and I'm ok at it
Inny	Maths			✓	Discontinuity	Because it's a lot different, Primary maths and then secondary maths.
Nore	PE			✓	discontinuity in practice / content	No, not really. PE is, it isn't the same in secondary school. I didn't like it as much. It felt really overly organized and kind of forced,
Nore	Irish			✓	discontinuity in content	and Irish as well in secondary school, it's a lot more about poetry so it's less enjoyable, in my opinion.
Tolka	Art/PE			✓	Subject interest	maths and English in secondary. I think in primary I just wanted to do the fun <u>stuff</u> , all the stuff is harder but it gets more interesting
Foyle	Art/PE			✓	Subject choice/ Learning	Because I like the practical subjects
Nore	History		✓		interest	But I still find history <u>interesting</u>
Cornib	History			✓	Increase in <u>difficulty</u> / Dislike of teacher	I think I used to like history, I can't remember much about it now because it changed a lot, [...] because it just became longer and harder and I don't like my teacher very much.
Maiove	Maths			✓	Increase in <u>difficulty</u> / Dislike of teacher	Too hard and I don't really like the teacher
Maiove	Art		✓		Personal interest	Still like art. I love the subject
Lagan	English			✓	PE	
Shannon	English			✓	Increase in difficulty	I don't know. I liked English in primary school but it got difficult, so I didn't really like it then, but history still has a bit of English in it and I like learning about stuff we do in class
Luba						
Lagan	English			✓	Increase in difficulty	Probably because it just started getting a lot harder so just couldn't, started to lose interest because, it got way harder....
Bann	Geography			✓	Discontinuity	In primary school, I always loved geography, it was very rare that we did it, but I always loved geography. I also enjoyed obviously PE, as I think most people did, but mostly definitely in the classroom, geography. but it is definitely different to what the primary school course is.
Fergus	Geography			✓	None specified	
Dodder	Art	✓			Undecided	
Dodder	PE	✓			Undecided	
Dorale	PE				Not Applicable	Do you own thing... don't have to study
Slaney	PE		✓	✓		Fun subject but science too now
Mourne		✓				
Barrow	Art	✓			None specified	
Feel	mixed		✓	✓		Generally the same but I like home ec and business now too

Appendix 5.4 Student perceptions of subject coverage in primary school.

Overview of student perceptions of coverage of subjects in primary school					
Subject	No, not really	A bit	Yes	Not mentioned	Comments
Geography	(6) ~~Maigue~~ Lee Slaney, Lagan, Avoca, Tolka	Boyne (6) Slaney, Bann Shannon Corrib, Feel		Others	Boyne – bit of each in SPHE we did is the <u>rivers</u> Rarely did it Feel – no relevant topics, counties etc.
History	(7) Tolka, Lagan, Moy, Dodder ~~Maigue~~ , ~~slaney~~ Lee	(2) Boyne, Nore	(5) Inny, Avoca, ~~Dargle~~ , Moume, Brosna	Others	We didn't do any history at all in <u>primary</u>
Religion	(2)	(2) Lagan, Moy		Others	
Business		(2) Blackwater Liffey	1 Feel	Others	JEP programme
Music		(1) Corrib		others	Didn't do a lot but I liked it when we did
Science	(7) Dodder Lagan, Moy ~~Maigue~~ , Slaney Lee, Foyle	(5) Boyne, Bann, Shannon, Avoca, Feel	(1) Science	Others	We never did any <u>science</u> No, never science. Rarely We do experiments outside
English			ALL		More creative writing in primary
Maths			ALL		
Irish		(2) Shannon Feel	(5) <u>Plus</u> others - ~~Maigue~~ , Barrow, Boyne, Blackwater, Liffey	Others	The only thing we <u>actually</u> use in secondary school from what we learned in primary school is Irish; Teacher didn't really speak it

Appendix 5.5 Students' perceptions of teachers in the classroom

Teacher-talk		
Moy	Discourse warning/negative	Well, just like, if you let's say, if you didn't do your homework in primary like they kind of tell you 'in secondary now you won't be getting away with that' and things like they're bigger deal in secondary just things like that. Was that good or bad do you think to tell you that? Probably a good thing so you kind of be like 'oh I need to step up my game
Tolka	Discourse warning/negative	I did say yeah they didn't really talk about it, but I remember like whenever people like forgot their homework forgot their copy books or something they always say oh you won't be able to do this when you're in secondary school
Slaney	Discourse warning/negative	They definitely say like if you forgot your books or something they'd say, like we're not in primary school anymore, and we don't like Hold your hand anymore, so you need to be responsible,

Appendix 5.6: Students' perceptions of who is responsible.

Primary teachers should know more about secondary <u>subjects</u>			
Some sample reasons			
Participant	Theme	NO	YES
<u>Suir</u> (L415-425)	Subject specific knowledge	In primary school teachers shouldn't need to know the curriculum for what you do with first year as it's not their area of expertise,	
<u>Erne</u>	Moving on	Totally <u>separate</u>	
<u>Corrib</u>	Building foundations in subjects	I doubt it's as important but it's still good to be able to lay the foundations	
<u>Boyne</u> (Line425-430)	Teachers' Knowledge		Because the primary school teachers don't know as much about the secondary schools ... because realistically, they haven't been in a secondary school in probably a long time, so it could have changed or they could have just forgotten kind of the whole system works,
<u>Lee</u>	Knowledge needed to prepare.		 I think that teachers in primary school aren't even aware of what we learn in senior <u>school</u> and I think it would help a lot if they did and because they'd be able to prepare us for what we learn in senior school and....
<u>Bann</u>	Refresh teachers' knowledge		but it does seem like some teachers almost, almost forget, and they. ... Especially, I suppose you could say, the veterans of the school and or the education system, they wouldn't, they would be a long time there, I'm not too sure they're really focused because that's only for maybe a month a year that they have to refer back, [they're] not as up to date on it as some, I find the younger teachers to be more up-to-date
<u>Nore</u>	continuity in content teaching methods		<u>yeah</u> maybe about, like there were some subjects like science in first year is completely different so maybe like teaching science in primary school and a similar way to how its taught in first year might be helpful.
<u>Bann</u>	Choice subjects Shock factor		I <u>definitely think</u> primary teachers should know more about secondary course because there are some, some subjects that ...are a kind of a bit of a shock especially the choice subjects ... I suppose it was a real big leap into, into what we're taught in <u>secondary</u>
<u>Inny</u>	Teaching methods		The Irish is definitely taught really bad in primary. Interviewer: yeah? Go on. Inny: I done Spanish and I'm already better in Spanish than I am in Irish
<u>Dodder:</u>	Subject option		Yeah, I think so because in my primary we didn't really do much science and in my school it's an option to do science, so if you do science, I think, like you should probably do more science, or whatever you choose, in primary.
<u>Darale</u>	Prepared for new subjects		yeah because then they get you started and ready to go to secondary school instead of trying to learn like French and some other subjects from like scratch!

Secondary teachers should know more about <u>primary</u>			
Some sample answers			
Sujc	yes	Expectations	 Secondary schools should know what you completed in primary school so they're not expecting as much of you. In primary school teachers shouldn't need to know the curriculum for what you do with first your others not their area of expertise, but secondary school should know the curriculum for primary school to know what you've done up to that point, so so they can help you see where you're at
Slaney, Lee Maigue	yes	Managing expectations of knowledge	Especially in Science, History and Geography...
Nore	yes	Avoid <u>repetition</u> Avoid jumping too far ahead	Because just to ensure that you're not repeating stuff that doesn't need to be repeated or jumping too far ahead, I think it would help them but it is hard to do because, like different people have different primary school experiences.
Brosna	no	New course; new start	I'm not really sure, and I don't really think so because I think they have their own course, like as soon as you join, the course starts, so you kind of, You just move on from primary and then you just have to like start with the course it doesn't really matter you're learning like this now
Erne	no	Fresh start	It's a fresh start
Luba Shannon	no	See no relevance	in the last four years we haven't really done anything like that I did in primary school. Nothing that I really done has stuck to me. Apart from English with a bit of writing, I never really did Irish, Geography, <u>science</u> and all that in primary school
Luba	no	No relevance	Like that we didn't really do much of anything that we touched on in primary anyway. It was <u>really</u> just the basics we learned in primary and went on to do more advanced stuff
Liffey Blackwater Boyne Barrow	no	Not important	The other way round is more <u>important</u>

Appendix 5.7 Bridge 5: Examples of comments

Well, they like told us you know in secondary school you'd have to be on time, you would have to be organised and you like, you <u>have to</u> do your homework and you're going to need to understand like certain bits of maths for secondary school and I think that's like mainly it. (Brosna)	Tolka: I think like in primary school whenever we had to do projects and stuff the teacher would help us set off, but in secondary as Dodder said they just say find the notes in your copy or in the book. Interviewer: And do you like that approach? Tolka: not really like it makes you independent but it's harder to do it by yourself, like at first, and when you first start secondary school.
In some <u>aspects</u>, we were ready in my primary school ... our time management skills good. ... in primary usually we're used to doing the homework on the day and then having a ready for the next day. But in secondary usually like it's just due for the next class so in sixth class for my primary school they did this thing where certain homework, would be due like certain days of the week to try and get us prepared for that. But the thing I think they didn't really prepare us for was like the exams and studying, because I think once I got to first year like I hadn't even done like one bit of study ever. So, like having to do the Christmas exams and study for that was like quite a big change, for me, because I wasn't really used to doing study and like doing these big exams (Liffey).	-If you're finding your subject difficult it's <u>really hard</u> because they you have to go to the teachers to ask for help, or support and the teachers don't really ask you. -And I think that for like, especially what I've noticed is that, like in primary school they kind of used to go over everything, but now in secondary school they like everyone's too scared to say something if they don't understand so everyone just sits there in silence, hoping that one person will say it, because they're worried what like the teacher might think of them, especially in first year because they didn't want to like make a bad impression, I think it's probably the same in class most people just kind of sit in silence, instead of asking and the teachers kind of just move much faster. (Lee & <u>Maigue</u>)

Appendix 5.8 Students' advice for teachers of First years

<i>Expectations of and advice for teachers of First years</i>		
<i>Feale</i>	Patience Time	Be <u>patient</u> Let students get to know <u>each other</u>
<i>Moy</i>	Realistic expectation in knowledge	don't expect them to know as much as you think they're going to know,
<i>Lagan</i>	Awareness of age and maturity	be more aware that they're actually coming from sixth class.
<i>Tolka</i>	Awareness of age and maturity	Maybe like go like easier on them they're from easy teaching the older years but like I think sometimes they forget that, like the first years are like they're just they've just come from primary school they're not used to the new environment.
<i>Foyle</i>	Be supportive	Go easy as them like be supportive of them and, like it, because it's a big transition.
<i>Avoca</i>	Expectations of behaviour	yeah there's just certain rules that in primary school they wouldn't have been so strict on in first year and then sometimes the other way around. - Do you think that that's fair. yeah cuz I think we're all getting more mature now So we talk more in the classroom than in primary.
<i>Nore</i>	Teacher expectations of level	But Irish maybe the teachers assume that we had a lot more Irish than we actually did, which meant that it made teaching kind of hard
<i>Brosna</i>	Teacher expectations of maturity and organisational abilities	I think they expected us to be more like more able to cope like we know they expected us to be organized, to be on time now and they'd say like it's not primary anymore, you have to do this, you know and so yeah like stuff like that.
<i>Erne</i>	Teacher expectations or maturity	don't be tough on the few weeks, a few of the teachers in the first like three weeks, they would either be extremely like kind of not rude but just, they won't give you any like space between the classes that kind of expected in the first few weeks, they you'd be a perfect student
<i>Suir</i>	Avoid assumptions of what they know	I would say, be aware of what they've done in sixth class to an extent and don't be expecting them to know things because they did it in sixth class... go back over and refresh their memory

Appendix 5.9 Characteristics of teachers with less experience

<i>Characteristics of student teachers/those with less experience</i>	
<i>Classroom Management</i>	can't control the classroom they feel kind of, to the side they don't know what to do (I2) sometimes they can't control the class, (Mourne) you got to be harsh; you got to be strict, you can't go easy on them you can't just do what the students say, (I1) they don't really have that much control over the class like, if you like, you could easily (I3) They just be confident about it really and to show authority (Shannon)
<i>Youthful Appearance</i>	Well, you can guess, because some are young. (Suir) and it's quite obvious, because they're younger (Slaney) their age they are usually a lot like not a lot, you know, but they are usually like slightly younger and that also means that they're like they're definitely more timid, (Lee)
<i>Attitude</i>	they're kind of stressing over little things; they look like they don't they, they make themselves look like they don't belong there they can't control the classroom they feel kind of, to the side they don't know what to do, (Suir) they're kind of nervous. (Shannon) [they need to] relax a bit Whereas the teachers who've been there for longer and stuff like that are more experienced that kinda of come in and they'd be more laid back.
<i>Overly prepared</i>	kind of things more prepared even than normal teachers, that they are organized, (Slaney) they come in with their laptop (Balckwater)
<i>Content driven</i>	if you have a lesson plan and you don't get everything done, there's no point in rushing the rest of the class to get your written lesson done, because then no one's gonna learn anything and we'll just end up,... not going well. (Suir)
<i>Focussed on plan</i>	student teachers would generally tend to just get started with the work a lot quicker. it's very, very easy to tell a student teacher. They are always so based on the course they it's like a Bible they that they follow or something (Bann) student teachers would kind of just be focused on getting through the course straightaway (Barrow)
<i>Resources</i>	yeah so some student teachers like to go by the books, like most like proper teachers or experienced teachers or other ones. Like to do with themselves like you know what their own experiment things like that (Corrib) and you can kind of tell that their student teaching. us because they go by the book A LOT Whereas, and a lot of teachers I've been there for longer kind of have their own resources for learning. Whereas you can tell that they're all seem nervous. (Maigue) are a kind of a bit more enthusiastic about teaching and a lot of time, the student teachers, that we have they do fun kind of things to do you know, like kahoot in class, are and then like what Sarah said, like don't let them take advantage of you because a lot of the time they can be too nice know (Luba)
<i>Classroom interaction</i>	[they should] like interact with the students more (Maigue)
<i>Negative Focus on individuals</i>	What they do is they keep talking to like a certain group of people in one class that maybe like be the messers, or whatever, and then they just like, other people in the class just don't they don't speak might be like a little. Like two or three people in one class that the student teacher always talks to just because they know them, and they just want to fit in and feel more comfortable around them are or in the class even. (Boyne) like you have one girl in your class call you over and say you by your name. That student teacher picks up your name and then use it constantly sort of like blah blah blah like you do this. (Slaney)
<i>Lack of interest in students</i>	And they're kind of very like they're not really interested in like getting to know you they're just more interested in like getting in there, get the job done and, like get out of there, (Barrow) teachers, that are full time, they've been there for a while they're more relaxed, they're more kind of them more kind of interactive even outside of the class time, however, student teachers feel like they're, it's almost like the reading from a sheet and, and that I feel like if they made a bit more effort to get, get to know you better and not to just focus on the lesson. and what's on the curriculum but, I think that's the main point (Bann)

Appendix 5.10 Phase 2: Bridge 1: Sample comments: Teachers & management

'I'd say the majority of teachers would not be aware of it and they might be aware of it on just because of education sphere and maybe because maybe they have children themselves and are aware of the reports and so on, but as I said, I've never really had a discussion with any teacher or any subject department in relation to access to education passports or to look at that information'. (Tramore)	So that kind of information is really that useful ... It's just, you know, schools are kind of busy. you know that information will contain certain amounts, but I think the notes you get from one to one is kind of better, you know ... I don't tend to use them <u>....</u> but if I'm honest with you., sometimes I use this only as a kind of a reference if something crops up'. (Navan)
the year heads might decide they want to go through every single one of my notes and every single student. That's their choice. And a lot of them might because they want to have a really good sense of their year <u>group</u> but I don't know if they all do that' (Byrne)	'There's a perception among primary school teachers maybe, that they want to give the child a fresh start, and so, you know, you can get this student was spirited and that translates to something completely different when you get to secondary school where you'd love to know. Of course, every child deserves a fresh start, but you'd love to know, to put your supports in place for no other reason' (Killarney)
...much of that information is, is in a locked cabinet in secretary's office here in the school. Which is very good. And <u>of course</u> we ...but with regard to being aware of these pupils day to day ... and not having that awareness being kind of eroded by the normal pressures of school life ... and the access to that information is a little bit problematic because you do have to make an effort to get the key.(Limerick)	I know in My first school... even the SEN department weren't <u>really sure</u> Like some schools were sending them in, in some weren't in the school and even in the school in was in last year They weren't actually quite sure whether we were expected to see it or not. (O'Reilly)
as a subject teacher, you never really... <u>... come in contact with</u> it because I suppose that's the special education team that deals with that. But the information in my experience over the last 11 years has never been transferred on to you as a subject teacher. And now I've never thought of asking for it <u>either....</u> (Martins)	...outside of the planning for the class ... sometimes it's difficult to get [teachers] to engage additional information ... it's not an intentional decision, it's so many agendas. There's so much going on for them, ...Like to be fair, to be reasonable. And it's much easier for a teacher who's got the same class all day to understand the needs and the kind of idiosyncrasies of that student than it is for x teacher. Like, if you're operating within the realms of possibilities, it is much harder to get someone to engage on that vast level and to remember <u>everything....</u> , but until the flags are raised. It just sits there. (Blackrock)

I tried to initiate a meeting of some of the local primary schools to come in just to see how best we could help a transition, but only it's getting time wise of getting everyone in as well that that so we had kind of initial meeting we just talked about some but then it never really flourished after that then as well I think you've probably the idea of time and also I think this is part of it as well is that just talked about the education as a business sometimes people look at and go and what's the ulterior motive (Tramore)	'So, we've developed a system where she goes and spends pretty much 1/2 day with the teacher down there with her SEN coordinator and gathers hard data and soft data on people coming ... [while in a previous school] there was not that relationship at all and we had no home school teacher. There was a transfer meeting, but only the students who had problems generally were highlighted. And so a lot of kids weren't talked about and we got paper information about them' (Tara).
Comments on curriculum knowledge	
I probably should look to see what they do a bit more in sixth class (Mahon) supposed to know I guess (Greene) Realize I don't know much at all (O'Reilly) Find out online but I'm guilty of not doing that, it doesn't really impact my teaching (Kearney) They don't [know about it] (Hegarty, Peters) [teachers] go in blindly (Hegarty) I don't have a huge knowledge about it at all (Martins) I don't know that much about primary schools, I'm not a parent' (Connolly) Majority of teachers are not aware, simply not aware' (Kiernan) Not something we discuss in departmental meetings (McAteer) No time to look at it (O'Dea) Don't know too many who would go out of their way to look at the primary school curriculum (O'Dea)	they mainly get that information if they are interested in looking at it, like it depends on the teacher and I would say if I asked my own staff how many of them are familiar with the primary school curriculum, I would say, 70% of them haven't clue. And they would be aware of topics that were covered just from the general information, what the kids will say -we did that in primary school, but would they be familiar with the primary school curriculum? I would say not, the 30% that are, are the ones that have to be aware, and they are mainly maths teachers. English teachers and learning support teachers' (Kells).

Appendix 5.11 Perception of a curricular gap

Overview of perception of a curricular gap in subjects MP and TP		
Subject	Gaps?	Reference
Business studies	Certain elements yes (<u>but</u> not recognised by teachers)	there are certainly maybe certain aspects of the primary school curriculum that I feel that perhaps a post primary teacher has a responsibility to know where like how is this taught or how do students learn about this at primary school <u>level</u>
Science	Santry	not really gaps. Expansion of some of the experiments in JC; similar topics.
Science	Kells	science in primary school is not the teachers are not science teachers. Number 1 they do not have the proper facilities to teach the subject very hard to teach science in a classroom. #2, primary school teachers are not teaching science. They're teaching nature studies or they're teaching health education and there's nothing wrong with that. There is no need for primary schools to teach science. No need, no need. We will pick it up at secondary school and bring it along. Same with Maths. There is no need for primary school teachers to teach, you know sets and relations and you know a bit of Algebra and a bit of this. No please don't. Because what happens then is when they come into us in a mixed ability classroom, we have mixed knowledge. <u>So</u> if they stick to the program, it would suit us an awful lot better.
Science	O'Dea	in our questionnaires, maybe 30 question and we devoted a couple of them to science. But we have thought to do that ourselves. So that was the good thing. I'm asking you ask your colleagues as well to information there and because. We would put that in ourselves, so it was things like have you done science experiments and if so, you know there was a box, please tell us and describe and very little came back in terms of what they had done or science experiments.
History	Hegarty	but they don't get the opportunities in primary school to <u>actually work</u> with history. It's too superficial, No because they do projects but...(the only subject they have introduced a book for)
History	Gap isn't big in <u>History</u> (Dunphy)	because my experience with junior cycle history, students has been extremely positive and for me, I would think that they are much more able and for the history curriculum than they are for the English curriculum.
English	(Dunphy) Disconnect	think there is a, there is a disconnect between English at primary and secondary school. I think there's the new junior cycle specification in English is hugely Mismatched with the skills and content of what they have studied at junior at primary school.

Overview of perception of a curricular gap in subjects
MP and TP

Subject	Gaps?	Reference
Geography	Prepared in terms of <u>skills</u>	, I suppose it depends on the primary school. I often see the depends on the primary school they come from. I do think they think it's all just maps and countries because a lot of them, even up to a couple of weeks ago, some of them said, when are we going to get to doing the flags and the countries never, you're not going to. You're not going to do it. That's what you do and you're you know. So yeah, it probably doesn't surprise me in one way. And that they're least prepared for, I do think they work. They do work hard at it. Then when they do, but it probably is maybe a shock to the system that they're not doing flags of countries and stuff and that you're starting with nearly <u>science</u>
	Not surprising from a student's perspective (Mahon)	
	Cosgrove – no link up	The main thing I found is exactly that response where all the students are in a flap quite quickly because a lot of them don't genuinely understand what geography is and a lot of them think that it's all we're going to look at the names of countries and where countries are in a map. They seem to think all of it is purely about physical geography of the world map. And then when you start introducing all structure of the Earth and all of this, they seem to not understand that geography is <u>actually</u> a type of science. And there's a lot of Dash built into it, so there is that overcoming that initial kind of gap and information of what is involved with the subject. Researcher Do you think it's a gap in terminology, in literacy? COSGRAVE It could be, but I think it's more so a gap in curriculum where it's like the secondary school curriculum doesn't line up at all with the primary school curriculum or vice versa, where they are both parts of the same subject

	Cursive writing	and it definitely in the writing element of English, I think that there's a disconnect there and that they certainly want more free writing and free expression. And with each at senior cycle. But it's kind of omitted from the junior cycle.
English	Repetition of novels (McAteer/ Blackrock) Connolly (lack of awareness of metalanguage)	Wonder Now more informal communication with schools through teachers and asking students
English	Hegarty Adare Repetition of material (novels)	they had ~~actually done~~ English novels that they've done in primary school. Now that's for me, a horrendous ~~overlap~~ and that maths
Maths	Navan	And I think like in things like maths, it is. I ~~do~~ think so. I think they have a. Some notion of what they what they cover, but then you know, they do a lot of stuff like fractions and all that stuff and then they do it again with the project maths in first year. But there's a certain level of Overlap definitely.
Maths	O'Loughlin	some things are taught but not taught using the literacy behind it
Music	Kearney	Doesn't really impact on my <u>teaching</u> . So ~~definitely there's~~ a crossover with music, I guess, depending on the primary school teacher, you know, if they if it's something that they're passionate about, it definitely shows when they come in
Art	Byrne	But I think if we didn't have that, the uptake would be very different because like initially when the kids come in and 1st year, we say, well, let's just do in primary your hands if you liked it or didn't like it. And they'll very mixed bag
Irish	Emphasis (on spoken rather than written) <u>O'Reilly</u> Disparity in assessments and what is expected.	. But they are coming in a lot of them, a lot more confident speaking. But not necessarily. Then when you go to do the assessment, the written assessment in it, they're not getting the Marks and that's very frustrating for them because so they're not taking as much care with accuracy in the written as Would come like they used to come in and this would have been it would have been all about, you know, your verbs (O'Reilly) <u>O'Reilly</u> I don't know if it's coming down to the approach in primary schools now or to the habits of the teachers that they had. I know that some primary school teachers love teaching Irish and some ~~don't~~ Then when you go to do the assessment, the written assessment in it, they're not getting the Marks and that's very frustrating for them

Appendix 5.12 Phase 2 Examples of comments



I tried to initiate a meeting of some of the local primary schools to come in just to see how best we could help a transition, but only It's getting time wise of getting everyone in as well that that so we had kind of initial meeting we just talked about some but then it never really flourished after that then as well I think you've probably the idea of time and also I think this is part of it as well is that just talked about the education as a business sometimes people look at and go and what's the ulterior motive (Tramore)	'So, we've developed a system where she goes and spends pretty much 1/2 day with the teacher down there with her SEN coordinator and gathers hard data and soft data on people coming ... [while in a previous school] there was not that relationship at <u>all</u> and we had no home school teacher. There was a transfer meeting, but only the students who had problems generally were highlighted. And <u>so</u> a lot of kids weren't talked about and we got paper information about them' (Tara).

Comments on curriculum knowledge	
I probably should look to see what they do a bit more in sixth class (Mahon) supposed to know I guess (Greene) Realize I don't know much at all (O'Reilly) Find out online but I'm guilty of not doing that, it doesn't really impact my teaching (Kearney) They don't [know about it] (Hegarty, Peters) [teachers] go in blindly (Hegarty) I don't have a huge knowledge about it at all (Martins) I don't know that much about primary schools, I'm not a parent' (Connolly) Majority of teachers are not aware, simply not aware' (Kiernan) Not something we discuss in departmental meetings (McAteer) No time to look at it (O'Dea) Don't know too many who would go out of their way to look at the primary school curriculum (O'Dea)	they mainly get that information if they are interested in looking at it, like it depends on the teacher and I would say if I asked my own staff how many of them are familiar with the primary school curriculum, I would say, 70% of them haven't clue. And they would be aware of topics that were covered just from the general information, what the kids will say -we did that in primary school, but would they be familiar with the primary school curriculum? I would say not, the 30% that are, are the ones that <u>have to</u> be aware, and they are mainly maths teachers. English teachers and learning support teachers' (Kells).

Appendix 5.13 Overview of participants' source of knowledge

Overview of TP and MP perspectives on source knowledge of primary school				
No.	Teaching Participants	Source	Management Participants	No.
9	Cosgrove, Flynn, Costello, Byrne, Geoghegan, O'Reilly, Greene, Martins, Mahon	Family, younger siblings and friends that are teachers	Trim, Kells,	2
5	O'Dea, Peters, O'Reilly, Dunphy, Finn	They are a parent	Kells, Tramore, Loughlin, Navan	4
4	Hegarty, O'Dea, Costello, Finn	Personal research	Loughlin, Santry, Adare, Slane	4
4	O'Dea, Geoghegan, Connolly, Kearney	Their own experience in primary school	Tramore, Santry	2
2	Byrne, Geoghegan	Online (NCCA)	Limerick (should)	1
2	McAteer, Costello	Asking the first-year students	Kells, Santry	2
2	Hegarty, Kieran	Own work experience	Tramore, Santry	2
2	(Costello) -only through personal research, pedagogy lectures (McAteer)	ITE	Santry	1
2	Mahon, Cosgrove	Casual chat among colleagues	Loughlin	1
1	Through SEN position (Byrne)	Teaching Role	Limerick, Kells	2
1	O'Dea	Subject department school approach	Slane, Blackrock, Loughlin, Trim	4
1	Geoghegan	CPD (Incl. subject groups)	Presumed' Tramore; Santry (personal); Limerick (Personal), Navan	4
1	O'Dea	School Culture	Blackrock, Slane, Limerick	3
0		Primary school textbooks	Slane Blackrock; (limerick (should)	3
0		PME Concurrent	Killarney; Santry, Tara	3
0		PP-led meetings between teachers and management in both schools	Trim, Slane	2
0		Casual Conversations in the locality	Tramore	1
0		Media	Tramore	1
0		Voluntary positions on School Boards of primary schools	Tramore	1
0		National Strategy programmes	Blackrock	1
0		NIPT		0
0		<u>Droichead</u>		0

Appendix 5.14 Perception of pedagogy methods



Overview of Pedagogy Methods TS and MS combined Perceptions		
Method	Used to it in PS	PP school
Group work Organising roles within groups/ pods / <u>stations</u>	Very used to it (Mahon, Costello) Expect group work (Mahon/ O'Dea); Adare, Byrne, Blackrock	
Breaks	Expect a break after note taking (Mahon)	
Target language	Not always possibly	PT dependent
Illustrating	Drawing on artistic ways of representing things (Mahon)	
Active learning	Used to this (Hegarty; Geoghegan, Byrne)	
Projects	Used to this (Hegarty)	
Games/fun	Used to this/like this (O'Dea ; Byrne; Greene)	
Note-taking		Not used to this
Rote-learning	Used to this	But not used to same extent in PP
Repetition	Used to <u>this</u>	Not used to same extent
Moving around in class	Used to this; (Byrne; Adare)	Not as accepted in PP
Cross-curricular approach	Used to this (Hegarty, Limerick, Santry)	
Writing up/follow through by teachers (actual work)		Don't like it (eg, Science)
Assessment (AFL/AOL)		
KWL charts	Used in primary (Costello)	
Getting homework corrected regularly	Very used to it	
Self-correction of work	Used to this	
Instructions	Used to clear <u>instructions</u>	
Peer correction		Not used to this (Costello)
Peer-assessment		Not used to this (Costello)
<u>AFL</u>		Not always evident in primary (Adare)
Longer term exams		Not used to this
Interactive whiteboards	Very familiar from primary	None really in PP schools
<u>Tools</u> using apps		Not used to this; Not in every primary school

Appendix 5.15 Comments on fresh start approach



Overview: 'Table rasa' / 'jazz hands' approach TS and MS perspectives		
1. Finn	Science	I approach it that they know nothing, you know and you know, I'll ask them if a few questions, but I know that and I tell it the PME students that if you wanted to you know for science if you want them to teach science successfully, you have to, you know expect that some of the kids will know you know their units of measurement and to not expect that they know it just in in your mind they don't know how to do it. <u>So</u> you're going to give all of them, you know, a two week introduction course.
2. Peters	Irish	We sort of teach them from scratch, but the assumption is that we are revising a concept that they will <u>definitely have</u> been faced with beforehand. And the problem is that there are students who have not had it explained to them explicitly, <u>Peters</u>
3. Kearney	Irish	Irish teachers like to start from scratch
4. Mahon	Irish/ <u>Geog</u>	were better off just going from scratch rather than trying to figure out all the time how people knew and I think in terms of your teaching methods sometimes it's easier to teach something from Like that they know nothing. Whereas if you're teaching from Sometimes it's easier as a teacher just to treat them all as if they don't know any of it and then build it up from there.
5. Costello	Geog/Irish	Down to the individual teacher
6. Flynn 'Jazz hands'	Geography	let's give him like you know, you know, jazz hands from day one because there's something about that that's very appealing to them because if you communicate that in a certain way that you do get guys to go OK, cool, clean <u>slate</u>

		probably going to come in armed with different pieces of information. <u>So</u> does that make my job difficult or easy? I guess it doesn't matter because my approach to it will always be the same, which is I'm pretending that everybody in the room here knows <u>nothing</u>
7. McAteer	English	<u>So</u> it's very clear and very structured topic wise. But how you want to approach it would be up to individual teachers,
8. O'Reilly	MFL	Really nice to teach German from a blank slate. Not possible with Irish (O'Reilly)
	Irish	but in Irish it's a lot more complex because <u>we</u> we've got parents say when she went to a <u>gael scoil</u> . So why is she doing this ...(O'Reilly)
9. Kearney	Music	No impact, no curriculum in music in primary
10. Mahon	Music	<u>So</u> I suppose music is unique in that state. They generally haven't done music before they come into secondary school. <u>So</u> I'm kind of starting on a clean slate or blank slate with music
11. Navan	general	<u>So</u> you really are starting at Ground Zero again
12. Tramore	general	(<u>down</u> to primary teachers)
13. Killarney	MS	think secondary school teachers think September 1st year is day one and you know you nearly forget what you've learned in primary school because it's so radically different to what happens in secondary school. (Killarney)
14. O'Loughlin	Maths	Very clear subject-department led approach
15. Slane	Maths	Their experience teachers always refer to prior knowledge

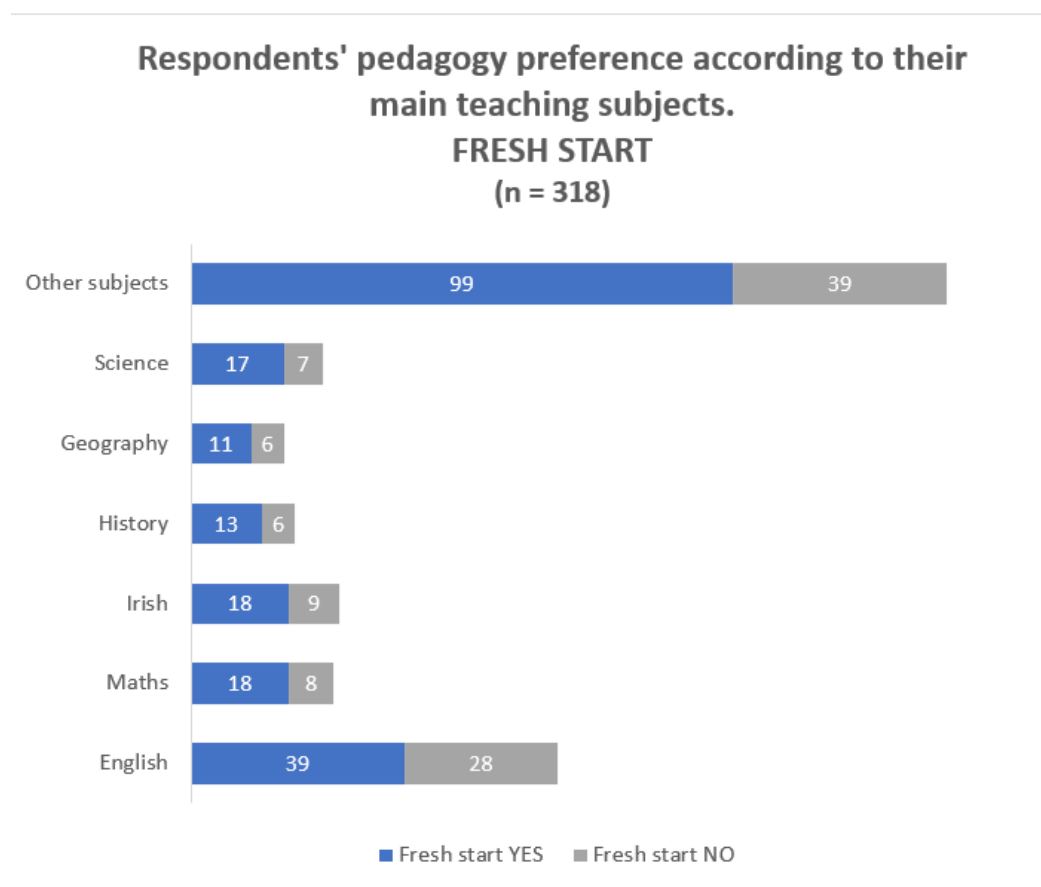
Overview of 'time' references across the Five Bridges of Transfer	
Bridge 1	time needed to do one-to-one interviews with incoming first <u>years</u> the difficulty of getting the EPs in a timeframe that allows <u>engagement</u> time to meet with teachers in <u>schools</u> time to go through the Eps and <u>reports</u> smaller schools have more time to devote to student files and sharing
Bridge 2	amount of time devoted by some schools to <u>induction</u> the voluntary nature of some tutor roles in schools. Other Years especially exam years need this time too
Bridge 3	No time available for teachers to <u>meet</u> Time allocated by primary teachers to different <u>subjects</u> Time needed for <u>CPD</u> Packed curriculum
Bridge 4	Impact of wellbeing on subject contact time in schools Weaker students need a lot of <u>time</u> Little time to chat with SEN dept and how best to help certain <u>student</u> No time for flexibility
Bridge 5	Time needed to support parents with emails/<u>communication</u> Time needed for them to adjust to new environment
Other	No time for upskilling staff Time needed for <u>CPD</u> Bureaucratic demands on Principal's time Invisibility of the time <u>spent</u> Workload of teachers

Appendix 5.16 Phase 1 Comparative summary

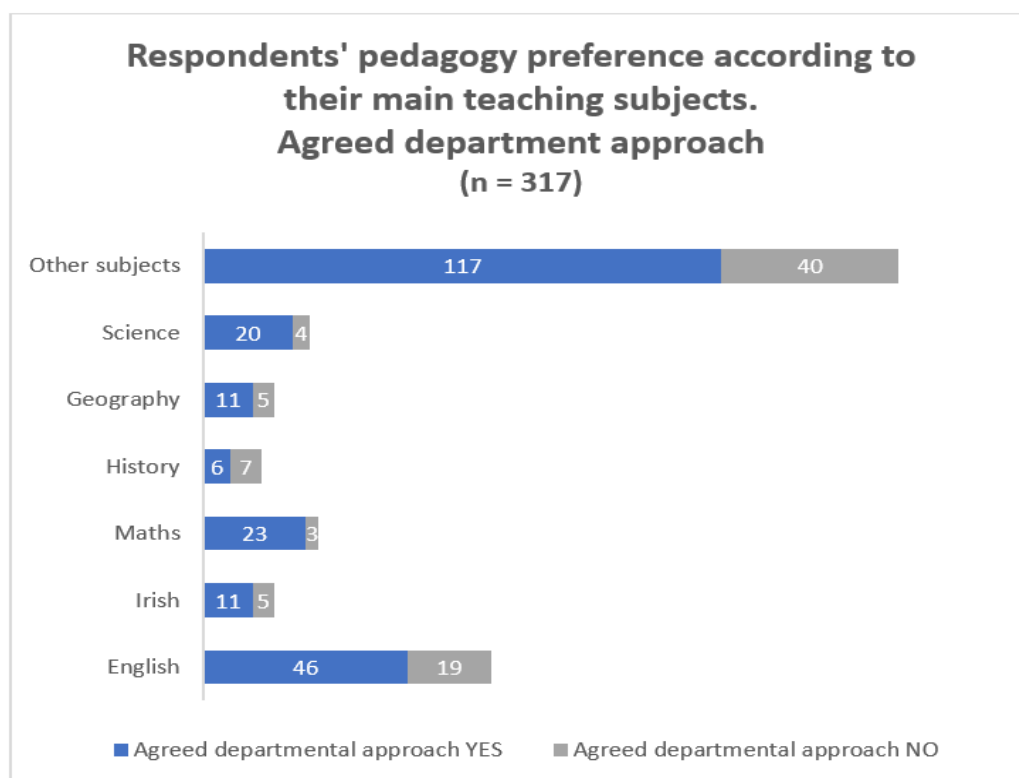
Students	Teachers & Management
1: Administrative Bridge	
Attitude & discourse: Generally, positive Information on strengths/weaknesses transferred? Not passed on to teachers No sense that they knew them Knowledge of EP? Little recollection Perception that it is used to form friendship groups Assessments upon entrance: viewed as simple Perception that they are used to form classes Interviews in schools: Scary but good Not happening in all schools	Attitude & discourse: generally negative towards EP Knowledge of EP: little or no knowledge of the EP by those outside of management or those with specific roles within an SEN department. Perception of usefulness of EP: Informal sources of information are preferred EP Positive: identifying and supporting AEN EP Negative: unreliable, inconsistent, biased Issues of GDPR and sharing of information Interviews: Don't happen in most schools Mainly for those with AEN needs Not always known by TP if they take place Interviews take too much time (MP) Assessments Content of entrance tests not always known Sharing of information: Inconsistent Knowledge of AEN needs shared among teachers. Information not always passed on to subject teachers.
2. Social & emotional Bridge	
Attitude & discourse: positive Types of initiatives: varied induction activities are mainly sport related Activities are time specific (linked to the first few days) Optimum length of time to settle? Term 1	Attitude & discourse to <u>supports</u>: very positive suggestion that there is too much emphasis on wellbeing at times. Types of initiatives: varied. active initiatives in place in schools Duration: mostly term 1

3. Curriculum Bridge	
Attitude & discourse: predominantly negative. <i>perceived</i> lack of content continuity in certain subjects. Subjects and perception of continuity: Core subjects: generally positive, Non-Core subjects: the mainly in Geography and science. Discontinuity linked to their perceived lack of engagement with these subjects in primary school. Subject preference: changes from primary to post-primary Observations: - a lack of knowledge of teachers in both levels of each other's curricular content. - primary teachers should know more about what they study in post-primary to prepare them adequately.	Attitude & discourse: mixed Subjects and perception of continuity: varies Different to students' perceptions at times Difference in how teachers and students seem to view continuity. Observations: - Teachers have a limited knowledge of primary and curriculum. - examples of good practice around curriculum bridging are school and or community specific. - limited to no communication with primary schools
4. Pedagogy Bridge	
Attitude & discourse: mixed Pedagogical similarities: use of group work, listening, note taking etc. Not similar: The use of target language (Irish) different teaching methods in maths (calculator) Prior learning: little reference made Expectations of knowledge: either too low or too high Pace: either too slow or too fast Teaching approach: teacher / subject dependent Some teachers taught as if they knew nothing revision and / or repetition viewed as beneficial	Attitude & discourse: positive Pedagogical similarities: suggestion that gap between primary and post-primary has closed with the introduction of the New Junior cycle. Sources of knowledge: ad hoc. Teachers' approach: teacher dependent Mostly a fresh start to teaching first years Minimal subject departmental approaches in pedagogical practices. Assessment practices: some methods used in primary not used sufficiently on post-primary (rote-learning/weekly tests)
Assessment practices: negative response different; different format and style (single end of semester exams) Homework practices: teacher dependent / correction practices different / feedback more direct	
5. Managing learning Bridge	
Attitude & discourse: mixed. Skills: awareness of gaps in their ability in knowing how to learn Role of 6th class teacher: strong the organisational preparation by their 6th class teachers Difficulties: Not prepared for knowing how to learn. Notable lack of independence in being able to move around classroom.	Attitude & discourse: mixed. Skills: student dependent. Lack of organisational skills and digital skills identified. Role of 6th class teacher: role of 6th class teacher acknowledged in organisational, deficits in digital skills were identified that hampered learning.
Emergent themes	
- Age and stage of teacher impacts how they interact - An emphasis on expecting and assuming knowledge - Role of teacher both in 6th class and in first year play important roles - Trust issues emerging	

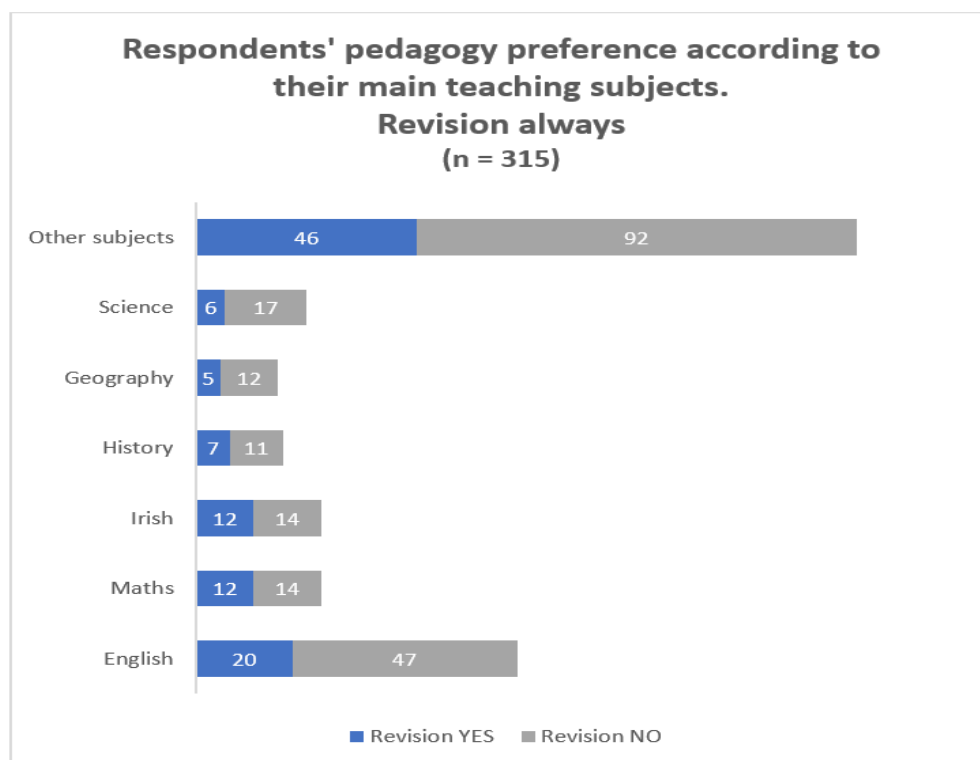
Appendix 5.17 Overview of responses to Fresh start approach by subject



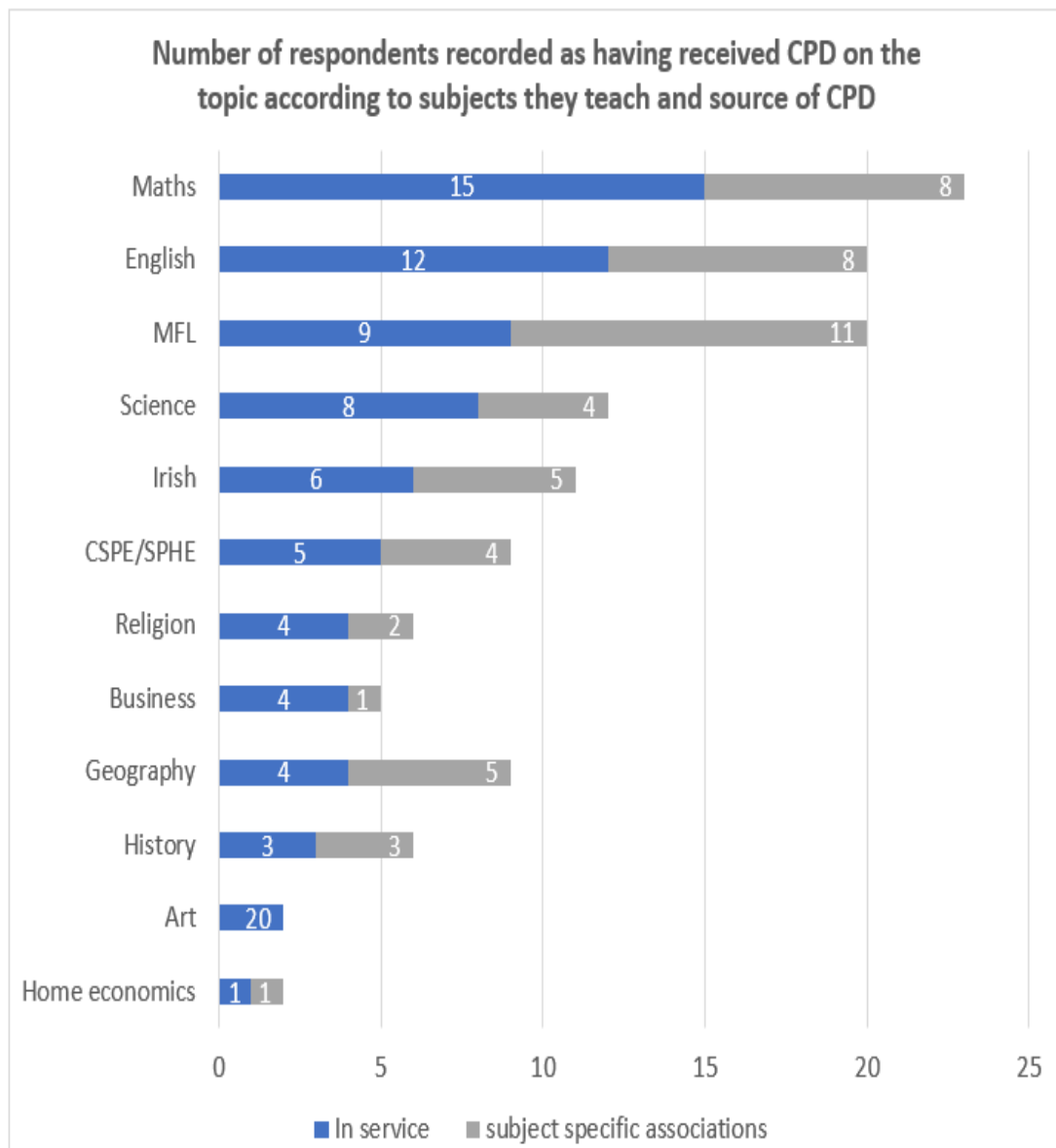
Appendix 5.18 Overview of agreed departmental approach by subject



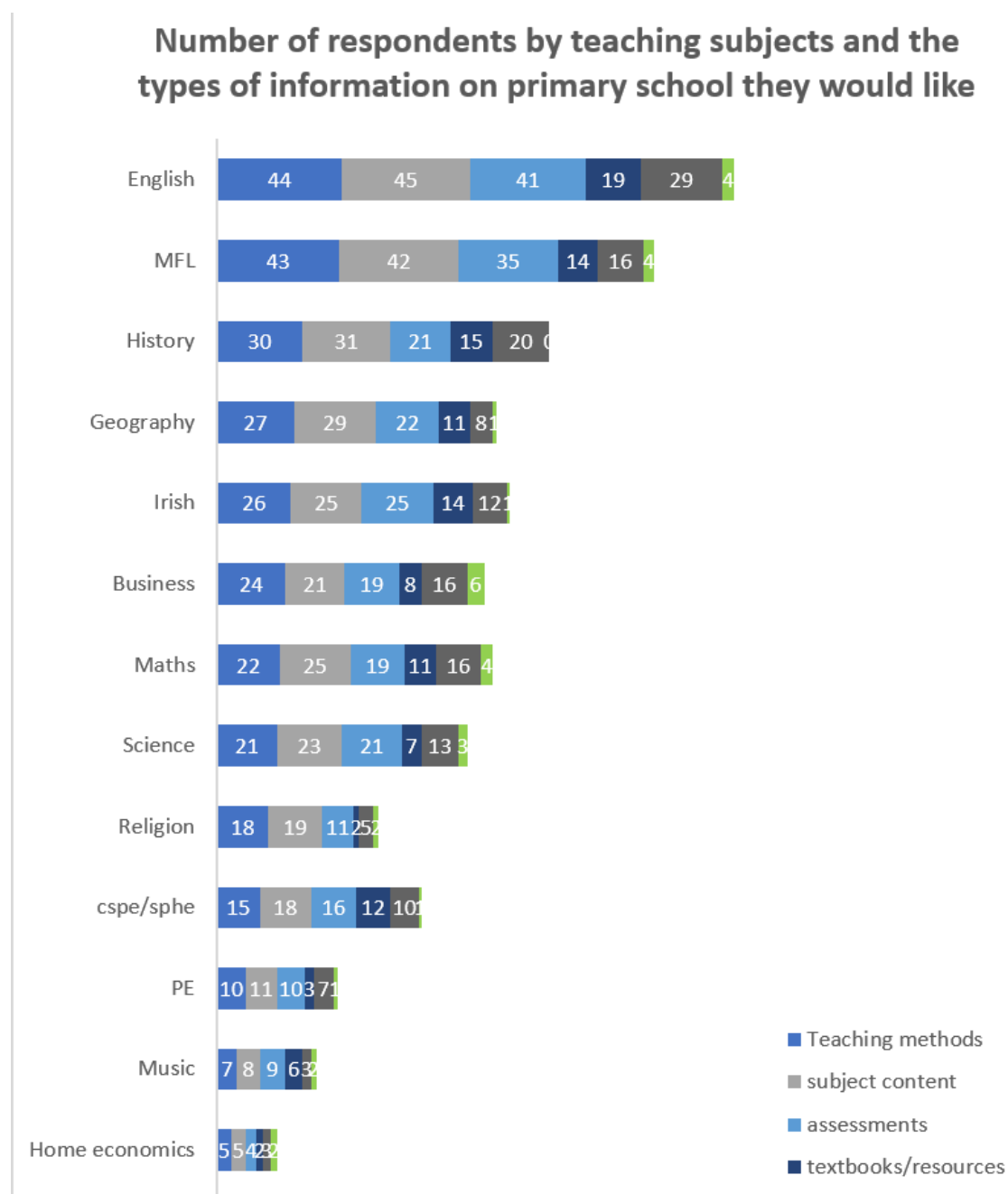
Appendix 5.19 Overview of responses to revision by teaching subject



Appendix 5.20 Overview of CPD by subject of respondents



Appendix 5.21 Overview of preferred CPD by respondents by teaching subject



Appendix 5.22 Overview of additional comments on definitions

Overview of respondents' comments and definitions on transition		
Negative	Definitions	Positive
A challenging time of change be difficult to navigate and that can determine experience of school for years	A very important transition which must involve both primary and post primary teachers as well as parents. An important life event	changing to a different style of learning with different opportunities .
A challenging time that where academics and building relationships can be overshadowed by excitement/anxiety from the student and enforcing rules by the school	A life stage that can take time to become used to. Secondary is a different level and some would have never had to organise anything until they land into 1st year.	A transition towards autonomy
Difficult, and more support is needed for the girls	Change from one thing to another	
A shock	A process that most students manage in 6-8 weeks. A process that generally goes unsupported.	Most pupils are ready to move on, and grow out of primary school culture, and are ready to take on more responsibility for themselves and their learning . This is not a one-size-fits-all. There are exceptions. But in my experience. They are ready, mostly to move on.
A bit of a shock really in terms of organising books and moving classrooms.	is a complex journey and is different for every child	
A huge and often terrifying and stressful event for children	a developmental step	More independent with more freedoms . Less time to students who are struggling.
Is complex . It can be daunting for some students and should be understood by post-primary teachers as such.	A defining period over a time in a young persons life where they prepare to move and do move from the certainty of a well-known social-educational setting to one that can be unknown and new.	
generally very scary and anxiety-inducing	Indeed, a coming of age, rite of passage	It's not easy. But in my view, it's GOOD that it is not easy. We don't like change, we don't like transition, but that is what life is like. The transition itself, difficult as it might be, IS a learning experience . leave it alone. Change nothing.
I know abroad in some schools they have one building for every age group. This would be lovely with babies visible and small kids around bigger ones.		