

Transition Informations Sessions* Demonstration Project 2006-08

Lessons Learned Report

* Also known as 'Starting School and Moving On' sessions

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Family and Parenting Institute



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Who should read this report?

This report is aimed at all Local Authorities (LAs) and their schools as they develop their support for parents, particularly during that transition when their child moves from one phase to the next in their development and learning. It shares learning by 20 local authorities that consulted with parents, then planned and delivered Transition Information Sessions (TIS) to inform and support families with a child entering a new phase in their development and education. As you read through the report you will find case studies illustrating a variety of models for delivering this type of parenting support and demonstrating what can work well in different settings. Pictures throughout are taken from a selection of sessions and from the lessons learned event.

Transition Information Sessions should be an integral part of the parenting support offer to which all schools are expected to give parents access by 2010.



What are the aims of a Transition Information Session?

Transition Information Sessions for parents (also known as “Starting School and Moving On” sessions) were developed within the demonstration project as one-off events, lasting about an hour but with extra time for any refreshments and informal discussion. They aim to:

- Lay the foundations for building effective home/school partnerships by welcoming all parents and carers with a child joining reception class, secondary, middle or high school.
- Give all parents - mothers, fathers and other carers - information, ideas and an opportunity for discussion about parenting issues, including how to keep their child safe, happy and learning.
- Give parents information about local and national services which offer families information, advice, help and practical support.

How Transition Information Sessions were developed in the Demonstration Project

Sessions were offered to each new cohort of parents with a child entering a new school setting. Session content was shaped by local preference and need but with a focus on how parents can keep their child safe, happy and learning. All sessions were expected to signpost parents to local and national services that are there to support them and sessions often directly involved such service providers - in planning, delivery and provision of materials. The format and delivery was designed to attract and engage with the audience, including those parents less frequently involved in school events.

The main four phases of the delivery cycle for sessions can be described as:

-Consultation with parents, including the traditionally harder to reach groups e.g. fathers, BME community parents (what do they want and need from the session?)

-Planning (including designing the content of the session, ensuring accessibility and reaching those facing any barriers to engagement, working with external partners, publicizing and marketing)

- Delivery (making it happen on the day)

- Evaluation (including seeking participants' views on what went well, what could be better next time, who wasn't there, who should have been and how can they be involved next time).

Session Content Materials and a Training manual

The Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) has developed a toolkit of materials that schools can access to get ideas and content for their sessions. This includes presentations, handouts for parents and topic materials for the transition into Reception Year, Secondary, Middle and High School.

Titus Alexander, an expert in the field, developed a training manual and handbook for session facilitators, for training purposes in the demonstration projects and across all LAs. These provide LAs with materials that lend themselves to cascading in training others.

Both the toolkit of session materials and the training resources can be accessed on the teachernet and FPI websites at www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools/teachernetgovukcoreoffer and www.familyandparenting.org.

Transition Information Sessions beyond the demonstration project

In 2007 -08 the FPI worked with 4Children to deliver action planning events and training for TIS session facilitators, offered free of charge to all local authorities. Over 2,000 LA nominees attended a two day training event covering planning, content and delivery of sessions. This work has supported LAs as they develop their own Transition Information Sessions, drawing upon the materials and models of delivery developed within the demonstration project and learning from the emerging good practice - outlined in this report.

Transition Information Sessions contribute to the overall school improvement plan and Ofsted Self Evaluation Form (SEF). Every Parent Matters (DfES, 2007) and The Children's Plan, Building brighter futures (DCSF, 2007) describe the sessions.

Demonstration local authorities

20 demonstration local authorities took part in the project in 2007-2008.

9 of these local authorities (marked *) had the benefit of their experience as demonstration local authorities in 2006-2007. These LAs were:

Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton*, Brighton and Hove, Calderdale*, Cambridgeshire, Croydon*, Essex*, Gateshead, Hampshire*, Leeds, Lewisham*, Luton, North Lincolnshire*, North Somerset, Northamptonshire, Redbridge, Sheffield*, Telford and Wrekin, Trafford*, Worcestershire

Each local authority was asked to trial Transition Information Sessions for parents, based on the model described above with up to 50 schools. These 20 local authorities successfully delivered sessions for over 900 schools in total.

Lessons Learned Event at London Zoo, December, 2007



The lessons learned event, to capture the experience of the demonstration projects in the 20 LAs, was held on 30th November 2007 at London Zoo and brought together local authority co-ordinators, facilitators, teachers, parents and other partners such as learning mentors and family information services. This report is based on the learning from presentations and discussion on the day. It provides a summary of the experience of the 20 demonstration local authorities, for all LAs and their schools to draw upon as they develop and deliver TIS for their parents.

Evaluation

The project has been the subject of independent evaluation by ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd. A report on the first year of delivery is published on the DCSF website (Transition Information Sessions (TIS) Demonstration Project - Year One Evaluation) and a final report on two years of the project will be published by DCSF in summer 2008.

Learning from the project

This report covers the learning from the project under the following headings.

1 What are the benefits for parents of attending TIS?	Page 7
2 What are the benefits for LAs and schools of TIS?	Page 10
3 What makes TIS a success?	Page 15
4 What are the challenges to delivering effective TIS?	Page 20
5 How can TIS be made sustainable within a school / LA?	Page 24

The report that follows is broken up with a selection of case studies (outlined below). Dip into these to see how LAs and their schools have shown excellence in their delivery of TIS.

1. **Locking Primary School, Weston-super-Mare** - good example of a creative information session that was also an opportunity to consult with parents, page 8.
2. **Lever Park School, Bolton** - the involvement of the Chair of Governors reflects an element of school ownership from the top down, page 11.
3. **Ray Lodge Primary School, Redbridge** - involving parents in the development of the Sure Start Children's Centre and the school's Parent Strategy, a Parent Support Adviser worked with the school to consult parents, page 13.
4. **Woodkirk High Specialist Science School, Leeds** - linked the session to a Year 7 parents' event and increased the number of attendees, including a good number of fathers, page 16.
5. **Blackburn with Darwen secondary schools event** - combining resources to provide an inspirational session with someone that parents and children respect and to whom they relate, page 18.
6. **Grange Lane Infant School, Scunthorpe** - excellent practice around consultation, page 21.
7. **Abbey Park Primary School, Halifax** - perseverance and creativity in breaking down home-school barriers, page 23.
8. **Crofton School, Lewisham, South London** - a mixed, secondary school where partnership with external agencies provided a participative, fun, relevant session page 25.
9. **Broomgrove Infants School, Essex** - effective use of a "market place" to introduce parents to a wide range of services and put service providers in touch with each other (essential for achieving a fully joined-up approach to supporting parents), page 27.
10. **Grendon Hall (outdoor activity centre) Wellingborough area**, Northamptonshire - five rural junior schools combined to offer an information session in a community venue, page 29.

1. What are the benefits for parents of attending Transition Information Sessions?

- Time to get to know key members of staff face to face, finding out who is available to support them and their child e.g form tutor, SENCO, learning mentor, Parent Support Adviser.
- The opportunity to understand the school environment and how it works and discuss or get information on school based issues e.g. timetable, school transport, homework.
- Finding out about how to support their child's learning and feeling more confident in how to do this, hearing about courses they could take to help in other areas e.g. parenting programmes, family learning, healthy cooking and eating.
- Meeting other parents for social networking/peace of mind e.g. meeting the parents / carers of their child's particular circle of friends.
- Having a chance to get to know the new school setting and receiving information / sharing ideas with other parents in a relaxed/informal way.
- Getting information at an early stage about all the support available as their child moves into a new phase of his/her development - important for all parents and particularly important to those facing challenges.
- Being consulted on and having the opportunity to influence future sessions around key areas of interest or concern e.g. child safety, taster parenting programmes, songs and stories sessions.
- Being included through outreach from the school e.g. home visits.
- Generally gaining greater peace of mind about the transition phase.
- Gaining greater confidence in their parenting skills/style.



Case Study - Locking Primary School, Locking, Weston- super- Mare

Background

Locking School is a primary school situated approximately 4 miles outside of Weston-super-Mare in Somerset. The school has approximately 270 pupils, infants and juniors who learn in separate buildings. There are 4 infant classes and 5 junior classes. The infants and juniors come together for various activities including a weekly assembly and playtime or lunchtime when junior children sometimes help the infants. Apart from reception the classes are arranged in mixed year groups (2 years for each class). This allows for greater flexibility when arranging class sizes. The head teacher said, 'Locking School is a community where the education of the whole child is developed in a caring organised and happy environment. We recognise and respond to the strengths and needs of all members of the school in order to realise the full potential of everyone.'

Planning

Across the North Somerset area the Transition Information Sessions work, also known as the Starting School/Moving On programme, has been taken forward by a team of 25 parent support advisors (PSAs) who are part of a DCSF pilot programme¹. The role of the PSA is to provide a bridge between school and home, supporting parents with a range of issues at an early stage to prevent problems from escalating into something more serious. This role was, therefore, ideally placed to develop the sessions. Each school based PSA is supported by a small team of co-ordinators who have provided the management and overview for the starting School/Moving On project.

The Event

The session was co-facilitated by the healthy school co-ordinator, the deputy head, the parent support advisor and the school cook. The event took place on a week day afternoon and adopted the theme of 'Healthy Eating' covering:

- New school food standards
- Awareness raising around salt / sugar / fat
- Questions and answers with school cook
- A 'ready steady cook' style activity with groups of parents who worked together to follow a healthy recipe and create a healthy lunch menu.

Displays were erected in the hall with information about:

- The role of the PSA
- How parents might access the service for support
- Healthy Eating.

Selections of recipes were made available for parents to take home, along with a range of other information leaflets. The session finished with a raffle and tea or coffee. Whilst parents were having tea the PSA asked them what kind of session they would like to come to in the future and reminded the parents to get in touch with any ideas they might have outside the session.

¹ The PSA pilot continues until Summer 2008. CSR allocated funding for national expansion of PSAs, over 2008-11, in the context of the extended schools core offer for parenting support

Outcome

Session staff: The multi disciplinary team that delivered the session were pleased with how it was received and fairly happy with attendance.

Parents and carers: Attendees generated a list of ideas for future activity and informed future session content. They also fed back to the group, enjoying discussing the challenges around healthy eating

Lessons learned around attendance and engagement in the session: Although the team were fairly happy with attendance they felt there was room for development for future sessions.

Consultation: Having the opportunity to consult with parents and carers on the evening was seen as invaluable.

Good Practice

Using the session as an opportunity to consult with parents and thus generating a list of ideas for future activity. Using a creative and interactive approach to engaging parents in the theme presented.

2. What are the benefits of Transition Information Sessions for LAs and schools?

- Schools that run successful TIS can experience a positive change in their home / school relationships so the two are working in a productive partnership.
- In developing TIS sessions, LAs and their schools develop innovative, creative, and diplomatic ways of engaging with parents. These can then be more widely applied to other parenting support work.
- The sessions provide information, advice and support (and where appropriate referral to other services) to parents.
- Where parents get support when and where they need it, schools may benefit from resulting better behaviour, attendance and achievement of children and young people.
- The sessions are an opportunity to stress to parents the importance of their child's education and, sometimes less recognized, the importance of the role of the parent in helping their child achieve.
- Because the sessions cover transition to secondary school and high school they provide an opportunity to engage with parents of this older age group. Such engagement is more often associated with meetings with parents at primary schools.
- LAs that develop a TIS model that fully involves partners with a shared interest in supporting parents have found this helps develop productive working relationships.
- Developing the sessions helps school staff become more aware of local services that can support parents and also familiarizes them with the wider parenting support agenda.



Case study - Lever Park School, Bolton

Background

Lever Park is a special school for 50 students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. This is an increase on last year when the school offered 42 places. Usually the school have an intake at year 7 of 3 or 4 new pupils, however this year the intake is 14 new pupils. Obviously, on such a small school, this size of intake has the potential to impact significantly on the school community and the school are mindful to make the transition period as successful as possible and to ensure that this impact is positive. The school contacted new parents and asked them what would best help them with the transition to a special secondary school. There were a number of options but the most popular were;

1. Spending time in school with their children and with other parents.
2. Specialist training for dealing with challenging children.

The most significant marker of both these options was that they both allow school to share its ethos and behaviour strategies with the parents, ensuring that the children get the same messages at home and in school. Option one would also allow the parents and carers to develop relationships within school before moving on to the more demanding option of specialist training. The school is hoping to develop specialist status and provide a resource for students up to the age of eighteen; plans for this development are underway.

Planning

The co-ordinator for the demonstration project made contact with the school to explore how the community might benefit from taking part in the project. The school submitted a detailed delivery plan which included a description of funded activity. The school wanted to provide new parents with the opportunity to develop positive relationships with school and with their children and other parents and carers by spending time in school. They would be working with their children on practical, physical and social activities:

Social Activities

Social Skills Games
Family day out
Mentoring / Buddies

Physical Activities

Football
Swimming
Hiking
Fishing

Practical Activities

Motor mechanic classes
Brick laying classes
Painting and decorating classes
Horticulture classes
Cooking

The Event

The event took place on a weekday evening. All parents, carers and children were invited to the session. Nearly all of the school's students and their parents attended. The session was opened by the Chair of Governors who presented awards to the pupils on a range of achievements; this had a very positive effect and allowed the parents to see how hard their children had been working. A bonfire was organized in the school grounds and a hot supper was provided. Parents visited classrooms and chatted to staff. The evening was used to promote other activities scheduled for the year. These included Healthy Cooking, Supporting your Child with ADHD and Family Outdoor Activity days. A range of information was displayed and available for parents to take home with them. There was a good atmosphere at the event. Parents and students clearly felt comfortable and well supported by the school staff and community. The head teacher said, 'We communicate with our parents on a daily basis. A good relationship with parents, grandparents and carers helps us provide the best for young people.'

Outcome

School staff: The school staff team feels that the sessions will benefit the whole school community in developing a 'Nurture School'.

Parents and carers: Parents and carers were given the opportunity to complete structured activity with their children and the session was felt to help develop sustainable relationships within families and between school and home. There will also be the added benefit of skills' acquisition.

Future benefits for the School Community and Children: Improved communication and participation, enabling a smooth transition period. In addition, working closely with parents/carers and staff will develop a social and behavioural strategy that is consistent and will produce robust boundaries for children both at home and at school. This is shown to have considerable positive impact on self esteem and confidence.

Good practice

Involvement of the Chair of Governors in the event reflects an element of school ownership from the top down.

Case study - Ray Lodge Primary School, Redbridge

Background

Ray Lodge Primary School (soon to be Ray Lodge Sure Start Children's Centre) is in the London Borough of Redbridge and has approximately 520 pupils on roll. The school's vision states that "It is important that a child feels valued, secure and happy in school and that the curriculum should encourage the development of a wide range of skills." In addition, partnership between parents and school is considered extremely important and parents are encouraged to share in their children's learning throughout their time at the school. Due to the new Sure Start Children's Centre development there is a requirement for the schools and the Children's Centre to develop a close working relationship. At the time of the session, Ray Lodge had been part of in depth community consultation to assess and inform local need and gaps in services for children, young people and parents and carers.

Planning

The Parent Support Adviser (PSA) worked closely with the head teacher and the school staff in making the arrangements for the session. The session was aimed at all parents with children entering into Nursery and Reception Class either in September or January. The Nursery and Reception Class staff and the Sure Start Children's Centre were involved in the delivery of the session.

The event

The school hall was set out in theatre style with visual displays of learning materials and a display of information from the Sure Start Children's Centre. Food was provided, together with a display of healthy eating foods. The PSA welcomed the parents and carers.

The headteacher covered the following subjects:

- The developments at the school
- The Sure Start Children's Centre and ongoing plans
- The school's parent strategy

It was stressed that the school welcomed parents and carers and had an open approach policy. 25 parents and carers attended, including two fathers.

The Nursery and Reception class teacher gave a presentation on the following:

- The early learning curriculum
- How important it was for parents and carers to know what was being taught
- The importance of supporting their child's learning
- How to help their children with their learning
- Positive messages and support for young children e.g. 200 ways to say well done
- Healthy lunches and healthy eating

Parents and carers were actively involved in questions and discussion. A 'goody bag' full of information was given to each parent / carer attending and parents who could not attend will also receive one. A crèche was provided for parents who needed childcare during the session. Before and after the session there was a lot of interaction going on between the parents and carers and staff.

Outcome

Parents and carers: Parents and carers engaged in the session and found it helpful. Parents were also able to find out about parenting classes available locally, fathers' clubs and support to families with a parent or carer in prison.

Sure Start Children's Centre development: The session contributed towards understanding the needs of local parents and carers and making sure that their needs are fed into the development of the services offered from the Centre.

School: The session helped strengthen the relationship between the PSA, the school and the parents and carers.

The local authority: This session helped inform and shape roll out of TIS in Redbridge and also test out new materials developed to support parents locally.

Good practice

Involving parents in the development of the Sure Start Children's Centre and the school's Parent Strategy. Ensuring that parents who couldn't attend received a goody bag with useful information.

3. What makes Transition Information Sessions a success?

- Consulting with parents - mothers and fathers - to inform planning and delivery. This is not only vital to delivering a session that matches parents' needs and expectations but also a means of building the home / school relationship and giving parents greater understanding of the purpose of the session.
- Thinking about how best to engage with any groups of parents who are hard for your school to reach and using outreach approaches where this is appropriate.
- Providing a framework for planning the sessions with marketing as a key concern.
- Ensuring that the event is interesting, relevant to parents' needs and concerns and fits with what you know about your parent community in terms of the use of language, materials and activities most likely to effectively engage them. This might mean taking an informal approach and offering fun, sociable activities to keep the session vibrant e.g. family cookery, drama activities.
- Planning the session to take into account days and times that mothers, fathers, carers and extended families can attend e.g. taking account of local working patterns.
- Providing facilitation that is both supportive and non-judgmental
- Working with others with a shared agenda of supporting parents, e.g. extended services, third sector, parenting practitioners, to develop collaborative practice and sharing of resources and knowledge e.g. other agencies can contribute materials or stands at your event, providing a market place where parents find out what's on offer.
- Ensuring that your Transition Information Sessions are designed to encourage all parents to access the information and support offered.
- Maximising opportunities for parents, schools and agencies to learn from each other and exchange experiences and information, so that the session is participative and starts to break down barriers that get in the way of open communication.
- Using Transition Information Sessions as an introduction and signpost to other activities and events that your school has on offer to parents, or to canvass parents' enthusiasm for anything you would like to introduce e.g. family learning, parenting programmes.
- Ensuring that parents are appropriately referred to sources of help and support where needed.
- Disseminating good practice and sharing experiences with other Las / schools in order to question and refine local practice.

Case study - Woodkirk High Specialist Science School, Leeds

Background

Woodkirk High Specialist Science School is a well established, comprehensive, co-educational, 11-19 maintained Specialist Science School. The school aims to provide a safe, happy and ordered environment where all children have the maximum opportunities to fully develop their individual skills and abilities. There are over 1760 students on roll including more than 240 sixth formers and a team of 113 teachers, plus 45 ancillary staff. The school's vision states "Woodkirk aims to create a balance between the various academic, intellectual, spiritual, cultural, social, community, musical, athletic and career demands on young people. Students are encouraged to be involved in all aspects of school life; the range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities offers a wide variety of choice. The school aims to bring about learning in all its various forms for all children, irrespective of ability and background. The theme of the evening was a Year 7 focus evening, to welcome the parents and carers to the new school and for the Head teacher to give some background on the school and the structure of learning and how parents can help their children develop and achieve.

Planning for the event

The school's mentor planned the event with the school and tied in the planning of the session with the market place that ran at the end of the session, together with the provision of food by the school's chef. The session was planned with support from Education Leeds.

The event

200 out of a planned 230 parents and carers attended with a noticeably good representation of fathers. The Head introduced the Assistant Head, the SENCO and the pastoral team and spoke about

- The learning structure
- Importance of parental support for children's learning
- The high aims and expectations at secondary school.

The Assistant Head teacher then spoke about how important parents are to their children's development, wellbeing and educational achievement. A representative from Education Leeds gave a talk about the STEPS programme, the importance of support being available to children and parents and how the programme underpinned the steps to excellence for personal success. He also welcomed the fact that a large number of fathers was present and the importance of their input.

A market place of service providers was provided, as well as food made by the school's chef. The stalls included the importance of attendance and every school day counting. Healthy eating advice was available, together with some samples of the school meals menus on offer as well as information on the STEPS programme, the curriculum, important dates for parents in the school calendar, Kidscape and the help line, the SENCO and her work. Information was also available on free school meals availability and how to apply for them. At the end of the session, just over half of the evaluation questionnaires were filled in or returned.

Outcome

School Staff: The school staff felt that the session was suitably pitched and that there was a good balance between the Head's talk, the Assistant head and Education Leeds's input on the importance of parents.

Parents and Carers: Parents and carers fed back that they would like additional support on internet safety and attendance and behaviour. As a result sessions on cyber safety and attendance and behaviour are being planned. Parents also found the presence of the SENCO useful. Parents also gave positive feedback on the market place of service providers, the information on Kidscape and the STEPS programme.

Future Planning: It was felt that it was important to gain input from outside agencies in future sessions and develop clarity about their role in the session and level of input. The school also acknowledged the need to develop alongside extended schools work locally. In terms of harder to reach parents (and there was a very good attendance overall) the school follows up individual issues with pupils and works on a 1:1 basis, where necessary and involves parents in any follow up work. This will be made clear to parents in future sessions.

Good Practice

Linking session to an existing event and thereby improving the number of parents who may be free to attend. Making staff available at the event e.g the SENCO to discuss parental concerns

Case study - Blackburn with Darwen Secondary Schools Event

Background

Blackburn with Darwen Local Authority has ten secondary schools across the area. The extended schools team decided to approach the schools with the idea of a collaborative event. This would take the form of a large scale event, held at Ewood Park Football Stadium in Blackburn and would include all ten secondary schools along with an extensive range of local and national providers. Councillor Chris Thayne, Executive Member for Children's Services, said, "This is an ideal opportunity for parents to meet each other, find out more about the services available to support children and families and encourage parents to become more involved in their child's learning. It is the first time we have held an event of this kind in the borough and if it is a success we would try to find a way to organise something similar in future years. Our aim is always to make the transition from primary to secondary school as smooth as possible."

Planning

The planning for this event required a co-ordinated approach through liaising with the ten participating schools and with the wide range of family support services that work in and around the extended schools network. Moreover, due to the large scale of the event and venue, risk management and assessments were required as were intricate planning and resources. As Olympic champion, Sally Gunnell OBE was speaking at the event, there was a requirement to liaise with her management team. Transport was provided for participating families to help those without their own transport to get to the venue, departing from 13 venues across the borough. A crèche was provided for children between the ages of one and eight.

The Event

The event took place on Sunday 4th November 2007 at Ewood Park Football Stadium in Blackburn. Thirteen coaches transported families from thirteen pick up points across the area. Sally Gunnell OBE gave an inspirational key note speech, with messages to children reflecting the importance to 'follow your dream and work on your talents whatever they are' and to parents 'support your children and believe in them'. The delegates watched the 1992 Olympic Gold Medal winning race; Sally took questions from parents and children afterwards. A marketplace was provided with representation from a wide range of local and national agencies providing services for parents. Also in attendance were the ten participating schools. There were a series of 30 minute information sessions for parents about healthy eating, effective communication with teenagers, combating bullying and peer pressure. In addition the children had the chance to take part in circus skill workshops or take a tour of the Blackburn Rovers' ground.

Outcome

Organisers: The organisers felt that the event was a huge success with around 1,200 parents participating. All the workshops were well attended, and they were relaxed and informative. This event will help inform and influence the development of a range of transition activities in local primary schools.

Practitioners: Enjoyed the opportunity to discuss real issues with parents and explore appropriate strategies with parents for supporting young people.

The Director for Children Services for Blackburn with Darwen: Felt that 'the event will help them make families aware of the support that the local authority and its partners can offer and thereby contribute to local strategic development.'

Parents: Felt that in Sally Gunnell they had been given access to an inspirational, motivational speaker who made excellent links between aspirations, education and supporting children. In addition, the provision of transport and childcare ensured that as many parents as possible could be offered the unique experience of the particular session.

Good Practice

Combining resources to provide an inspirational session, with someone parents and children respect and relate to. The provision of childcare (and in this case transport) was thought to be key to the high attendance.

4. What are the challenges to delivering effective Transition Information Sessions?

- Getting schools and key school staff fully on board, gaining willingness to own the session and create a welcoming environment for parents.
- Ensuring there is capacity and flexibility for delivery, including outreach work, and staff are available to support parents with sensitive issues after the event.
- Reducing the stigma attached to parent and family support.
- The time it may take to build up a relationship of trust between the home and school.
- Ensuring parental involvement in developing session content and design where it may be difficult to get input from some parents on what they want.
- The difficulties of getting some parents on board, where they may be better able than staff to market TIS to other parents.
- Introducing sessions in an environment where the school-parent relationship is not always an equal partnership - to succeed TIS need to build parents' confidence in their own abilities and empower them to access the services they need for their children.
- Dealing with issues around access to sessions such as English as an additional language, transport, parents with learning or physical disabilities and having the time and resources to ensure equality of access.
- Ensuring all parents are recruited to sessions and that the content and model of delivery are shaped to engage with them. Parents who may be less easily reached include fathers and male carers.
- Ensuring that the momentum and innovation continues with each new round of TIS - so that lessons learned from one year are reflected in the next.
- Tackling school governance issues for Extended Schools such as insurance and allocation of resources.²
- Getting the relevant people on board and working together to ensure leadership, planning and co-ordination of sessions at school, cluster and LA level (depending on local arrangements).
- Finding the resources (time and training) to involve parents in running sessions
- Spreading the good practice developed in the demonstration projects, so that it reaches all schools.

² Guidance for school governors on extended schools is available as follows - Planning and funding extended schools: a guide for schools, LAs and their partner organisations (2006) at <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DFES-0472-2006.pdf>

- Governance guidance for Sure Start Children's Centres and extended schools (2007) at <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/Governance%20guidance.pdf>

- Extended Schools Services Toolkit for Governors at <http://www.tda.gov.uk/leaders/leadershipsupport/toolkitforgoverningbodies.aspx>

Case study - Grange Lane Infant School, Scunthorpe

Background

Grange Lane Infant School is situated in the Ashby area of Scunthorpe. The surrounding catchment area is mixed socially and economically with some pockets of deprivation. The school has 221 pupils aged 3-7 and is in the process of becoming a designated Sure Start Children's Centre with a new building attached to the school. The school has a strong ethos towards parental involvement and works hard to ensure that parents feel welcome and part of the school environment and school life.

Planning

An initial parents' information session was held in the school for the parents of new reception children. This session was used to consult with parents on ideas and views for further sessions. Parents who attended these consultative sessions fed back that they wanted support on the following themes:

- School attendance and punctuality
- Routines
- SEN
- Attainment

Further sessions were then planned around parents' needs. So that the consultation / planning cycle is continuous, each session is evaluated and comments are used to inform and plan future sessions.

The Event

The focus of this particular session was Special Educational Needs. 12 parents attended, 4 of which were fathers. The sessions were held in the parents' area and delivered by two colleagues from the local Parent Partnership Service. Parents had an opportunity to hear about:

- the statementing and assessment process
- how parents could get involved with their child's education and support their child's learning needs
- how parents might access a broader range of support services.

Parents were then encouraged to discuss common concerns. Each parent was provided with an extensive information pack to take home.

Outcome

School and facilitators: Staff at the session were pleased with how the session had gone and in particular the number of parents that attended. They also felt that the event acted as a vehicle to enable them to explore real issues that parents need addressing face to face and in partnership.

Parents: Parents had an opportunity to discuss shared concerns and issues and receive information and encouragement and received strong messages about the school wanting to work in partnership with them to support their children.

Future Plans: The school is keen to develop more family learning opportunities and sees the Transition Information Sessions, known by many schools as the “Starting School Project”, as a way of supporting this aim. A full family learning day is planned for September and learning from the sessions will be fed in to the planning for delivery.

Good Practice

The school’s real commitment to developing sessions based on consultation and using feedback to continuously improve and develop further provision for parent support.

Abbey Park Primary School, Halifax

Background

Abbey Park is a smaller than average sized primary school, situated in Illingworth, North Halifax serving an area of social and economic disadvantage to the north of Halifax. The number eligible for free school meals is almost three times the national average. More than the usual number of pupils transfer in and out during the school year. Many of the parents at the school are young lone parents who need a great deal of encouragement and confidence building to engage with the school.

Planning

The estate served by the school has attracted negative publicity over the last few years in relation to drugs and gang culture, This reputation has impacted unfairly on the school where the school community are actively working to develop a positive image. Many of the local parents do not enrol their children prior to the school year starting and will make that decision at the beginning of the autumn term, clearly this makes planning and engagement with parents difficult. Many children start the reception class with poor language skills; this is a key priority area for the school staff. These factors were all taken into account when planning the sessions and in evaluating their impact. Originally the school offered parents an afternoon session, but the take up for this was very poor, this was followed by the offer of a morning session which a few parents attended. The staff felt that a different approach was required and developed the idea of a pamper day. All parents were approached by letter and telephone to make a free appointment for a pamper session; they were able to choose from a menu of treatments.

The Event

A classroom was made available for a café and crèche; refreshments were available all day including a fresh fruit platter. Foundation staff were available to chat and answer questions. Nine parents had attended by mid afternoon, with the promise of more coming later. Given that some parents were not yet known to the school a follow up pamper day was planned for the parents of all reception children in mid September.

Outcome

Staff: Staff at Abbey Park School clearly have some complex issues to work with, and developing a trusting relationship with parents and restoring the reputation of the school is a priority. The proactive approach of the school in looking for approaches that work for their community is starting to make a difference and there are ambitions to develop a parents' room within school to offer more activities. Staff also commented that some parents do not want to use the crèche and are not used to leaving their children. Understanding parents' issues through these sessions will help the school engage and be as "easy to reach" as possible.

Good Practice

The perseverance and creative thinking of the staff helped to develop sessions that encouraged parents and broke down barriers. The importance of understanding that where parents are disengaged with the school, it is vital to break down barriers first, so that any information, support and advice given is valued.

5. How can Transition Information Sessions be made sustainable within a school / LA?

- Embed Transition Information Sessions in your strategic plans for parenting support.
- Consider and determine best use of LA and school resources to ensure delivery of sessions, including pooling resources.
- Engage with other agencies / organisations with a shared agenda of supporting parents who can contribute to events through their presence and materials at no extra cost to the school.
- Ensure that developing and facilitating the sessions is embedded within job descriptions for appropriate staff e.g. Parent Support Advisers.
- Adopt a business link approach and so maximise the use of sponsorship and support from local businesses to fund costs for items such as materials and hire of venues.
- Develop a co-ordinated approach to developing sessions in groups of schools, across clusters / geographical areas.
- Share good practice: disseminate what you have done and what you have learned through your informal and formal contact networks.
- Effect change on the culture and mindset of the school community so that parent/school partnership is understood as key and welcomed by all, with TIS as a key activity and gateway to other parenting support/parental engagement activity.
- Document what you do, so learning isn't lost.



Case study, Crofton School, Lewisham, South London

Background

Crofton School is a mixed, secondary school in Catford, Lewisham, South London and a specialist Arts college. The school states that “Our central concern is the student and fulfilling the student’s potential. We are here to help every student develop positive self-esteem, self-discipline, a sense of responsibility and attitudes of co-operation and respect for others.” In addition, the school places considerable emphasis on the partnership between the school, family and students and sees it as the foundation for helping students to make use of their many and varied talents.

The school offers clear transition support to parents from a wide range of transition projects which include:

- e-mailing
- video conferencing
- home / schools agreements
- Outreach visits to parents.

Planning the Event

Lewisham Borough Council wanted to explore ways of helping parents and carers with the issues that they face when their child moves to secondary school. The sessions were developed and co-delivered by Lewisham Extended Services team in partnership with The Children’s Society Genesis Project. In addition, the MakeBelieve Arts (MBA) Theatre Group was commissioned to engage parents and involve them more actively in discussing the issues through the use of drama. The assistant head teacher acted as school liaison for Crofton School’s session.

The Event

The school’s prefects escorted parents and carers to the meeting location and arranged refreshments for them. 16 parents / carers and 14 pupils attended the event.

The session followed this agenda.

1. Welcome
2. Ice breaker (parents discussing their own experience of starting secondary school)
3. Drama sketches addressing issues that parents face
4. Audience participation section - the theatre group acting out difficult parenting scenarios and asking the audience to suggest solutions/join in the improvisation playing one of the parts to demonstrate other ways to handle the situation
5. Advice and guidance available locally - signposting to services
6. Evaluation via visual feedback - parents were invited to hold up a card displaying either a happy, expressionless or sad face to give their feedback on various aspects of the session

Parents were each given a folder with information about advice, guidance and support that could be obtained locally.

Outcome

Partnership working: The Partnership between Extended Services, The Children's Society Genesis Project and MakeBelieve Arts has been very productive and the drama has been very well received by parents/carers over the two years of the trial. The Borough will plan the introduction of sessions in all their schools on the basis of learned experience and strong leadership and partnership.

Local services: Feedback from some of the other agencies has been very positive

Parents: Parents watched intently and could be seen recognising and acknowledging the scenarios being enacted. Parents' discussions between themselves about different coping strategies for day-to-day troubling issues often have greater impact than strategies offered by professionals.

Good practice

The partnership between Lewisham, The Children's Society and MakeBelieve Arts maximises the benefits of shared knowledge and vision and the value of mixing different skills and approaches. At the same time it offers parents both the opportunity to access important information and advice whilst engaging in the issues in a relaxed and entertaining atmosphere.

Case study - Broomgrove Infants School, Essex

Background

Broomgrove Infants School is based in Wivenhoe, near Colchester, Essex. The school's vision statement says "At Broomgrove Infant School we aim to provide a quality education for the whole school community which develops self esteem and potential for all in a caring, stimulating environment." The school also aims "To involve parents and others where appropriate, in the education and development of the children."

Planning the event

The school decided, in partnership with the county family learning service, to run their session as a market place for parents that would be held at the end of the school day: a range of organizations / agencies and professionals offering information, advice and support for parents would be on hand to discuss parents' queries and hand out information. Parents could pop in before or after they picked up their children. A childcare service would be offered to parents to keep children occupied whilst parents would be free to browse.

The event

The school hall was turned into a market place full of displays and information for parents / carers. Children were in some of the classrooms making popcorn or food. Parents and visitors were able to talk to some of the children about their activities or browse around the market place.

Agencies and information included:

- Extended schools
- Family learning
- Brownies
- The school's savings club
- Essex Fire and Rescue Service
- Essex road safety team
- Eat well advice
- Becoming a school governor
- Essex Libraries
- The importance of school attendance
- Qualifications advice
- Premier Sport
- Essex Parent Partnership Service
- Connexions
- Job Centre Plus

Refreshments were available throughout.

Outcome

Agencies and school staff: Agencies and staff found that it was easier to talk with parents informally and were pleased with the opportunity to share information and discuss their service with parents, as well as share information and network with other services.

Parents / carers: Parents and carers had lively discussions with the agencies present and also benefitted from the ability to engage their children in fun activities.

Future Planning: Essex plan to use this model as part of the TIS programme to engage more agencies in earlier involvement with parents / carers and to encourage multi-agency work.

Good Practice

The range of agencies and services available at the event this gave parents as good an opportunity as possible to learn about the range of support and information available to them locally, in addition to the networking opportunity that it offered the agencies. The activities for children also gave parents more freedom to talk to professionals.

Case study - Grendon Hall (residential activity centre), Wellingborough area, Northamptonshire

Background

Five junior schools in a small rural cluster in the Wellingborough area combined to run a weekday evening parent information session in a local authority residential activity centre. Grendon Hall is a residential training centre providing training facilities and outdoor activities for both adults and young people. The centre is also used for non-residential activities and courses, conferences, seminars and group training all year round. Activities on offer to young people include abseiling, climbing, open canoeing, kayak, archery, ropes course, raft building, whitewater rafting, and orienteering.

Planning the event

The five schools collaborated to find common ground that would also attract parents to attend an information session. The activity centre was chosen as the venue to provide neutral ground for the event and to give parents the opportunity to see for themselves where their children come for residential outdoor activities. A lead member of staff from each school was nominated. They were supported during the planning stage by Northamptonshire's Extended Schools and Children's Centre Development Manager.

The event

40 parents attended the event, including a few fathers. The surroundings helped to create a very pleasant, friendly atmosphere. (Grendon Hall is an old Queen Anne house in 17 acres of grounds.) The evening was facilitated jointly by the extended schools manager and University of the First Age (UFA), which is a national educational charity founded in 1996 by Professor Tim Brighouse, and works in partnership to develop the confidence, achievement and potential of young people through extended learning opportunities. UFA aims to raise young people's aspirations and achievements by improving confidence and self-belief through exciting and memorable educational experiences.

The focus of the evening was how parents can help their children learn more effectively by recognizing different learning styles and using strategies to support their child's preferred style. The evening was very interactive with materials for parents to take part in creative learning themselves. A buffet was served halfway through the session and parents were able to talk with each other informally.

Outcome

Parents: The parents attending enjoyed the session as well as learning something new. One parent said, "This is a great idea, anything to help us support learning. I would like this kind of information throughout the school not just at transition times." Another parent commented, "It would be good to have some sessions on supporting parents in managing the emotional changes we will face with adolescence."

Schools: It was a good opportunity for the schools to work collaboratively to combine an enjoyable evening with information about how parents can support their children's learning.

Good Practice

Schools working together in partnership; combining informal, creative ways and more formal ways of presenting information to parents; using local resources to offer a session in a community venue.

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If you have any further queries about the TIS (also known as Starting School) project, toolkits or training materials, please e-mail info@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

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