This Thesis is dedicated to my son, Éanán,
who has transferred from Primary to Post-Primary
at the beginning of this current school year
and who has formed much of the inspiration for my research.

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Strategies for Transition
From Primary to Post-Primary

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ABSTRACT

The origin of the researcher's work on this theme began with her experience of teaching senior primary school pupils and observing the difficulties that can exist in the transferring of these pupils to post-primary school. This research project aims to propose workable strategies to ease the transfer process and to make the transition a more positive experience for the students.

Having encountered negative tones of fear and concern from sixth class pupils, much apprehension about their making the change and, in many cases, pupils exploring the feasibility of repeating the final year in primary school rather than transfer, the researcher undertook to explore the topic of transition further. A variety of research instruments were employed and these include:

(a)   Survey among students prior to and after entry to post-primary school, looking at their fears, concerns and hopes and examining their settling-in patterns.

(b)   Survey among the principals of the schools to which the pupils transferred and looking at practices in existence for the induction of pupils.

(c)   Interviewing teachers in primary and post-primary schools surveyed, about their feelings on transfer.

(d)   Comments from parents in schools surveyed as to how they perceive the transition process.

It is proposed to plan an improved transfer programme in the light of responses received. Recommendations are made to ease the transfer for the pupils and to work towards the children being more prepared and consequently more content upon their arrival in post-primary school.

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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 *Purpose of the study*

> The transition from primary to post-primary school is a challenge for all pupils. For a small minority however, it can be a source of anxiety and may pose particular difficulties. Such anxiety can be associated with moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar, perhaps from an established peer group to a class of relative strangers, or from a school close to home, to a larger school some distance away. Some pupils coming to post-primary school may be having their first experience of a mixed setting. There are new teachers and new subjects to deal with and a school timetable to negotiate for the first time.

This quotation, from the NCCA *Junior Cycle Review* 1999 discussion paper, illustrates the challenges involved in the transfer of primary school pupils to post-primary. The report further pursues and develops some of the curriculum and assessment factors which may contribute to early school leaving. The report's findings show that a more structured transition programme between primary and post-primary schools would ease the transfer process for pupils. This may encourage students to stay in school and has implications for the raising of student achievements and in smoothing the pathways. In her experience of teaching the senior pupils in primary school and of monitoring the transfer procedures as they exist, the researcher has noticed that a major gap exists between primary and post-primary schools, and that a more structured transition programme would help to bridge the gap and smooth the pathways for the pupils transferring. The reasons for the great divide have interested the researcher for a long time and she wondered if sufficient steps were being taken in the primary school to alleviate the situation.

She also wondered if adequate transfer procedures were in place in the post-primary schools, or whether it was something that was beyond the school's control and required the help of advisors to the schools.

The purpose of this study is to focus on a monitoring of two primary schools and two post-primary schools, and look at transfer practices as they exist in these schools. The research will have as its objective, to make recommendations that will ease the transfer from primary to post-primary for pupils and their families. It will also work towards developing strategies that will improve the transfer process for all involved. These recommendations will evolve in the light of responses from the interviews of students, teachers and parents in the schools where the research is based, and from a review of literature pertaining to the issue.

1.2   Profile of the writer

The researcher has worked in both of the primary schools where the study is based. She has worked in school X for 25 years, where she served as assistant teacher for 7 years and deputy principal for 18 years. She taught the junior classes for 13 years, middle classes for 5 years and senior pupils for 7 years. It was while working with the senior pupils, that she became aware of the spirit of disenchantment that set in among the pupils, around the issue of transfer to post-primary.

Arising from this, she decided to survey the issue and commenced the process by interviewing the pupils in her own school. The researcher has, during the year of this work, taken up the position of principal teacher in a similar sized school which is also situated in a rural area. She is again working with senior primary school pupils in school Y, where she perceives the transfer from primary school to be a concern for her new pupils also. She has observed some pupils adapting easily to their moving to second-level schools. However, she has also encountered pupils in her sixth classes who were experiencing difficulties in making the change.

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The writer is of the opinion that a more structured communication process between the primary and post-primary sectors around the transfer issues would help in alleviating the trauma of transfer experienced by many pupils. The writer would be interested in sharing her findings with her counterparts in the primary and post-primary sectors, who may aspire to improved transfer procedures being implemented

1.3 Profile of the schools

There are two post-primary schools in the town where the research is based. They consist of a 750 pupil co-educational secondary school and a 340 pupil co-educational community college. The secondary school is a Catholic voluntary school and the community college is run by the local Vocational Education Committee. The town is situated in the east midlands of Ireland and has a growing population of 4,500 inhabitants. The town, formerly a market town, is now a place of residence for many who commute to Dublin daily, to their place of employment. There are a number of small units and factories in the town which employ between 20 – 30 people each. There is increasing housing development in the town and on the outskirts, and the school population is growing.

The pupil intake in the two post-primary schools in the town originates in 20 primary schools. The furthest of these primary schools is 16 kilometres from the town, and the nearest are the two single sex primary schools in the town. These primary schools range in size from two teacher schools in the rural areas to a sixteen-teacher school in the town. The researcher wondered, in the light of the work carried out by Shanks and Welsh (1986) if the movement from these relatively smaller rural schools to the larger primary schools was causing any more pronounced concerns for the pupils, and were there adequate strategies in place to help them to cope with the movement. The primary schools where the researcher has worked are both situated in rural areas. School X is located in the east midlands and is one of the feeder schools for the two post-primary schools in the research. The school has an enrolment figure of 128 pupils, with a staff of five teachers and a shared remedial teacher with three other schools. The school is an amalgamated

central parish school with a steady population of middle income earners. The school staff agreed to the rotation of classes among them, and each staff member has involved themselves in the experience of teaching a range of primary classes. The school Board of Management was briefed on the research on the transfer issues and gave its assurance of support and encouragement for the study.

School Y, while also situated in the east midlands, stretches to a distance of thirty-two kilometers from school X. It is also a rural school with an enrolment of 91 pupils and a staff of four teachers. The school shares a remedial teacher with five other schools. The school is situated in a growing area, with a housing estate which will consist of forty houses, in progress. The population is one of a farming community and a workforce that commutes to Dublin daily, either by car or the provincial bus that services the area. It is an area of middle income earners and it lies within a three mile radius from its two neighbouring towns. Pupils from this school transfer to second-level schools, other than the two post-primary schools in which the researcher carried out her interviews.

1.4 Summary of the Chapters
The thesis is organised as follows:

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on transition between school sectors. This chapter gives an analysis of the research on the topic such as:

- Age of transfer;
- Curriculum continuity;
- Contact between primary and post-primary schools;
- Good practice – such as in the Plowden and Pupils' Transfer Reports;
- Middle schools;
- Induction programmes;
- Pupil adaptation to secondary school;
- Student experiences of transition to post-primary school.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology which was used throughout the research. It is a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis and both are described.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the project.

Chapter 5 arrives at the conclusions and presents recommendations and strategies that could be put in place to ease the transition from primary to post-primary school.

The appendices will deal with related issues on the topic. Appendix A was administered with the first-year pupils following on their transfer to post-primary. It was presented to them in the form of a structured questionnaire and would assist in establishing their settling-in patterns.

Appendices B and C are a compilation of the most common fears and hopes, as expressed by sixth class pupils, prior to their entry to second - level.

Appendix D is a structured questionnaire for the post-primary principals on their induction practices for first-year pupils.

Appendices E, F and G contain the comments from primary teachers, post-primary teachers and parents in the schools where the researcher's work was being carried out.

Appendix H is the transcript of a seminar and workshops on the transition issue, which was attended by the researcher.

Appendix I is a sample of a transfer form, containing a profile of each student, which the researcher has submitted to the post-primary schools where her pupils transfer.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

Since the early part of the last century research on transition between different school sectors has been carried out. The research tended to be in the part of government reports which were produced in England. (The Hadow Report, 1926; The Plowden Report, 1967; The Bullock Report,1975; and The Cockcroft Report, 1982). A number of studies on the transition process and the effects of transition were also carried out in the British Isles and these include Nisbet and Entwistle (1969), Spelman (1979), Derricott (1985), Thorp (1994), Hargreaves, and Earl and Ryan (1996), and Kerr and Schagen 1999.

Research around the transition issue has also been carried out in other continents and this research proposes to examine a sample of this literature. In the United States of America research into the experiences of students after entering secondary school was carried out by Cotterell (1982). In the early part of this century a study was carried out in Western Australia, which explored children's expectations prior to secondary school and their experiences when they entered secondary school. This study was carried out by Kirkpatrick (2000).

There have also been some studies carried out in Ireland, - in particular those of Sheehan (1977), Lyddy (1981), O'Connor (1982), Naughton (1997) and Foley (1997). A report was published by the Department of Education in 1981 which highlighted the problems of transition, and made recommendations for the alleviation of these problems. Studies have also been undertaken on the transfer issue by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in 1994 – 1997 and in 1999.

In this review, the writer proposes to examine a sample of the literature which refers to studies which have been researched outside of Ireland. It is also proposed to look at some of the material which refers to the Irish context.

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2.2 Research outside of Ireland

(i) Government Reports in England

In the Hadow Report (1926), *The Education of the Adolescent*, the issue of transition between school sectors was first looked at in a government report. The focus of this study was on continuity at the traditional age of transfer, 11 +, between primary and secondary schools. Eleven became the traditional age of the transfer after the recommendation of the Consultative Committee on the education of the adolescent. The following quotation indicates how the 1926 committee used the metaphor of growth to imply that a new age structure would strengthen what they clearly saw as a continuing process.

> Transplanted to new ground and set in a new environment, which should be adjusted, as far as possible, to the interests and abilities of each range and variety, we believe that they will thrive to a new height and attain sturdier fibre. (Board of Education, 1926, *The Education of the Adolescent*).

The Hadow Report on the primary school that followed in 1931 reinforced the idea of education as a continuous process.

> It is true indeed that the process of education between the age of five and the end of the secondary stage should be envisaged as a coherent whole, that there should be no sharp division between infant, junior and post-primary stages, and that the transition from any one stage to the succeeding stage should be as smooth and gradual as possible. (Board of Education, 1931, *The Primary School*)

By the time of the Plowden Report, 1967, it was seen fit to assert that 'learning is a continuous process from birth', whilst also pointing out the need to avoid strain at the points of transfer from one class to another and from one school to another. The report puts forward the view that junior schooling ends too early.

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In order to address the problems associated with transfer the idea of the middle school was proposed. Middle schools were seen to be the meeting points of the primary and secondary traditions according to the report, the middle school was to:

> Develop further the curriculum methods and attitudes which exist at present in junior schools. It must move forward into what is now regarded as secondary school work but it must not move so far away that it loses the best of primary education as we know it now. (Plowden Report, 1967, para, 383).

The Plowden Committee, therefore, puts its faith in changing the age structure of schooling in order to ease problems of transition from education of childhood to the education of adolescence. The recommendations of the Hadow Report had not been implemented.

The Bullock Report, (1975), *A Language for Life*, saw language as the backbone of the curriculum. One of the report's main conclusions was, that effective liaison should be a priority need. Recommendation 162 spelled this out in more detail:

There should be close liaison between the secondary school and in junior and middle schools from which it receives its pupils. In addition to joint activities of various kinds, this liaison should include such measures as:

> (i)   the appointment of a member of the secondary school staff to maintain contact with the contributory schools;

> (ii)   an exchange of visits and teaching arrangements between members of the staffs. (Bullock Report (1975), p.532).

In its stressing of effective liaison being a priority need, the Bullock Report emphasised the importance of the transfer of records from teacher to teacher. For a teacher taking a child for the first time, the report argues that there is no substitute for first hand knowledge of that child and of the learning situation in which he has been involved.

But, as the Cockcroft Report, *Mathematics Counts*, 1982, acknowledged it was not an easy task 'to record concisely on paper', all too often it resulted in what Bullock referred to as 'shadowy assessments' containing no more than suggestions about a child's earlier education. The Cockcroft Report therefore, has stressed the necessity for more detailed record keeping as a means of ensuring more effective liaison for pupils.

(ii)   Primary – Secondary liaison

A review of the literature draws attention to view points and instances of good practice in relation to transfer from primary to post-primary. The fact that literature review draws in different countries emphasises the point that it is an issue of general concern, focusing on problems that may arise at a stage of pupil development when transition from one school type to another takes place. As the timing of the transfer often coincides with the onset of early adolescence, it is important that the pupil is transferred in a caring and collaborative climate. In order to ensure that the pupil transfer is seen to be a natural development, it is highly desirable that worthwhile contact is established between teachers in different school categories.

It is true to say that if education is to be continual there needs to be contact between schools and teachers. Just as the baton is passed in a relay race and the next runner continues the process, so do the pupils need the same smoothness of transferral in their passage from primary to secondary school. If the transfer goes well the pupil is more likely to succeed in his next school. Regarding this, Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) concluded that a smooth transition to secondary school would benefit children. Unnecessary sharp changes in

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organisation and teaching methods are likely to be harmful. "Close co-operation and understanding between primary and secondary teachers is perhaps the most effective way of helping children to adjust rapidly to the new environment of secondary school" (Nisbet and Entwistle, 1969, p.8)

Spelman (1979) in his study of 3050 pupils who transferred to 31 schools in Northern Ireland, monitored the initial adaptation of pupils to different types of secondary schools in terms of their background and academic characteristics, among others. In looking at the initiatives taken by schools to facilitate transfer, he found that academic and pastoral liaison with their contributory primary schools was a feature reported by most of the schools included in the enquiry, that the use of record cards or profiles, reciprocal visits between schools by primary and secondary teachers were relatively frequent practices in over half the schools represented. All of these findings, speak of good practices in primary - secondary school liaison.

In Gorwood (1986) the importance of communication between teachers is emphasised. "Every opportunity needs to be taken to encourage teachers across the stages to enter into dialogue" (Gorwood, 1986, p.202).

He proceeds to suggest means of organising improved communication between schools. The building of trust, he suggests is best tackled in easy stages. In order to counter any implications of division between primary and secondary schools in so many aspects of education, Gorwood feels that there is a need for emphasis on matters of interest beyond sector boundaries. "Schools sharing that same catchment area have a common concern for the same pupils, they could well get together to discuss joint pastoral affairs, testing and recording procedures, the sharing of expensive resources, joint visits and many similar non-controversial matters" (ibid, p.202).

Kerr and Schagen (1999), explored the progression from primary to secondary school through detailed case - study work in ten secondary schools and seventeen feeder primaries. Their findings show that the emphasis placed on the importance of liaison varied from place to place, but that their interviewees,

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almost without exception, tended to stress the 'pastoral' aspects of liaison. Asked what good liaison could achieve, a secondary head said, 'you get to know the children better, and they get to know the school better'. A primary head observed 'the main beneficiaries of cross - phase liaison are the children, because it gives them confidence that people care about them and want to make the step easy' (Kerr and Schagen, 1999 p.11).

The following are a list of liaison activities carried out in some of the schools in which the case-study work was explored:

- a few secondary schools attempted to give primary colleagues information about how their former pupils were progressing after transfer. One organised a November meeting, which gave teachers an opportunity to talk, another sent a note to feeder primaries of how their pupils were settling in. In some cases, year 1 pupils were encouraged to write back to their primary teachers and let them know how they were getting on. On the whole, primary teachers valued such feedback, and contacts could prove useful in identifying pupils who may be experiencing problems with transition;

- A primary science co-ordinator described the programme which he had experienced operating successfully. Primary teachers had taken classes to the secondary school, and secondary science teachers came and taught in primary classrooms. There was also a booklet suggesting areas for liaison which secondary teachers could use as a basis for their primary lessons;

- In another school, the head of science visited the three main primary feeders to help with science work. She also brought the Year 6 pupils to the secondary school towards the end of the summer term to get used to the science laboratories and to cover safety aspects with them. The teachers reported that the visits worked well and they helped to increase the pupil familiarity with the equipment and thus cut back on the time the pupils spent in science lessons at the beginning of year 7, on laboratory induction and safety. (ibid, p.20)

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(iii)   *Familiarisation Provision*

The purpose of this section of the analysis is to document the extent of transfer provision, not only in terms of specific transfer arrangements, but also in terms of specific induction programmes for first years, and to estimate the effects of such provision upon pupils' attitudes to transfer.

Youngman (1986) conducted a research in Lincolnshire, where all the country's primary and secondary schools were circulated with questionnaires. An analysis of the survey findings gives evidence of how schools liaise prior to transfer. The Plowden Report recommended at least one visit by the pupils to their new school prior to transfer. The 1978 Primary Survey, *Primary Education in England,* also mentioned its importance. Youngman's survey return confirmed, that familiarisation provision is given wide importance in the county and that all schools in the return undertook one or more of the following:

- pupils visit with parents;

- pupils visit with classmates;

- parents visit collectively without children;

- a guided tour takes place;

- address given by headteacher or first year tutor;

- pupils meet form teachers;

- some curriculum activity takes place.
    (Youngman, 1986, p.187)

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There were also other interesting schemes in operation in the schools surveyed by Youngman which helped to ease the pupils into secondary school and would probably impact on the pupils having a positive attitude to their new school. These included, a panel of first years answering questions from future entrants and a planned day when the primary schools visited to make use of the secondary school facilities, such as sports hall and swimming pool. Some schools operated a full day session, with many of the above features and a school lunch. Others concentrated on parents, and conducted individual family interviews and open evenings.

All agreed, the writer tells us, "that such visits are worthwhile and ease the child into the new school, lessening the trauma for the individual when he starts in September". In the same series of studies reported in Youngman (1986) Shanks and Welsh (1986) describe a study they carried out in the rural areas of two Scottish regions, Highland and Tayside. They found no evidence to suggest that rural children fared any worse than their urban counterparts when transferring from primary to secondary school. (ibid, p.187).

A study of childhood transition was carried out in the north of Ireland by Knox (1987). She looked at 12 post-primary schools with 896 pupils aged from 11 to 12. The pupils were surveyed before and after transition. Knox felt that for many of the pupils, the transition from one sector to another evoked feelings that are akin to those who have suffered a bereavement. She spoke of childrens' attachment to the past and of their having difficulty in 'letting go' and 'unhooking from the past'. Knox researched the efforts of pre-transitional organisation and post-transitional organisation and concluded that successful transfer demanded work by both sections of schooling. There was evidence that neither side showed sufficient knowledge or understanding of the other's school.

Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan (1996), found evidence that while induction days can have real advantages they can also carry dangers. Insofar as they create positive attitudes to transfer and relieve anxiety for students, induction days

can have real advantages. "These special days with their flashes and bangs in the science display, impressive gymnastics performances in physical education and the like, can create a real sense of eagerness and anticipation among the transferring students about the excitement ahead" (Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, 1996, p.50). The chief danger, their study found, was one of disenchantment. They looked at an interview case study of a student who had transferred to senior high school. There was evidence of disillusionment setting in about the prospects of independent learning, when worksheets and dictation were found to prevail and the school could not deliver on its promises. "This points to the importance of there not being too great a discrepancy between what students experience on their induction day and what they are likely to experience in the remainder of their secondary school career" (ibid, p.51).

(iv) Curriculum Provision

Unless a child's experiences on transition from one school to another lead to a recognition of continuity in the curriculum, it is likely that the transfer will be effected without problems. Induction programmes assist in preparing the pupils for the transition but once transferred the ground must be familiar enough to allow them to proceed. While schools continue to pass through as much information as possible about social and academic background, this question appears to be central to the issue, for at the end of the day, "Continuity is what is, or is not experienced by the individual child. He is the one who experiences the discontinuity of demands by different teachers and different schools". (Dean, 1980. P.51).

A major study was undertaken by Derricott (1985), into what schools can do to ease the social, emotional and cognitive adjustments which pupils have to make when transferring from the primary to the secondary sector. The report was aware that liaison procedures may ease the transition from school to school but that they do not ensure curriculum continuity. The study found that curricular continuity necessitates the implementation of an agreed curriculum plan which would be worked in both the junior or middle school and in the

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lower years of the secondary school to which the pupils are transferring "The agreement between schools implies consultation amongst staff and the ability to plan together. Such a plan assumes teachers to shared technical language and the competencies to use this in inter-school professional activity" (Derricott, 1985, p.16). He goes on to say that continuity implies agreement about aims and objectives, the selection of content, skills and methods of assessment.

Another English study by Thorp (1994) draws a distinction between curriculum 'continuity' and 'progression' "In certain senses, parts of the curriculum may seem to be continuous like a historical project, elements seem to follow on as part of a seemingly logical framework. Managing progression however, directs attention much more sharply at the level of children, those who experience the curriculum" (Thorp in Speak (Ed), 1994, p.183). He describes good practice in facilitating curriculum continuity by encouraging communication between teachers, joint planning and joint work among teachers from different school levels through meetings, visits, exchanges and by encouraging collaboration and collegiality.

(v)   Some Research in other continents

An American study by Cotterell (1982) examined new students' reactions to events in the first three weeks in high school, as recorded in diaries which were kept by the students. The experiences of 2 groups of 103 students were compared. The study found that the students expressed continued anxiety about the organisational aspects of the school. They also felt threatened and intimidated by the presence of older students. Their anxiety regarding homework was not a concern at first, but increased after the first few weeks. On the other hand, students' reports of interesting learning declined after the first few weeks. However, the level of support from teachers remained unchanged. "The data suggests the centrality of curriculum experiences and the key role of the teacher in assisting student adjustment in the transition from primary to secondary school" (Cotterell, 1982, p.296)

In Cotterell's study students were more sensitive to interesting curriculum experiences than to events from other sources, and the power of classroom activities to arouse interest was particularly strong in the first week of school. Information about the school curriculum and procedures, on the other hand, had greater arousal potential after the first week. (ibid, p.30).

A study by Kirkpatrick (2000) in Western Australia explored childrens' expectations prior to secondary school and their perceptions when they entered secondary school. While its central focus was on the experiences of the children, it also investigated changes in students' academic performance during the transition from primary to secondary school.

Over a twelve month period of school this study showed that most students' performance remained at the same level in relation to the syllabus description for the final year of primary school. After three terms of secondary school there was little improvement in most children's academic performance, and in some cases students' academic performance actually declined. The future consequences of this, of course, are serious. It means that not only were these children 'marking time' for a significant period of their first year of secondary school, but that they were missing valuable learning which would provide a basis for future learning" (Kirkpatrick, 2000.p.3).

In order to discover possible explanations for this pattern of academic performance, the children in this study were asked to talk about their expectations and experiences during the transition. The students were looking forward to moving to secondary school because they believed that the work would be more interesting and challenging, and that they would have an opportunity to form new friendships and study new subjects. Students' initial responses to secondary school were mainly positive, but as time went on they experienced boredom in the work being no more challenging, and at times repetitive of primary school.

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The students surveyed, described their peer groups as holding strong beliefs about doing well in school, but this was also accompanied by a strong desire not to be singled out for any academic performance. Most students were ambitious to improve well at school but they only wished to be told this privately. It is little wonder then, that peer pressure is suggested as one of the reasons for the decline in some students' academic performance in their secondary school.

The report concludes by highlighting the importance of curriculum continuity in the transfer process. "Secondary teachers need to be familiar with the work which students have previously covered and to acknowledge the value of previous learning and experience, attention to these features will allow secondary teachers to capitalise on the positive expectations that students hold for secondary school". (Kirkpatrick, 2000, p.8).

2.3   Research in Ireland

(i)   Report of the Pupil Transfer Committee 1981

The report of the Pupil Transfer Committee 1981 suggests that while the majority of Irish pupils settle in to secondary school relatively quickly, 13 - 14% of pupils will need special attention at the time of transfer. The report divided the children who would need special help when transferring from primary into seven main types;

> 1.   slow learners;
> 2.   deprived background;
> 3.   emotional difficulties;
> 4.   specific learning difficulties;
> 5.   handicapped;
> 6.   sensory or physical disabilities;
> 7.   uninterested and poorly motivated.
>   (Department of Education, 1981, p.18)

The Report felt that regardless of whatever category under which the above mentioned schoolgoers may be listed, that what they all have in common is that they have experienced failure in one form or another. "Now, with the prospect of transfer to a school in which for a time they will be strangers, and to a more demanding academic situation, they may well feel beaten before they start" (ibid, p.19)

A pastoral care team was called for by the Report and it is noted that the pastoral role of the class teacher should not be overlooked. The Report noted that in 1981 there was relatively little communication between primary and the post-primary schools. The appointment of a transfer advisor from the full time secondary staff was called for. Their role was perceived as liaising between primary and post-primary, and thereby helping to ease the transfer for children of all types. It was envisaged further that the transfer advisor would:

- be available during class hours to anyone in distress;

- be available at a given time to anyone with personal difficulties;

- be on the watch for new pupils where, in some cases, contact would have to be made with parents;

- visit the feeder schools in the final term of fifth and sixth classes and spend some time with the pupils. Here, the entrant could identify at least one teacher in their new school who might be expected to be a friend;

- ease the problems of transfer pupils, and at the same time complement and supplement the work of the Guidance Counsellor. (ibid, p.23).

Once again greater communication between the schools on either side of the transfer divide was stressed by the Report. "At the root of good understanding in education, as in life, is good communication. While this is particularly so as regards children with special needs, the necessity for it in relation to all schoolgoers whomsoever is sometimes overlooked" (ibid, p.28).

It also asked that parents and other agencies concerned with education be involved. A climate of acceptance and understanding would be desirable by all teachers with the principal giving an active lead in the matter. The Report emphasised the absolute importance of continuous contact between the relevant primary and post-primary teachers, especially those who are in proximity to the transfer divide.

The Report suggested that the Record Card system be improved so that teachers on either side of the divide could actually use it and derive benefits from it. It was also highlighted that at transfer stage the cards should be supplemented by contact between principals, between teachers of sixth class pupils and career guidance and remedial teachers in post-primary schools.

The Report also saw the Intermediate Certificate as a terminal examination for many students who subsequently took up employment or apprenticeship opportunities. In the light of this, it called for a four year run up to it rather than the three years that existed. "All things considered however, as educationalists we must see a four years' Junior Cycle as highly desirable and recommend that where conditions in respect of accommodation and specialist teaching personnel permit, it be introduced, provided always that the children concerned should before transfer have satisfactorily completed sixth class standard. Such a provision is at the very root of that continuity which we seek as between primary and post-primary stages". (ibid, p.40).

The Report also included provision for in-service training for teachers to familiarise them with syllabi on each side of the transfer divide. It called for an articulation of primary and second-level syllabi in each subject to ensure continuity.

A programme for the professional training of primary and post-primary teachers was called for. This would include specific treatment on pupil transfer problems, a reform of the training programme for teachers should include, "at least a week of teaching practice in a post-primary school in each year of training, with the converse to apply in the training of post-primary teachers". (ibid, p.90)

(ii)   Unpublished Studies on Transfer

Sheehan (1977) used questionnaires and essays to look at transfer procedures and its effects on children. She saw the introduction of the child into junior infants as being a 'transfer from home' followed by the transition from senior primary, where the pupil is the 'big fish', into second-level school as another major upheaval in the life of a child. In order to be able to cope with the new setting, the pupil would need to have a mastery in the basic skills of numeracy and literacy and be capable of working unsupervised. Children were found to feel anxiety when the place they were moving to was frightening or unknown to them. As a result of this many pupils developed school phobia, even prior to transferring.

It was clear to Sheehan that in the schools studied the child was being made to fit the school, rather than the reverse. It was obvious from the findings that the children were missing the child - centred curriculum of the primary school, which was being replaced by a subject - centred curriculum in the post-primary school. Sheehan recommends that a pastoral care programme be adopted by all schools to ease the effects of transition, also recommended is a guidance scheme for children in their early years in the secondary school, one which would include regular testing and recording of judgements by teachers. It would also include advice on homework and the teaching of study skills and note-taking.

Sheehan felt that contact between the feeder and the receiving schools was vital and improved liaison would help the confidence of the pupils transferring. The senior pupils in the primary should be encouraged to visit their neighbouring secondary schools for concerts, sports day, open days and other such occasions. Sheehan saw a need for improved communication between teachers on each side of the transfer divide where they would live in 'mutual respect' rather than in 'mutual suspicion' of one another.

Lyddy (1981) looked at the transition from primary to secondary school and referred to it as the 'great divide' in education. She undertook a study covering 7 boys and 8 girls primary schools in which 918 students were about to make the transfer. Lyddy followed up on these students after they had made the transfer and managed to contact 586 of them. They were spread over 5 boys, 4 girls and 4 mixed post-primary schools. She found that there were significant gender differences, for example, boys who repeated the sixth class in the primary and then transferred to the secondary school were better motivated than girls who did the same. However, the findings showed different after the transfer as the boys were not as motivated as the girls then.

Lyddy wondered at the fate of the 1000 pupils who don't transfer. She spoke of the high anxiety, low self-esteem and unstable self-image experienced by many pupils who transfer, added to this are the feelings of isolation, and this is often heightened by the effects of streaming.

A study by O'Connor (1982) saw transition as an 'alignment' or 'articulation' between primary and post-primary school. She viewed transition as an integral part of continuum not as a 'crisis intervention' in a stage of the pupils' life. Lyddy discovered a link between transfer and school drop-outs, especially those in the lower socio-economic bracket.

Lyddy looked at the mechanisms used in school to facilitate transfer. She felt the need for guidance and counselling in secondary school as this would assist the pupil in the adjusting from a single teacher in primary school.

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The pupils would need guidance in their coping with many teachers, their varied standards and expectations, more formalised curriculum and the demands of a 'hidden curriculum'

Foley (1997) researched the 'rhetoric and reality of transition from primary to post-primary'. He conducted structured and semi-structured interviews in three post-primary schools in the town in which he worked. He was interested in the division between pupils who are coping well in their new schools, and those who have not made the transition well and are beginning to flounder.

Foley wondered if there was a reason for it within the school, about which something could be done, or whether it was something which was beyond the school's control and required the help of agencies external to the school.

The research found that "all of the schools ignored the wealth of information gathered by the primary schools when the transferring pupils were attending there". The principals of the secondary schools did say that they wanted to give the pupils a 'fresh start' a 'clean slate' as they began life in their new school". (Foley 1997, p.113). Foley recommended that the records of a primary school pupil be given to the parents or guardians as he or she leaves the primary school, and a copy also be given to the school where the pupil is transferring

It is further recommended that induction programmes need to be re-examined, and that teachers deployed to the first years need to be carefully chosen. The findings also suggest that pastoral care and home school liaison co-ordinators need to develop a structure for post-primary schools which would allow the student to have a voice in the school. "With less disenchanted and worried pupils in our schools, the schools would be happier places in which to work and to learn. " (ibid, p.120).

In a study carried out by Naughton (1997) 101 pupils in four primary schools in Co. Cork were interviewed about their attitudes towards their pending transfer to local second-level schools. They comprised four classes, one in each of the

four schools in the town. A questionnaire sought qualitative and quantitative responses. Pupils were asked to state their worries, and the researcher found that only 7% of respondents said they were very worried about the new school, 47% had an equal mix of worry and expectation, while the remaining 46% declared themselves to be 'quite happy' or 'very happy' with the prospect.

Unlike other researchers, Naughton found no appreciable differences between the sexes in most of the research findings. The extent of worries expressed by the sexes was roughly the same, but the aspects giving rise to these worries differed. The girls were more concerned with the rules and regulations of the new school, whereas boys were worried about their academic performance and being bullied. The maintenance of friendship was a primary concern for all pupils, often expressed as a desire to be 'popular'.

Naughton speaks of the extent to which 'care' is an integral part of the structures and relationships within schools, "rather than an add-on, it is a crucial factor in enabling students to meet challenges and changes with confidence". (Naughton 1997, p.319). He goes on to suggest that such care should be for all pupils, not just for those who are not coping. On the other hand, an overprotective kind of care can hinder development, "young people must be allowed to test themselves to experience a degree of discomfort and insecurity, and in so doing, to extend their 'boundaries', (ibid, p.319).

Naughton recommends that greater communication between teachers would be of great significance for the student in transition, "a further 'spin-off' from the building of common teaching, would be the engagement of teachers at both levels in genuine dialogue that has been conspicious by its absence over the years". (ibid, p.322).

This current study is focused on the years 1999/2000. It takes a close micro-view of the situation of transfer that exists between two primary and two post-primary schools, as is indicated in the methodology. It explores the attitudes of pupils, teachers and parents and examines what the situation is now.

It is the researcher's opinion that not much has changed since the earlier researches, and that it is important now for the state to encourage good practice in schools, and to give a lead in the transferring of pupils from primary to post-primary schools.

(iii)   Pastoral Care for Transferring Students

McGuinness (1989) presents the case for a whole school approach to pastoral care and argues that the most effective delivery of pastoral care must occur throughout the academic teaching of the school. He rejects the 'safety net' view of pastoral care which focuses on children who already display emotional or personal problems and urges that every teacher should play a part in the personal development and pastoral care of each pupil, with particular regard to the pupils who have transferred from primary school. "Pastoral care must, like the rest of the curriculum, be analysed with scrupulous care, as with other topics in the school curriculum, pastoral care must justify its position by showing that its effect is positive". (McGuinness, 1989, p.143).

Humphreys (1993) sees the emotional welfare of children as the cornerstone for educational development. The support of a pastoral care team in a school is seen as the most effective means of boosting the morale, of the pupils. If such problems are identified and supported in the early years in school, it will pave the way for an increase in the students self-esteem. Humphreys deals with fear of examination, bullying and problems in adolescence as matters "in need of pastoral help but the pupils manner of expressing their self-esteem through bullying and other difficulties cannot be allowed to continue, as it only leads to other students also displaying problematic behaviours". (Humphreys, 1993, p.165).

The need for the provision of teachers in the area of pastoral care was highlighted by Martin (1997). She equates disaffection and student drop-out with students suffering "a lack of self-esteem and are frustrated in a school system they perceive cares little about them". (Martin 1997, p.23).

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She applauds the recent developments in Irish education concerning the caring dimension and the provision of teachers in the area of pastoral care and guidance counselling.

In Smyth (1999) a strong emphasis is placed on pupil support and personal development. She quotes examples of good practice in schools where the pastoral care programme is student-centred and where the formal programme is usually taught by class tutors and co-ordinated by the head of pastoral care. The importance of including pastoral care for first-year pupils is spelled out here by a Principal who was interviewed by Smyth. "I would prefer if the year heads' duties would include taking on some particular topic with first-years, maybe the transition from primary into second-level, maybe in third year relationships, in transition year, drugs". (Smyth, 1999, p.192).

As part of his study on pastoral care, Monaghan (1999) looked at the importance of 'mentoring' for the junior students, "a growing number of schools seeing the value of involving senior students in assisting junior students, particularly in the transition from primary to post-primary". (Monaghan, 1999, p.114). It is evident from his research that the students themselves recognised the important contribution they could make to the junior students as they began their time in their new school. Senior students were of help in showing students around the school during the first week of term, spending time getting to know new students, meeting them regularly and allerting them to anti-bullying policies and school procedures.

The need for such initiatives in schools was highlighted also by Collins and McNiff (1999). They speak of the process of 'belonging' begins even before the student arrives. "Questions about subjects, choice of subjects, streaming, assessments, books, costs and so on are answered within new relationships and communication modes". (Collins and McNiff, 1999, p.34). The importance of being introduced to the senior students who would have responsibility for them, as they settled in to a new environment, is stressed. With these provisions in place, the student feels that they 'belong' to the school.

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In the Education Welfare Bill (1999), the importance of care for the child who may drop out of school or fail to attend school regularly will be catered for. Careful monitoring of pupils will be attended to by the principal of the school and an appointed Welfare Officer. The subject of the Welfare Bill will be to promote an environment in school which encourages pupils to attend regularly, "fostering in school an environment which encourages children to attend school and participate fully in the life of the school, conducting and commissioning research into the reasons for truancy on the part of students and into strategies and programmes designed to prevent or discourage truancy". (Education Welfare Bill, 1999, p.2).

(iv)   *Streaming and Subject Choice*

Drudy and Lynch (1993) found that there were several factors mitigating against the presence of a system of streaming in schools. Many pupils find themselves in 'streamed' classes right from the beginning of first year and this for many pupils can have adverse effects on their self-esteem, "increased attainment in higher streams and ability groups has been bought at the expense of low attainment by weaker groups. With regard to personal and social effects, these revolve mainly around the findings, on the negative self-image of those in weaker groups, and the weak friendship patterns across groups or streams". (Drudy and Lynch, 1993, p.256).

It does appear that the recommendation in the White Paper on Education (1995) that students be allowed the maximum choice for as long as possible before making decisions regarding subject choice or level, should be pursued as a matter of priority, and that dissemination of best practice in programmes for first year be undertaken as soon as possible. "Access to a more student-centred curriculum will be facilitated initially on entry to junior cycle. Access to this curriculum can play a significant role in facilitating the transition from primary to second-level. Students should be allowed maximum choice for as long as possible before making decisions regarding examination subject choice or subject level". (White Paper on Education, 1995, p.46).

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The need for greater flexibility in subject choice is highlighted also in the NCCA document "From Junior to Leaving Certificate" (1997). "The subjects chosen by a student on entry into post-primary school have a significance beyond junior cycle. They determine to a large extent, a student's options in senior cycle". (NCCA, 1997, p.11).

The NCCA's review found that in nearly one-third of post-primary schools, students have to select their subjects before they enter post-primary schools. It also found that in one-fifth of post-primary schools students are allocated subjects on entry. These findings give particular cause for concern, in the light of the conclusions of Symth (1999) in the research into school effectiveness, who found that, all else being equal, greater flexibilty in subject choice is associated with improved student performance in the Junior Certificate Examination.

Summary

There is general agreement in the literature that the age of twelve is a good age for transferring. The older a child is the more mature they are, and the better they are able for the complex process of transfer.

All of the literature agrees that there is a greater need for communication between teachers. Not alone is there a call for the transfer of pupil records but there is a need for dialogue about pupils who are making the transfer. The literature calls for greater communication between partners on either side of the transfer divide, between teachers, parents and teachers and pupils and teachers. The issue of curriculum continuity needs to be examined. The literature would seem to feel that there is a need for legislation in this regard, as teachers seem to be reluctant to do anything about it themselves.

All of the literature agrees that while some students make the transfer smoothly, a group of less than 20% suffer long and catastrophic effects as a result of their transfer. The literature calls for the support of a pastoral care team in each school. This team may identify these pupils who are at risk, hopefully at an early age, and guide and assist them in their transferring and settling in to second-level school.

There is general agreement in the literature that boys and girls settle in differently, but the literature differs in which sex settles in best at transfer. The literature also agrees that the role of parents is crucial in the transfer process. If the parents are involved and are supportive, the greater the chance the pupil has of settling in better. Despite the myths attached to the settling in patterns of children from rural schools, the literature shows that there is no difference in the effects felt by rural pupils than by urban pupils.

While the literature agrees that there are good induction practices in some schools, it does highlight the fact that some pupils learn of their new school from their peers or from hearsay. It is important therefore, that schools spend some time planning their induction programmes and getting their liaising structures in place. The organisation of activities for pupils and teachers with the aim of 'gradualizing' the process of transition, may be essential preliminaries for joint planning ventures in the future.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

A combination of qualitative and quantitative procedures were used by the researcher in order to get an overall picture of the reality of the transfer process and, thus, to develop strategies to help ease the progression to post-primary school for the pupils. The researcher has operated from two primary schools where she taught as deputy principal and principal, both in rural areas, and in each case she worked with pupils from sixth class who were about to "leave the nest" and transfer to the "big school".

The procedure used for research consists of:

- Student questionnaire and analysis of their comments prior to and following transfer;

- Survey and guidance procedures carried out with pupils by the educational consultant;

- Implementation of "O.K. Let's Go", a transition programme from primary to second-level;

- Interviews with principals of the two post-primary schools to which the pupils transferred;

- Views on the topic from primary teachers, post-primary teachers and parents.

These procedures are described in more detail : -

3.2   Student Participation

The researcher became aware of the concerns of sixth class pupils arising from the issue of transfer over a number of years where she had worked with this class group. Upon approaching the pupils to express these concerns, they were only too willing to co-operate. The researcher would have operated an interactive relationship with her pupils and therefore they would have little reservations about expressing their thoughts. This manifested itself in their willingness to become involved. The pupils in school X were invited to express their hopes and concerns in April 1999 prior to their progressing to second-level education. There were twenty pupils in sixth class and the children were divided into groups of four, with one person appointed by the group to report back on their findings. Subsequent to their transferring to the post-primary schools in their nearest town, the researcher re-visited the pupils in January 2000, allowing a reasonable amount of time for "students" as they now referred to themselves, to settle in. Having kindly received the permission of the two post-primary principals, the researcher met the students in their new surroundings and requested their participation in a questionnaire about their new experience in this school.

The questionnaire set out to elicit from the students how they felt about their transition to their new school, how they were settling in and what they did and didn't miss about their primary school. The students were asked about:

- Their feelings on their first day in this school;

- Who had helped them most to settle in;

- How they were adjusting to new subjects, timetable, classrooms and multiplicity of teachers;

- Any worries that they have now in this school;

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- What advice they would give to 6th class pupils if they were speaking to them;

- If there was anything that they missed or didn't miss about primary school.

A copy of the questionnaire can be found in the Appendix A.
A copy of the "hopes and fears" expressed can be found in
Appendices B and C.

The researcher transferred herself, during the course of this work, as principal to school Y, situated also in a rural area but in a larger sized village. Here, the sixth class consisted of eleven pupils who would subsequently be transferring to second-level schooling. In January 2000 the pupils were requested to submit their hopes and fears about transfer, to paper. Each pupil worked on an individual basis in the presence of the researcher and the children were guaranteed that their paper would be confidential and anonymous. The response was one of willingness and the pupils were proud of their comments being taken away by the researcher for analysis.

3.3 Educational consultant

Having visited the open day of the community college to which her pupils transferred, the researcher participated in the "Primary to Secondary transition awareness programme" conducted by an educational consultant. As a means of supporting her own pupils in their imminent transfer, she invited the consultant to spend some time with her sixth class. The programme to be covered was carefully planned beforehand and the pupils were taken through various stages which included:

- Ranking their major fears and concerns on entering post-primary school under the headings of, very important, fairly important, important or not important.

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- Guidance as to how to cope in their new schools, developing skills of listening, communicating, coping with homework and thinking in a positive way.

3.4 "O.K. Let's Go" Transition Programme

This programme which addresses some to the problems and fears associated with transition from primary to second-level school was devised by Deis na Gaillimhe consortium in 1996. The consortium consists of four primary schools, four second-level schools, three youth organisations, the Western Health Board and the City of Galway Vocational Educational Committee. The researcher requested the support and goodwill of the parent body and the Board of Management for the implementation of this programme with her senior primary pupils. The response was one of enthusiasm and encouragement for it and the programme, consisting of five units, was implemented during the final term of primary school. The children were given the opportunity to share their hopes and concerns with each other by class discussion, small groupwork and individual work.

3.5 Interviews with the post-primary principals

In the initial talks with each principal regarding this research project, the process of transition was discussed with them and it was agreed that a questionnaire would be supplied to each principal and returned to the researcher.

The questionnaires were dispatched and returned during the second school term, a time when the principals suggested as being more suitable than any other. The overall intention of these questionnaires was:-

- To establish the number of primary schools from which the pupils transferred and the means, if any, of transferring "student records";

- How first contacts with pupils were made;

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- How the new pupil is "catered for" on the first day in the new school;

- What structures are in place to facilitate the transition;

- The "concessions" given to first year pupils to ease the effects of the transition;

- Remedial measures in place for students who present with difficulties.

The two principals were most co-operative and spared no detail in their answers.

A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix D.

3.6 Teachers' and parents' views

In order to achieve an all round balance in her work, the researcher thought that it would be important to interview teachers and parents who are directly or indirectly involved in the transition process. The people interviewed were associated with the schools in which the researcher's work was being carried out.

The primary teachers interviewed, were those involved with middle to senior classes, while the post-primary teachers were those who were teaching first years. The parents of the pupils who were due to transfer to their new school in the current school year, were interviewed. Each group was asked their comments on transfer and their views were recorded on paper by the researcher.

A copy of the viewpoints can be found in Appendices E, F and G.

3.7 *Seminar on "Transition from primary to post-primary"*

The following is a briefing from a seminar on "Transition from primary to post-primary" attended by the researcher and organised by Drogheda Youth Educational Network in March, 1999. The seminar was attended by sixty people which included representatives from primary schools, post-primary schools, parents, youth organisations, health care and other interested parties. The aims of the seminar were to explore the issues surrounding the transfer and its impact on young people, particularly those who are educationally disadvantaged. The participants were involved in group work and in workshops, which gave participants an opportunity to discuss particular issues surrounding the transfer, and to propose different ideas and strategies to maximise the benefit to the young person, of the move from first level to second level. Each workshop was asked to discuss three questions and to feed the ideas back to the large group.

- What is working well at the moment in the transition from primary to post-primary?;
- What are the difficulties, from your perspective, in the transition issue?;
- Any suggestions to improve the situation in the short term, in the long term?.

Transcript of the seminar findings to be found in Appendix H.

Chapter 4

Findings of the Research

4.1 Introduction

Two hundred and five pupils transferred from primary to post-primary in the town which is the locus of this piece of research, last September. They moved from up to 20 primary schools to the two post-primary schools in the town. Some of them moved from a 25-pupil school to a 750-pupil school, from a two teacher school to one with up to 40 teachers, if all-part time teachers are included. Most of the children were in co-educational primary schools and they are all in co-educational post-primary schools. The majority of them moved from very small classes to classes containing at least 25 pupils. The children have, therefore, experienced a huge amount of change in the transition from primary to post-primary. At the same time, a lot of planning, in order to ease the transfer process for pupils, is required on the part of the receiving schools to facilitate the transition and to ensure that it is not too traumatic for any of the students. The researcher investigated the procedures used by each post-primary school and surveyed the transferred students to see if there were signs that some to them were failing to make the transition successfully.

The results of these investigations will be outlined in this chapter. The researcher further took her sixth class pupils through a survey of concerns regarding transfer and a guidance session on how to cope, with the co-operation of an educational consultant. A "Let's Go" transition programme, was also implemented with the same group.

The findings of the questionnaire given to the post-primary principals will be described, and an analysis of the comments from teachers and parents will be given. Each instrument used in the research is taken in turn and its findings are reported.

4.2 Student participation

The 6th class pupils of primary school X were interviewed in April 1999, prior to their transfer and were invited to record their fears and hopes about moving to post-primary. The children were divided into groups and one person reported back to the class on their findings. In the following analysis are listed the main concerns of the pupils:

- Fear of not being in the same class as their friends and not being able to make new friends;

- Worried that the different subjects will be harder and they won't be able to keep up with the work;

- Afraid that the other children will laugh at them, or bully them or tease them about their appearance;

- Not being sure of finding their way around or knowing where their locker is;

- Apprehension about not getting on well with the teachers.

The following analysis lists the hopes that the pupils have for their post-primary school:

- Hoping to meet new friends;

- Being anxious to be placed in a good class and get on well in their studies;

- Many of the pupils would like a position on a football team;

- There is a great novelty involved with post-primary schools closing for a half-day on Wednesdays and the primary pupils are looking forward to this.

The researcher believes that the pupils would feel more confident and content in post-primary school if the pupils were placed in a class with some of their friends. The issue around friendships is a major concern for the pupils, and while they wish to meet new friends, they also hope to continue the existing friendship patterns that they formed in primary school. The pupils who will be transferring at the beginning of the next school year had attended a 5-teacher rural school, where due to smaller enrolment numbers there are very close relationships between pupils and teachers, and also between pupils themselves. Having spent in many cases a number of years in multiple class situations with their friends, they now wish to continue those friendships forward into their next schools. It would seem, that the security of having friends, would be a contributory factor in their settling-in patterns.

Student Questionnaire

Following on the transfer of 6th class pupils from school X, the researcher re-visited the said pupils in their new schools in January 2000. The students now felt that they were in a more favourable position to express their opinions on transfer and were only too willing to comply with the request to complete a questionnaire individually, on their experiences. The sample was divided between boys and girls. (40%, 60%). The students were in the 12 and 13 age bracket (20%, 80%).

(i)   How they settled in:

As evidence of their settling in, or failure to do so, in their respective post-primary schools, the researcher looked for signs of difficulty being experienced by the pupils on getting on with their peers and their teachers and if there were signs of a failure to cope with the systems in the new school.

The analysis portrays a mixture of feelings experienced by the pupils on their first day in post-primary, while 20% of the pupils were delighted, 15% found it a frightening experience, 35% were a little frightened and 30% had no particular feeling. The researcher is of the opinion that this 30% were analysing their new surroundings and may have being experiencing a mixture of feelings on their first day. On entry to their new school 85% of the sample said that they were overawed by the size of the school, 90% were overawed by the large number of pupils there, 15% said that they felt lost on their first day, 95% of them said that they had settled down at the time of the survey. The majority of pupils (75%) felt that they received the greatest help to settle in from their friends, the next source of help was from their Year Head (20%) and this was followed by help from their parents (5%). Despite the fears expressed by these pupils prior to transfer they appeared now to be coping well with the multiplicity of teachers and they showed signs of liking the way things were done in their new schools. 100% of the pupils were being taught by 14 teachers and every pupil liked having a number of teachers, and 30% would look for help from a teacher. The pupils remained in their own classrooms, similar to primary school but 85% of the pupils would prefer to move from one class to the next.

The entire sample took part in sport in the school, with 70% preferring gaelic football, 20% basketball and 10% soccer. There is no doubt therefore, that the pupils are enjoying and actively participating in sport in their new schools. One of the main concerns of the pupils prior to transfer was the fear of being in a different class from their friends and of not having new friends. When surveyed in post-primary, the pupils were more content about the continuity of their friendship patterns, with 95% of the pupils placed in classes with their friends from primary and 90% have formed new friendships. It is also interesting to note their feelings about the older pupils in the school, 45% of the sample find them helpful, 35% friendly and 20% think that they are bossy. It can be seen from these figures that the majority of the pupils were coping quite well with the transfer and were beginning to settle into their new routine in post-primary school, and 100% of the pupils said that they would remain in their new school until after their Leaving Certificate Examination.

This would indicate that the pupils are feeling good about their new schools and intend completing their second level education there.

(ii)   Problems with timetable, subjects, school routines

The allocation of a timetable is an entirely new concept for a first year pupil, and it is little wonder, then, that 65% of the pupils surveyed experienced problems with reading their timetable when they first received it. However, 100% of the pupils understand the timetable better now in the second term of post-primary school. When questioned about the 16 subjects that they study, it was evident to the researcher that the pupils were enjoying the greater allocation of time to, and the specialist teachers for, the subjects of Physical Education and Art. 40% of the sample choose Physical Education as their favourite subject, while 25% selected Art, 15% liked Geography, and 10% each for Business Studies and Science. The results of the survey shows that the pupils have concerns around school routines and problems that may arise. They expressed worries about tests, detention, difficulty with subjects, taking examinations, being bullied and keeping their friends. Now that the pupils have transferred to post-primary, their concerns have shifted from forming friendships to keeping their friends. The researcher feels that this arises from the increased number of pupils attending their new school, in comparison to their former primary school. It would seem that the pupils have concerns around the probability of the friends they have meeting new friends, and they losing out on the closeness of the friendship patterns that they enjoyed in primary school.

The pupils are now concerned about the systems in place in post-primary where there is more testing in place, and an increased emphasis on taking examinations. The school rules regarding detention of pupils is also a new concept for the new first-years. This form of discipline is enforced where a pupil remains in school for a Wednesday afternoon when the other pupils would have a free half-day, and is given a correction exercise to write.

Pupils who have not complied with school rules on a third offence, their parents will be informed in writing and they will be on detention on the following Wednesday. The pupils are in agreement that this discipline system is fair and leads to improved behaviour, but because it is new to them, they have a certain fear of it. Arising from the worries expressed by the pupils, the researcher is in no doubt, but that the majority of them are missing the easier time in the primary school, with less emphasis on tests, and with a different approach to indiscipline.

(iii) Their feelings about the primary school they had left

While only 5% of the sample have returned to their primary since they left, 100% of the sample would like to return and tell of their experiences. When asked what advice they would give to sixth class pupils, they would suggest to them, "not to worry", "be confident", "choose your friends carefully", "work hard", "be sensible" and above all they stated, "keep in with the teachers". The pupils were requested to report what they missed most about primary school and the issues raised most frequently include; working on the computer when finished classwork, smaller school, less homework, school concerts and plays, school tours, miss not having to get up as early, being with their brothers and sisters, knowing everyone in primary school, having less subjects. They miss taking part in the football leagues and miss some of the primary teachers. It was also interesting to note that there were many aspects of primary school that they didn't miss; too much noise in the playground, having to tolerate the infants, having too much responsibility in 6th class. They did not miss some of the teachers or having to be cautious of the little ones when playing football. In her analysis, the researcher concluded that the pupils were impressed with some of the concessions attached to their new schools, and were welcoming the free half-day each Wednesday, and the free classes they might have from time to time. This would indicate that there are aspects of their new schools that the pupils are welcoming.

The sixth class pupils of primary school Y were interviewed in January 2000, prior to the transfer that they will make later on, in the year of this research. The pupils were invited to record their fears and hopes about moving to post-primary. The children reported individually and the researcher compiled an analysis of the issues that arose most frequently. It is obvious from the comments that the pupils are growing more conscious of their physical appearance and that their fears of bullying are growing:

- Pupils are concerned about the possibility of having no friends in post-primary and no-one to talk to;

- Embarrassed if they didn't know an answer in the class and were to blush or to be shy;

- Fear of being expelled or suspended;

- Apprehensive about the people not being as nice as in primary school;

- Afraid of being left out of games;

- Concerned about teachers picking on them or getting into trouble in front of everyone else;

- Pupils are in dread of the custom in post-primary schools of throwing flour and eggs on them when it is their birthday. It is obvious that there are similarities in the pupils' concerns about maintaining friendships, being teased about their appearance and getting on with the teachers, between the two groups of sixth classes interviewed prior to transfer to post-primary school.

"Educare" Survey in May 1999:

Fears and Concerns,

Total 100%

	Very Important	Fairly Important	Important	Not Important
Rules	60	25	15	0
Making Friends	90	5	5	0
Being looked at	35	35	15	15
Maturity	35	35	15	15
Following T-Table	35	25	35	5
Many Subjects	15	35	25	25
Having Fun	85	5	10	0
Other Students	15	45	20	20
Finding My Way	40	25	25	10
Finding Class	50	30	20	0
Different Teachers	10	55	20	15
Remembering Books	60	5	35	0
Being in Trouble	65	25	5	5
Getting Help	55	25	15	5
Carrying Bag Around	0	25	15	60
Lunchtime	15	50	30	5
Peer Pressure for Smoking/Drugs	60	30	5	5
Bullying, Fighting, Teasing, Stealing.	60	25	10	5
Going from Small to Large School	40	30	20	10
Not being in same class as Friends	80	10	10	0

(iv)   *The Cohort for transfer in 2000*

The researcher decided to carry out similar interviews with her pupils who would be transferring to post-primary school in 2000 as she carried out in 1999 with the pupils who have already transferred.

The following analysis lists the hopes that the pupils have for their new post-primary school:

- Hoping to make new friends

- That the teachers will be as nice as the primary ones;

- Would like to do new things at lunch time;

- The pupils are determined to pass all their examinations;

- Hope that they won't be too shy and will be "cool" like everyone else.

4.3   Educational Consultant

The researcher, having been impressed with the transition awareness presentation given by an education consultant at the open day in the local community college, approached the consultant with the view of formulating a preparation programme for post-primary school and working through it with her senior primary pupils. It was "a step into the unknown", as programmes of a similar nature had previously been delivered with first-year students, but for the consultant it was the first time to prepare for, and administer a programme of this nature with primary schools. The content of the seminar, having been prepared in conjunction with the researcher, was taken through with the pupils, who co-operated fully and were generous in their praises of the experience, as were their parents, to whom they were requested to relay a report on their involvement.

The class of twenty pupils who participated, were each given a sheet which outlined the major fears and concerns, as described by first-year students, upon entry to second-level school. The sixth class pupils were requested to rank these in order of importance and it is surprising to note, arising from previous responses by the same pupils, that making friends (90%) and being in the same class as friends (80%), were among the main fears held by them. When the issue was taken up later, the children admitted to feeling secure with the friends they had and being comfortable in their company, as they had come through primary school together.

They felt re-assured when it was pointed out to them, that in class allocation in the post-primary schools to which they would be transferring, provision was made for pupils from feeder-schools to be placed in classes with their previous classmates, thus allowing for friendships to continue if desired. The issue of peer pressure for smoking and drugs was ranked very important by 60% of the pupils, as were the concerns about teasing, stealing, bullying and fighting. It is surprising that only 40% of those surveyed, ranked moving from a small school to a large school as being very important, but then 30% rated it as being fairly important, which would speak for the level of importance it holds among children from a rural background. When spoken to after the survey, many children were apprehensive about moving from a small country school to a town where large numbers of pupils would be feeding into. They highlighted the possibility of peer pressure they may come under, especially having been in a rural school with only minor incidents of bullying, fighting and temptation taking place, and where pupils would be more inclined to report, and the matter would be dealt with "on the spot". Each concern as it arose was discussed, and strategies on how to cope were suggested. A feeling of more confidence on how to cope in their new schools was expressed by the pupils, having been given the opportunity to air their fears and further, to be alerted to positive ways of dealing with situations.

The pupils were taken through a "listening skills exercise" and were surprised themselves, that in many cases, they were not listening with sufficient intent. They were advised to sit near the front of the class and to avoid distractions, because the more they are distracted, the more they will miss in class.

They were alerted to the fact, that if chatting to their friends means that they miss one important thing that the teacher says in each class, this will amount to 9 important things each day, that means 45 things each week and about 1,800 things each year, and this would amount to a great deal of catching up to do. The pupils were advised that when they would be listening to someone talking, it would be extra beneficial to:

- Tune in;
- Question;
- Listen actively;
- Review.

They were reminded that listening is one of the most used forms of communication and would be a necessary skill to help succeed at school, in a job, or in our personal relationships.

On the issue of homework, the pupils were encouraged to think about it in a positive way, as a means of revising the day's school-work. They were introduced to the concept of study skills and to strategies which would be of help to them in completing their tasks.

These include:
- Plan homework time carefully;
- Note carefully what has to be done;
- Tell teachers if you feel you have too much to do;
- Ask for further instructions if you're not sure;
- Tell your teacher before the lesson if you have had problems finishing;
- Ask questions in class/or privately about work you got wrong;
- Do your best.

It is the researcher's opinion that by highlighting and discussing positive ways of dealing with their concerns, and by outlining strategies on how to cope in their new schools, it will form a good background for the pupils when they transfer. The pupils themselves expressed opinions of a greater confidence after the seminar and a lesser apprehension about the "big move" that they were about to take. They welcomed the experience of a visitor to the school, who took time with them in the raising of their fears and concerns around the transferring to a new school. The visiting of outside speakers to a rural school is quite rare, and when it happens, it is generally enjoyed by and remembered by the pupils. The researcher is confident, that the transition awareness programme presented to her pupils, exposed them to positive ways of dealing with concerns they may have when they move to second-level schooling.

4.4 "O.K. Let's Go" Transition Programme

The "Let's Go" programme was introduced to the 6th class pupils in the researcher's school, in May 1999, in order to give them an opportunity to share with each other their hopes and concerns around transition issues. The programme consisted of 5 units, where at the end of each unit the pupils filled a worksheet which they reported back to the class group. In unit 1, "Meeting New Challenges", the findings of a worksheet based on making the changes easier for entry to second-level, are as follows:

- Finding out as much as possible about second-level school;

- Get a brochure on the school;

- Attend open days;

- Talk to older brothers/sisters/friends;

- Visit the school beforehand;

- Talk to parents.

These findings are similar to those found by Youngman (1986) in his survey of familiarisation provision in schools.

In unit 2, "Time Management", the children were exposed to a sample school time-table and were subsequently invited to answer questions about it. This practice introduced the pupils to the concept of "double-classes", "free-classes" for studying new subjects in post-primary and 40 minute classes.

Unit 3 "Making Friends", deals with a topic that is of concern, evident from previous interviews, with this sixth class group. The worksheet filled by the pupils raised their awareness to the ways of finding a friend in their new school. The pupils reaction to this exercise was, that by sharing their findings, they would be in a better position to form new friendships in their next schools. The methods they would employ were as follows:

- Introduce yourself to someone, talk to them and maybe you will find that you have something in common with them;

- By joining in sports and activities in the school, it is possible to find friends who have the same interests;

- By being friendly and kind to others, they will talk to you and it may be possible to be friends with them.

Unit 4 "Rules and Choices", alerts children's awareness to the necessity of rules for the general discipline and control in the school, and also dealt with the consequence of breaking a rule. In consultation, the class drew up a list of rights in a classroom which would also apply in a post-primary school:

The people in our classroom have the right to:
1.   A safe environment;
2.   Express their opinions;
3.   Be listened to;
4.   Learn.

In unit 5 entitled "Self-Esteem", the children were given the opportunity to project themselves through drawing up personal profiles, which they shared with classmates through pairwork, and subsequently the profiles were compiled to produce a class magazine.

The intended outcome of this exercise was to have the pupils feeling good about themselves and becoming aware of their talents, friends, achievements and goals for their next school.

In keeping with the "user friendly" approach adopted by this programme Deis na Gaillimhe have produced a student profile form to be completed by 6th class teachers and presented to the post-primary school that the child would be attending. A copy of this form is included in Appendix 1.

The researcher took her pupils through this programme in order to alert them to positive ways of preparing for second-level school, and to look at ways that some things are done in their new schools. It would appear from the pupils' involvement in the programme that they would have found it a worthwhile experience.

4.5   Interviews with post-primary principals

A number of key questions around the transfer issue and induction process were given to the post-primary principals and these are the findings:

(i)   How first contact with pupils are made

Each of the schools began their approaches to the various primary schools early in January by writing individually to each primary school principal and requesting the names of their sixth class pupils. Following on this, each pupil is provided with a school prospectus and a letter for the student and parent, inviting them to an open day or night in the school. The primary school principals are requested to distribute this information and the post-primary schools have experienced full co-operation with this practice.

It is the researcher's opinion that a more personal approach by the post-primary schools would be more beneficial, where the visitor would provide first-hand information about the schools and the pupils may feel more at ease in asking questions on their home ground. However, this has never been the practice, and both schools adopt similar approaches which leads one to deduce that there is no direct intent to "be in competition" with one another. On open day/night in each school the parents and their children assembled in one hall in the school, and were welcomed and addressed by the principal. The ideals of the school and all its good points were described to the audience. Each of the principals described the school policies on homework, bullying, school rules, and a sample timetable was described to give a feel for the school day in that year. Another speaker, usually the vice-principal or year head, outlined the extra-curricular activities that the pupils could become involved in and the achievements of the school to date. A tour of the school then takes place, with the prefects acting as guides. Each school has an exhibition of their achievements for all to see. In the secondary school, the parents on their return from the tour, would be given a registration form, where if they were enroling their child, would be asked to fill it in. Forms are also handed out so that parents could register their children for bus transport. The community college held a further enrolment and entrance examination on a Saturday. On this day the pupils who had decided to enroll turned up for their entrance examination and they, or their parents, filled in the enrolment form. The pupils were requested to bring with them a report from their primary school. The researcher has strong reservations about handing a primary school report to a pupil for transfer to another school. She believes that the information requested would be best transmitted from teacher to teacher in written or oral form. The secondary school requested no transfer of records, but stated that three feeder schools furnish them anyway.

The purpose of the entrance examination in the community college is to establish if there are pupils with special needs and these students have the services of a remedial teacher in the post-primary school. It also assists in the streaming of pupils in first-year classes and depending on progress, these pupils may remain in the same stream, or be transferred to a different stream in their second year.

In the secondary school, the first year pupils are tested in the month of September. The purpose of this test is to try to identify students who may need extra help in different areas of their work. These students will then have the services of a resource teacher and will also receive an allocation of remedial help per week. In this school streaming does not take place until the pupils second year. The researcher feels that this is a more effective system as it affords an opportunity to become familiar with the post-primary curriculum.

(ii)   How the new pupil is catered for on the first day in the new school

The first day in each of the schools is a day where the 1st years are brought in on their own. The new pupils arrive around 9.30 in the morning and they are received by the principal, vice-principal and year heads for first years. There are also prefects present on the day, who will act as "buddies" to the first years during the year. They will show them around during the day, take them in small groups and generally be available to answer any queries or give advice to those who seek it. The new pupils are introduced to the staff and are assigned to the class group and classroom where they will remain for their 1st year. They are introduced to their time-table by the year head who also furnishes them with their book list and answers any other queries they may have. They will be given a "taste" for their subjects and the day will be interspersed with sporting and leisure activities.

(iii)   *What structures are in place to facilitate the transition*

Each of the schools had a year head whose responsibility it was to take a particular interest in the first year class to which they were assigned. They dealt with any problems that may arise and kept the principal informed as to how the pupils were settling in. This system of good practice was also highlighted by Smyth (1999).

The pastoral care teams in the two schools consisted of the year heads and tutors or monitors and counsellors who sought out students whom teachers were worried about, for one reason or another. The school chaplains were part-time in both schools and very often were only there for the start of the year ceremonies, or graduations. One of the schools had a student council, and the first-years were represented on it. In the community college, the first year students participated in a special course on school transfer delivered by an outside lecturer. The researcher feels that this will be a good follow-up programme for her pupils who have transferred here, as it is delivered by the same educational consultant who formulated and carried out a pre-transfer programme with them in sixth class.

(iv)   The "concessions" given to first year pupils to ease the effects of transition

The first years were treated the same as other students in each school. The only difference was in the severity of a sanction that would be imposed on the pupil for an infringement of the rules in the first few weeks. After the month of September, the schools gave no concessions to first years if they broke the rules.

The only other concessions that this researcher discovered, was that first years have their own classrooms, whereas other classes have to move rooms. One school spoke of a special mass for first years early in the first term, followed by a party and a visit to the cinema.

For this school, there were also visits to the swimming pool in September accompanied by first-year competitions. It is the researcher's observation that the schools have certain structures in place to meet the needs of first years and that in general, the pupils are catered for quite well in their first year of post-primary schooling.

4.6 Teachers' and Parents' views

(i) Views of primary school teachers

The primary school teachers interviewed by the researcher spoke of mixed feelings about transfer, with some teachers who worked with junior classes admitting that the transition of pupils to post-primary school was not an issue for them as they would not be teaching the senior classes, and it was never an issue at staff meetings or teacher courses. The teacher who worked with the senior pupils spoke of disillusionment about the issue, and with little or no contact with second level schools apart from their yearly visit, which they described as a marketing exercise, with the post primary principals contacting or calling to primary schools and "doing their rounds" in the course of a morning or afternoon. This they claimed, was not adequate, and it afforded no opportunity for interaction between teachers from both sectors.

The primary teachers interviewed would welcome more contact with teachers from second-level, where curriculum continuity could be discussed and preparation strategies for the pupils transferring could be exchanged. The primary teachers expressed concerns at the movement being "daunting" and "mysterious" for the pupils and the fact that they were so protected in primary school, would lead the teachers to believe that the pupils transferring would incur major changes in their new schools. It would appear from the replies of the primary teachers, that they are laying the blame for the gap that exists between the schools at the door for the post-primary schools. The researcher feels that the primary school teachers could take a more active role in the transfer process, in initiating contact with post-primary schools, organising visits for the pupils and in transferring relevant information about their pupils.

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As is highlighted by Gorwood (1986), the teachers on either side of the divide need to avail of every opportunity to communicate.

(ii)   *Views of post-primary teachers*

When the researcher interviewed the post-primary teachers, she came to the conclusion that not only did the "divide" exist between the two sectors of schools, but it also existed between teachers from the two levels of schools. It seemed obvious from their comments that neither sector fully understood the other, and this may be due to the fact that there are no opportunities for professional interaction.

While the post primary teachers expressed concerns about the primary pupils being too young on transfer, and the adjustment to multiple teachers situation being difficult, with many of them missing their primary teachers, the researcher is of the opinion that much of the blame for pupils' disenchantment lay with the primary schools. Comments which centred around the primary schools "pampering" the pupils, the primary schools being questioned about their approach to the teaching of mathematics and questioning if the pupils transferring were "tough" enough to withstand bullying, speaks of the necessity for structured communication between teachers from first and second level schools, where opportunities would prevail to tease out these, and other concerns.

(iii)   *Views from parents*

While the parents interviewed were of the opinion that pupils nowadays are better prepared for their post-primary school, they expressed grave apprehensions about it, with many parents feeling "heart-broken" about their child leaving primary school. The researcher concluded, that many parents welcome the closeness and security of the small rural school and regret that their child has to move on from this personal and happy environment.

Parents feared for their child leaving the school and its familiar surroundings. They expressed concerns around bullying in post-primary being more widespread, and a fear that the child might grow apart from them. The parents expressed feelings of anxiety, trauma and fear for their children taking this step into the unknown. The researcher feels, that if teachers from the primary and post-primary sectors initiated a preparation programme for parents, it could help to address some of the apprehensions they have about their children taking this giant step. It is evident from their comments, that the parents' minds need to be put at ease and greater opportunities for their involvement in their child's transition could help with this.

4.7 Seminar on "Transition from primary to post-primary"

(i)   What is working well at the moment in the transition from primary to post-primary?

During the course of her research, the author had the opportunity of attending a seminar which dealt with the topic of transition to post-primary school. In the light of the issue being a matter of concern in the Drogheda catchment area, the researcher feels that it is desirable to draw attention to the findings on the issues in question. The findings of the seminar suggests, that while the initial contact with parents, in the form of open days and nights, is productive in strengthening the links with parents and in providing the opportunity for an overview of the school for the parents, it would be more productive if it were held earlier in the year of the 6th class pupil.

Improvements in information and communication between primary and post-primary schools have also been identified. A variety of representatives, which include principals, year heads and counsellors make themselves available for visits to primary schools for talks with sixth class pupils, and in turn, many post-primary schools arrange class visits for senior primary pupils. There are further forms of communication between some schools in the transfer of student records, and information on pupils who may be in need of learning

support. For the first-year pupils, some of the senior pupils take the role of "buddies" or "mentors" for them and many schools reported increased comraderie arising from this friendship between the pupils.

This is one of the systems also strongly advocated by Monaghan (1999). There is a greater involvement by primary teachers in the uptake of accompanying their sixth class pupils on a visit to the post-primary schools. There is also an increased participation by parents in their attending meetings, open nights and parent council meetings.

The findings conclude that a lot of goodwill exists between the schools, in the welcoming of pupils, providing pastoral care and guidance for pupils, and in general with post-primary staffs being receptive to their incoming pupils.

(ii)   *What are the difficulties in the transition from primary to post-primary?*

The area of communication was highlighted as one of the main areas in need of attention. There needs to be better communication with parents of sixth class students in the year before they transfer to post-primary. Many teachers are reluctant to commit information to paper so if what is necessary to transmit, could be communicated verbally between teachers from both sectors, then the post-primary schools would be familiar with important information about the pupils transferring. There was concern around the necessity of assessment tests, as they are often administered too early and in some cases dominate the sixth class programme. The issue of bullying was raised as a concern for the vulnerable student, the high achiever and as a problem on the school buses, where the new pupils might not get a seat.

The financial strain that first-year post-primary incurs, can cause great difficulty in families. There is grave concern around the curriculum content not being relevant to children from travelling backgrounds, that the entrance test may be daunting and there may be unavailability of a resource teacher for these pupils in post-primary.

(iii)   *What changes could be made in the short term and the long term?*

A strong plea was made for early intervention and identification of more vulnerable students in the first few years of primary schools and their necessity for access to a resource teacher from early on in primary school. The need for a structure to be put in place to ensure better communication between the two sectors was stressed as the stepping stone for planning, organising and evaluating transfer issues. A liaising policy in the schools would be effective in establishing better patterns of communication. The suggestion of adapting both curriculums to facilitate transfer was raised, and the involvement of parents in transfer would be a priority. The concept of summer activities was included in the seminar, which envisaged a summer induction course that would help pupils to deal with their new situation. Further, the element of fun for the pupils was emphasised, with perhaps a disco or recreational social evening for incoming first years in August. As good practice, the code of behaviour of primary school could be passed on to post-primary school, with the students having an input in its compilation.

So as to ensure that all children transfer, the setting up of a "tracking system" would be necessary for monitoring and future prevention. In concluding the seminar, it was agreed to use the existing system to best advantage even with all its flaws. The researcher participated in the groupwork discussions on transition issues, where she shared ideas on existing practices with other teachers. Arising from these discussion groups recommendations for better practice were drawn up, and the researcher is of the opinion, that with some extra thought and effort, more practical measures to ease transfer for the pupils could be put in place by primary and post-primary teachers.

Chapter 5
Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter a concise account of the findings of the research is provided. The conclusions formed as a result of research are presented along with the recommendations of the researcher which includes practical strategies to ease transition for the pupil. The conclusions will look at what is working well at the moment and what are the difficulties in the transition from primary to post-primary school. The recommendations will include suggestions to improve the situation in the short term and in the long term.

5.2 Conclusion

(i) What is working well at the moment in the transition from primary to post-primary?

The findings show that despite certain apprehensions prior to transfer, that the majority of the pupils had made the transfer quite successfully. When the researcher interviewed the pupils in January following on their transfer, 95% of them said that they had settled in and 100% of the sample said that they would like to remain in their new school until after the Leaving Certificate. The 5% who are still having difficulty in settling into their new schools, or who have not settled in yet, are most likely to be experiencing problems with school or feeling disenchanted with the transfer from their primary school. It seems evident that those pupils would benefit from the services of a transfer advisor as suggested in the *Report of the Transfer Committee*, 1981.

Each of the two post-primary schools had the services of a pastoral team to assist any student who was experiencing difficulties. In such circumstances the year head and or the guidance consellor was on hand to offer support and advice.

The pupils were taken care of in their first year by senior pupils who acted as 'mentors' or 'buddies' for them. The findings show that this system is working well and that the first-year pupils in general, have positive feelings about the senior pupils, with 45% of the sample finding them helpful and 35% friendly.

The allocation of a timetable is an entirely new experience for the pupils. Despite experiencing problems with reading the timetable at the outset, 100% of the pupils understood it better in the second-term of post-primary school. The pupils were exposed to a wide range of school subjects, with the students studying 16 subjects in all. It would follow that subject choice would not come in to question until the pupils second year in post-primary, thus providing them with the opportunity to try out and become familiar with a wide variety of subjects in the first year. Allowing pupils the maximum amount of time before making decisions about subject choice is strongly recommended in the government's *White Paper on Education*, 1995.

The system in the school whereby the majority of the pupils were placed in classes with their friends from primary school is to be commended. The pupils are now more content about the continuity of their friendship patterns and 90% of them have also formed new friendships. The findings also show that the pupils are enjoying the leisure activities on offer in the school, with 100% of the pupils taking part in the sports of Gaelic Football, Basketball and Soccer.

The researcher would recommend the services of an outside facilitator who could familiarise the pupils with the transfer process. The pupils in the sample were widely exposed to the transfer issue by the visit of an educational consultant to speak to them in the final term of primary school. The pupils were afforded the opportunity of airing their fears and concerns about their pending transfer to second-level school. Each concern as it arose was discussed and strategies on how to cope were suggested. The pupils were alerted to listening skills and homework approaches which would be of benefit to them in their next school.

Similarly, the exposure to the "Let's go" transition awareness programme, brought with it the advantages of familiarising the pupils with the transition process. It raised their awareness to the meeting of new challenges, to improved time management and to ways of reaching out and making new friends.

The findings show that both of the secondary schools have the services of a remedial teacher. Each of the schools withdrew children who needed remedial teaching from their normal classes and the remedial teachers took them when they could. Both of the schools in the survey operated a system of 'streaming' in their schools. However the voluntary secondary school did not introduce this system until the pupils' second year in school. This would give the pupils an opportunity to settle in to their new environment and to become familiar with their new school subjects.

By reviewing the data gathered, it is fair to say that both second-level schools gave considerable thought to the planning of their induction programmes. The pupils were taken in as a group on their first day in September. Here, they were introduced to the staff, to their timetables and were allocated free time for the pursuit of leisure and sporting interests. First year pupils were given their own classrooms and were given 'concessions' as regards discipline for the month of September.

(ii) *What are the difficulties in the transition from Primary to Post-Primary?*

The findings show that arising from an entrance test in the previous Spring, that the pupils in the Vocational School are streamed in their first year in post-primary school. The researcher is of the opinion that this system is not very appropriate for first years. Maybe they are better to start post-primary with a 'clean-slate' and be allocated to streamed classes, if this system must be implemented in second year, However the system of streaming is found to have more negative than positive influences on students, as highlighted by Drudy and Lynch (1993).

The wealth of information gathered by primary schools about their pupils was almost ignored. Perhaps the fault for this lay at the doorstep of the primary school, as only three primary schools in the survey had transferred report cards about their transferring pupils. The researcher believes also that it is a waste of valuable time on the part of the secondary schools when they ignore the data that has been gathered on each pupil in their previous schools. While there is a danger that a pupil might be labelled due to their report, the benefits of helping to identify pupils 'at risk' would far outweigh the disadvantages.

The findings show that the area of communication all round is one in need of immediate attention. There is little or no communication between teachers on either side of the transfer divide. It seems as if both groups are blaming the other and neither side are taking any positive steps to initiate improved communication. The principals of the post-primary schools surveyed make no personal approach to the feeder schools. Their communication is in the form of a letter and school prospectus dispatched to the local primary schools for the attention of the sixth class pupils. The researcher feels that a personal visit by the principal or year head or another appointed teacher would be more fruitful contact for the transferring pupils. While the parents are invited to an open night in the post-primary schools, it is obvious from their comments that a more structured involvement would help to smooth their fears and ease their anxieties. The parents feared for their child being bullied, not being able to stand up for themselves, not being able to cope with the long day and missing their primary school. For the parents also it was 'a step into the unknown' as their child moved from being the 'big fish in the small pond' to being the 'small fish in the big pond'.

The pupils expressed great difficulty in leaving their primary schools. While only 25% of the sample have returned to their primary school, since they left, 100% of the pupils expressed a desire to return and tell of their experiences. While there were some aspects of primary school that they did not miss, in particular the noise level of the junior pupils in the playground, there were many aspects of their primary school that they were missing.

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They missed the smaller school, less homework and the social aspects of school tours, sports and concerts. They also reported that they missed some of their primary teachers.

In general, the need for a more structured transfer process seems like common sense, but that doesn't mean it always happens. It seems as if the time is ripe now for a push and the policy makers should take it on board. The process needs co-operation from all parties if we are to make the 'curve of continuity' a smooth one from teacher to teacher, class to class and school to school.

5.3   Recommendations

In this section the researcher will outline practical strategies to ease the transition from primary to post-primary school.

- Parents, particularly those who have not attended secondary school themselves, can become anxious when their children are called to do their entrance test. Opening up the school in an informal manner for both parents and students on that day can benefit the whole family. It is debatable if entrance tests are necessary at all. The researcher feels that more open dialogue between schools who are transferring would be more advantageous. If information were passed in both written and oral form between teachers, it would have the advantage of identifying pupils who may be in need of extra help. It would also give a more all-round report of the child, where his good points should also be outlined.

- Opportunities for parents and teachers to meet informally creates bonds between the parents and the staff which are greatly valued by the parents. Occasions should be created for parents of sixth class to meet the school staff of the post-primary schools informally. An invitation to a school concert production, an open-day which includes school art or other work display, a welcoming mass and buffet evening, all provide opportunities for informal social gatherings.

- Learning about how the school functions, the role of tutors, year heads, the discipline code and school rules is very necessary for parents to keep them informed of school procedures. An induction programme, spread over a period of time prior to transfer, would also be very helpful to parents, as would a booklet on induction for parents.

- It would also be helpful if parents could meet the year heads who will be responsible for their own children, formally in September. This would provide an opportunity for early interaction, which could only be for the benefit of the pupil. It would also help to set parents' minds more at ease if they could visit their child's classroom on a prescribed day in September, and hopefully, see their first year settling in.

- Not alone is it beneficial to facilitate study skills seminars for pupils but workshops on such would be beneficial for parents. These would provide opportunities for parents to learn how they can support their children at secondary school.

- Inviting the students to write a letter about themselves and communicate anything that they would like their yearhead to know about them, could help to personalise their arrival at their new school.

- Increasing the number of occasions on which the sixth class students come to the school for programmes of planned activities, can help to lessen their confusion and ease their transition. Activities where recent entrants help to integrate the incoming students can be helpful. Open sports days, science exhibitions, school concerts, treasure hunts in company with the previous years entrants, can help the new students to adjust more quickly to the size of the building.

- Inviting the sixth class pupils and their teachers to post-primary open days can help to ease the students into the much larger school.

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- Providing opportunities for first-year pupils to return to their primary schools and tell of their experiences would provide first-hand information for the sixth class pupils. To further maintain contact between the two sectors, older pupils, perhaps transition year could return for visits as faith friends and classroom assistants. Encouraging the senior pupils to take responsibility for new entrants particularly during the first few weeks, also helps to integrate the new students.

- Increasing the opportunity for students' views to be heard and taking appropriate action in case of bullying or absenteeism, can reduce some of the reasons why students drift away from school. Including a 'tracking system' in all schools to ensure that all children transfer.

- Developing a pastoral care policy and the training of a team who will be on the lookout for students who may be experiencing difficulties. The identification and remediation provision for pupils who present with problems, at an earlier rather than a later stage.

- The economic impact of transfer must be addressed as part of a support system for parents and students. The provision of book rental schemes is most helpful in this respect.

- For the students, friendship patterns are very important during the settling in period to their secondary school. Being in a class with friends from primary school makes it easier to adjust to the new environment programme which help to 'break the ice', and encourage the students to get to know each other, are especially valuable when students come from a number of feeder schools.

- Giving the student exposure to as many subjects as possible in first year widens their choice for future years. The inclusion of a foreign language and a science programme in sixth class also helps to prepare them for second-level. The inclusion or rotation of extra teachers in primary school for such subjects would help to prepare the pupil for the multiplicity of teachers in second-level.

- The avoiding of streamed classes, especially for first-years will help the pupil to be more at ease and not worrying about which class they will be allocated to. Where it exists, alternating the names of the ability groups from year to year should lead to less distinction between pupils. Students are alienated when they perceive themselves to be down graded because of the numbering or lettering of the class. A new system of naming classes should be devised.

- Greater communication between teachers on each side of the transfer divide is called for. There needs to be oral and written dialogue in the form of report cards, student profiles, folders etc. There also needs to be collaboration about subjects and to ensure that curriculum continuity takes place.

- The need for a transfer advisor to liaise between both sectors is a top priority. This advisor should be appointed from among the secondary school staff and be allocated the post of responsibility for transfer of pupils. Notwithstanding this, all teachers should have a part to play in transfer by offering their support and by helping to ease the trauma experienced by many pupils on transfer.

- Attention should be paid to the folklore about the school. Policies on discipline, code of behaviour, streaming, school rules and regulations should be transparent and perceived to be enforced. Policy and practice must be seen to coincide if credibility is to be maintained and students continue to be attracted to and thrive in post-primary schools.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

GROUP TRANSFERRED IN SEPTEMBER 1999
POST TRANSFER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How did you feel on your first day here? (Delighted, Frightened, A little frightened, No particular feeling).

   _____

2. On the first day were you?   Yes/No

   - Amazed at the size of the school

   _____

   - Amazed at the large number of pupils

   _____

   - Feeling lost

   _____

   - Missing your friends

   _____

   - Have you settled down now?

   _____

3. Who helped you most to settle down? (Principal, Other Teacher, Year Head, Parents, Friend).

   _____

4. How many subjects are you studying now?

   _____

5.   What is your favourite subject?

_____

6.   Did you have any problem with reading your timetable when you first arrived here?

_____

7.   Do you understand your timetable better now?

_____

_____

8.   Has you class got its own classroom?

_____

_____

9.   Would you prefer to have your own classroom, or move to other rooms for different subjects?

_____

_____

10. Are some of your friends from primary with you in this class?

_____

_____

11. Have you made some new friends in this school?

_____

12. Do you take part in sport in the school?

_____

13. What is your favourite game?

_____

14. How long do you intend to stay in this school?

_____

15. What age are you?

_____

16. Are you a boy or a girl?

_____

17. What are your worries now, that you are in this school?

_____

_____

_____

18. How many teachers have you?

_____

19. Do you like having a number of teachers?

_____

20. Would you prefer to have 1 or 2 teachers who would teach you all subjects?

_____

_____

21. In general, how do you find the older pupils in this school? (Bossy, Helpful, Friendly).

_____

22. If you had problems, other than homework, to whom would you look for advice or help?

_____

23.   Have you ever returned to your past primary school, since you left?

_____

_____

24.   Do you think it would be a good idea for first years to return to their primary schools and speak to 6th class about their fears, concerns, hopes, on transfer to post-primary?

_____

_____

25.   If you were ever speaking to 6th class, what advice would you give them?

_____

_____

26.   What do you miss most about Primary school?

_____

_____

27.   What do you not miss about Primary school?

_____

_____

Group transferred in September 1999
Most common fears expressed in April 1999

Children were divided into groups and 1 reported back:-

- I fear that I will be in a different class from my friends and that I won't make new friends;

- I am worried that the different subjects will be harder and I won't be able to keep up;

- I am afraid that the other children will laugh at me, or bully me, or tease me about my appearance;

- I am not sure if I will be able to find my way around or know where my locker is;

- It bothers me that I won't understand what the teachers are saying and that I won't get on well with them.

Hopes
- I hope to meet new friends;

- I would love to get into a good class and get on well at my subjects;

- I would like to get on the school football team;

- I am looking forward to the half-day on a Wednesday.

Hopes and fears expressed by present 6th Class - January 2000
Comments given on an individual basis

Fears

- Having no friends and no-one to talk to;
- People laughing at me because I am too fat;
- Going red in the class if I don't know the answer;
- That people are not as nice as primary;
- Afraid of getting expelled or suspended;
- Being left out of games;
- That I will be too shy;
- Afraid of getting into trouble in front of everyone else and they would be going home telling about me;
- Being got when it's my birthday and they throw flour and eggs on me;
- Teachers picking on me.

Hopes

- Hope to make new friends;
- That the teachers will be as nice as primary;
- Would like to have new things to do at lunch break;
- To pass all my tests;
- I hope that I will not be too shy;
- I would like to be 'cool' like everyone else.

APPENDIX D

Questionnaire for Post-Primary Principals

1. What is the total number of pupils in the school?

    _____

2. How many primary schools are "feeding into" your school?

    _____

3. Are there "transfer of records" from primary school accompanying each pupil?

    _____

4. What methods of contact do you have with primary school, prior to transfer of pupils?

    _____

5. What happens on the first morning for the new first-years in your schools?

    _____

6. Do you have support services, pastoral care, guidance, counselling, for first years? If yes, can you give some details.

    _____

    _____

7. Are there any extra concessions for 1st years?

    _____

8. Are the first year students who present with difficulties, identifiable in their first year of post-primary school?

    _____

9.   If yes, what remedial measures do you have for them?

_____

_____

10. Do you have any further induction policies that you can give some details on?

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX E

Comments on "Transfer" from primary school teachers
where researcher's work was being carried out

- Unless you are teaching the 6th class pupils, you don't know much about transfer and it is never an issue at staff meetings, teacher courses or curriculum planning days;

- I would have noticed it being more daunting for the eldest of a family;

- We are inclined to spoon-feed the children in primary school and it must be an awful change for them;

- There is very little communication with post primary schools, the one quick, brief visit that is made is over, before the children have got their minds round to thinking about transfer;

- It's a great mystery to the pupils as to what is going to happen in their next school;

- There is no procedure in place in primary school for preparing the pupils, the 6th class teacher is already overstretched and a good place to start would be, with contact of a preparation nature between teachers from primary and post-primary sectors;

- I view the visits from the post-primary principals as a "marketing exercise". They are calling out to the primary schools earlier each year trying to get ahead of the rest. Our class are often deciding on which school they will attend, by the principal who has made the best "impression".

Comments from Post-Primary Teachers

- Why not use number lines for maths and teach tables?;

- Why are they pampered so much?;

- Teach them to revise and do tests by revision;

- The kids are missing their primary teachers;

- They are finding an awful change with so many teachers;

- Many of them are too young coming in here;

- They need to be strong to withstand the bullying;

- Children are too pampered coming from the primary schools, they need to toughen up.

Comments made by parents of researcher's sixth class pupils whose children will be transferring to post-primary school in September 2000

- This is a traumatic year for me, even thinking about him leaving primary school;

- My child doesn't like leaving, she is afraid of the big school;

- I think that children are better prepared now for their next school;

- I see it as a big change, my last child was wandering around for the first six months when she went to the secondary;

- I'm dreading it, afraid he would be bullied and wouldn't stand up for himself;

- She loves her primary, I don't want her to leave;

- I wish they wouldn't have to leave this school;

- I'm heart-broken, it's even worse than starting school;

- He is going to find the long day a big change and I'm afraid that he'll grow apart from me.

The following is a report from a seminar on "Transition from primary to post-primary", attended by the researcher and organised by Drogheda youth educational network in March, 1999.

Each workshop was asked to discuss three questions:-

- What is working well at the moment in the transition from primary to post-primary?

- What are the difficulties, from your perspective, e.g. teacher, principal, parent, youth worker, health worker etc., in the transition from primary to post-primary?

- Any suggestions to improve the situation?

- In the short-term e.g. work that could be undertaken in the summer term and in September;

- In the long-term, what would we like to see down the road?

- What is working well at the moment in the transition from primary to post-primary?

Open Days/Nights

- Good for children and parents to get overview of schools and choices;

- Initial contact with parents usually in April, working well but better earlier;

- Initial contact with parents at general meeting encourages their input, strengthens links with parents.

Improvement in information and communication between Primary and Post-Primary schools.

- Representative from post-primary visiting primary schools;

- Communication in advance of enrolment days;

- Use of white cards;

- Class visits to post-primary school;

- Availability of year heads and counsellors;

- Post primary school getting back to primary school about new students;

- In some situations post-primary school informed of children who have received remedial help/learning support in primary school.

Buddy System
- Senior student buddies
- Mentor system.

Work of Primary school teachers
- Preparation and practice for sixth class students in entrance tests;
- Bringing sixth class students to visit post-primary school;
- Resource teacher for travellers bringing group to visit post-primary school.

Parental involvement
- Parent teacher meeting;
- Parents council;
- Open night for parents.

The following are other points mentioned that do not fall into a particular category.

- A lot of goodwill exists;
- There are a lot of supports available in post-primary;
- Positive attitude of staff in a "certain school" welcoming students in, addressing their needs, treating them as persons/individuals. This is beneficial for settling in students, making them feel welcome and cared for;
- Pastoral care and Civics both beneficial;
- Children know each other from football clubs and athletic associations;
- Multiple teachers – not just one teacher;
- Children assured of a place in post-primary before the assessment test;
- Closer links have developed between community based projects and schools.

Communication

- Better communication needed, especially verbal;

- There could be better communication with parents of sixth class students in the year before they come into post-primary;

- Reluctance on the part of teachers to commit information to paper;

- Primary schools do not alert post-primary schools to special needs;

- Teachers/parents need to know a particular person to link with in the post-primary school.

Assessment/Entrance Tests

- Assessment tests dominate sixth class – is there a need for them?

- Assessment tests are too early.

Bullying

- Bullying of vulnerable students;
- High achiever can also be bullied;
- Teachers being bullied by parents;
- Bullying on buses – new children don't get a seat – worrying about going home.

School Transport
- Particularly daunting for children from outside the town;
- Early bus times;
- Bullying on buses;
- Overcrowding.

Parents/Family issues
- Financial strain of post-primary school;

- Parental non-involvement mainly due to fear of coming into a system they don't know;

- Parents not aware of the positive changes in schools;

- Parents afraid of interfering;

- Parents lack of training on how to approach school;

- Parents being too involved with their own children – defensive;

- Schools tend to contact parents with bad news only.

Travellers
- Cultural problems for travellers – tension between their needs and that of the school/community;
- Entrance test is daunting;
- Curriculum content not always relevant;
- Only one traveller in post-primary school in Drogheda;
- No resource teacher for travellers in post-primary schools.

Identity

- Difficulty in bringing positive sense of own identity into sheer size of second level;

- Fear of not being accepted;

- "High flier in primary now flying low".

The following are other points mentioned that do not fall into a particular category

- Streaming;

- Negative experiences at primary level are difficult to reverse;

- Age of children coming into post-primary e.g. where they had been kept back and are older than the other students;

- School attendance act not good for enforcing poor attendance;

- Isolated position of special schools;

- People not aware of the befriending system run by the North Eastern Health Board;

- Coming into mixed classes.

What changes could be made in the short term and the long term?

Early intervention:

- A strong plea was made for early intervention at a very early age – relationship with parents could be nurtured especially those with negative experiences at school;

- Identification of more vulnerable students in the first few years of primary schools;

- Where primary schools are junior and senior, the principles of transfer should apply. Both pupils and parents would then have the experience of this before transfer from primary to post-primary;

- Access to resource teachers for the more vulnerable student from early on.

Communication between Primary and Post-Primary Schools

- Need to put structure in place to ensure better communication between primary and post-primary;

- Year head to visit primary school in June and discuss any issues or fears and give a link for students;

- More contact and feedback – formal face to face meetings, outside agency to initiate meetings;

- Allow second level schools into primary at fifth and sixth class;

- Organised sharing of information about students.

- Forms for completion by primary teachers that address positive issues e.g. areas of interest and not just "difficulties";

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- Earlier feedback from new school about child's progress;

- Clarification of policy on liaising;

- Day long meetings of primary and post-primary schools for ongoing evaluation and planning.

Primary School
- More discussion in primary school on new subjects to be taken up in post-primary, from own primary teacher;

- More teachers for sixth classes – 3 teachers a day;

- How to structure sixth class to ease transfer issues i.e. include subjects, life skills, creating a timetable and "going to different classes".

- More respect for children's space.

Post – Primary School
- Transition month in September;

- Journal system – more positive comments;

- More respect for children's space.

Teachers
- Time for teachers to take all this on board;
- Training for teachers.

Parents

- Make school parent friendly;

- Involve parents more in transfer;

- Bring parents into school for positive reasons;

- Parents to be invited into new schools each time students transfer;

- Training for parents in May held in primary school maybe given by someone from post-primary school;

- Post-Primary schools to meet parents of incoming first years prior to September;

- Counsellor/Non-teacher to meet parents individually in first month in post-primary school;

- Bring parents back in after first month in post-primary school;

- Parents to meet in class groups.

Summer Activities

- Information on summer projects to be fed to schools;

- Summer induction course – using fun – helping kids deal with new system e.g. by dealing with new situation in the summer;

- Disco or recreational social evening for incoming first years in August.

Supports for Students

- ISPCC transition programme;

- For "at risk" students, 2 hours per day to be spent in school and remainder of time with youth/community project – integrated with schools;

- Need for co-ordination between school and youth/community sector.

Assessment Test

- Are they necessary?

- Postpone assessment test to May/June

Transport

- Supervision on transport

- More buses

Codes of Practice

- Code of practice – clearly defined;

- Code of behaviour of primary school to be passed on to post-primary school – students to have input.

Resources

- More money needed, more back up;

- HSCL teachers for ail schools.

Tracking System

- Need for setting up a "tracking system" to ensure that all children transfer.

Mediation Centre

- Local mediation centre for problems - for parents, children and schools – if problems can't be resolved within school.

The "System"

- Use the existing system to best advantage – even with all its flaws.

PRIMARY TO SECOND-LEVEL TRANSFER FORM
STUDENT PROFILE

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Mothers Name: _____

Fathers Name: _____

Relevant Medical Info: _____

_____

Attendance in 6th (to date) _____ days out of _____ days.

Comment: _____

_____

Please tick: (1 = Poor, 2 = Average, 3 = Good)

	1	2	3
Irish	☐	☐	☐
English	☐	☐	☐
Maths	☐	☐	☐
History	☐	☐	☐
Geography	☐	☐	☐
Sport	☐	☐	☐
Music	☐	☐	☐
Art	☐	☐	☐
Project Work	☐	☐	☐
Leadership	☐	☐	☐
Teamwork	☐	☐	☐
Behaviour	☐	☐	☐

	MICRA-T	SIGMA - T
	(English)	(Maths)
Sten Score	☐	☐

Application to Study

In-Class	☐	☐	☐
Homework	☐	☐	☐

Extra Curricular Activities:

In-school _____

Out of school _____

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