

## Transition from Year 8 to Year 9

Elizabeth Heatley, Sacred Heart School Petone, Term 3 2018 Primary Principal's Sabbatical

### **Acknowledgements**

My thanks to:

- NZEI, NZSTA and Ministry of Education for this valuable initiative enabling an opportunity to rest, relax and reflect on current practice and new innovative practice to enhance the transition of our students to college particularly our priority students.
- Our Board of Trustees for supporting my application and granting my leave
- To my leadership team and staff for being willing to step up in my absence
- To my colleagues who willingly answered questions and shared their practice with me.

### **Professional learning Activity: Term 3**

During my sabbatical, my focus was to carry out an investigation into the transition of Year 8 students into Secondary Schools with a particular emphasis on transition from full Catholic primary schools to Catholic Secondary schools, as this is the structure I am currently involved with. I am particularly interested in how priority students are transitioned to enable them to succeed from Day 1.

My research focused on what schools are currently doing to transition students, programmes prior to starting and how a successful relationship between the secondary and primary schools assisted.

### **Sabbatical Purpose**

**My area of focus will be focussed on four questions:**

- What are your current transition practices?
- Which practices are the most successful?
- What factors must be included in successful transition?
- How do you work with Catholic Secondary Schools to ensure that a Catholic secondary education is always an option e.g. equity, common good?

### **Background**

My school was the lead school in a TLIF project around Transition to School for 5 year olds and we have developed some innovative practices in this area. The project found three overarching themes and three major findings. The overarching themes were: transition to school is a journey as well as an event; relationships matter; and communication matters. Communication is essential, especially for priority learners. The three main findings were testing the water – this is about starting the journey to a new school knowing that 'getting in the water' is inevitable, teachers working together- professional dialogue and finding the

familiar. Although these were based around the transition from ECE to School, they could also be applied to transition from primary school to secondary school. I felt that we needed to enhance our transition practice from Year 8 to Year 9 and I am hoping to develop our processes as a result of my sabbatical.

ERO have produced a report, which looked at Transition from Primary to Secondary School (2012). It looked at preparing for successful transitions, support for priority students and effective transition processes including support of families to choose the right school for their children.

From my reading and research, it has become obvious that successful and well thought out transition between primary and secondary school is vitally important to ensure that all learners can achieve success.

Relationships are at the heart of all transition. Dockett and Perry (2001) identify the difference between orientation to school and transition to school. They say orientation focuses on procedures whereas transition involves pastoral and academic focus. They also say that effective transition programmes are well planned and effectively evaluated, flexible and responsive, based on mutual trust and respect and rely on reciprocal communication among participants. It is vitally important that everyone is involved with the transition process- students, families, Year 8 teachers and the new teachers at college. Transition processes are to assist students with adjusting to their new place. For the students at my school this means moving from a small family orientated school to a large secondary school. It may mean leaving friends they have been to school with for 8 years and be the only person going to a particular college.

From my research, it seems that transition can be quite hit and miss. Some schools place a great deal of emphasis on it and some do very little. From my own experience, the transition for our Year 8's is based very much on the relationships that we have worked to develop with our local colleges. It is much smoother when we know key people e.g. Principal, Deputy Principal, Year 9 Dean, Head of Learning Support. ERO noted in their 2012 report that students who are not supported during the transition to secondary school are at greater risk of disengaging from learning. The experience that each person has will be very different depending on the supports, which are put in place at each stage.

## **Transition Trends**

Talking with a number of schools, it was interesting to see how different schools approach transition to secondary school for their students. There were several similarities but no agreed method. Anecdotally it seems that the better the relationship between schools the better the transition appears to be.

## **Summary of Findings**

### Current Transition Practices

- College visits, open days, open mornings, taster days
- College staff coming in to talk to Year 8

- Completing profile sheets but not sure if they get used
- Ensuring curriculum coverage by the end of Year 8, focus on Key Competencies
- Major focus on transition for children with additional learning needs
- Helping parents to complete forms
- Past students coming back, visits from Year 9 teachers to see the pedagogy being used by primary teachers, secondary teachers teaching Science to Year 8, senior students running after school mentoring clubs
- Meeting with College staff to talk about students with extra needs
- Secondary Principals coming to meet Year 8's

#### Most successful practices

- Preparing students for the level of work
- Developing skills for needed for the more independent environment at college
- Key Competencies valued highly as necessary for success at college.
- Taking students on a tour of the new school
- Personal communication with the secondary school about learning needs, placement and social factors.
- Good assessment records

#### Factors which must be included in successful transition

- Positive relationships between feeder schools and colleges
- Shared knowledge and understanding about what we as the primary school can do to ensure our learners are ready
- Know the expectations of the Secondary Schools and prepare students for them.
- Buddies from Secondary School for each child
- Link between Yr 8 and Yr 9 so expectations are set
- Face to face visits for the students with key Secondary School staff
- Visits to the colleges and meeting teachers (not just 1 orientation visit)
- Communication : particularly of expectations from both parties primary and secondary

#### Catholic Option for Secondary School

- Monitor where students are applying so that you can assist with the Enrolment and transition process
- Offer parents support and guidance through the process
- Writing testimonials
- Developing closer links through Kahui Ako
- Promote Catholic Schools
- Advocate for families who are unable to meet financial requirements of Secondary Schools (this is becoming more of an issue particularly in Auckland)
- Principals should develop relationships with Secondary Colleges through attending functions and taking Student Reps with them.

## Implications

The implications from my reading and research are that transition is not a straightforward process and is different for every child. This means that schools need to develop processes, which are equitable and promise success for every child.

## Conclusion

For transition to secondary school to be successful, it needs to be adapted to meet the needs of each school from which the students are transitioning. One size does not fit all and what works for large primary schools might not work for mine where we have a small Year 8 cohort leaving each year and our school is a small school where everyone knows each student and their families. Our students then transition into large secondary schools.

Teachers who have a good understanding of the expectations of the secondary schools and prepare their students for these will help the transition to be effective. We as primary schools need to focus on developing resilient children who are able to take their place at secondary school. A strong focus on teaching the Key Competencies will help develop the skills our students need.

Secondary teachers need to take time to find out how primary teachers teach. There is a huge focus these days on student agency and children directing their own learning. Therefore, if they transition to a school with teachers who teach with a chalk and talk method then they will be lost and their learning will suffer.

ERO indicated that staff at both primary and secondary schools have important roles supporting the transitions of all students. They suggest that leaders and teachers in contributing and receiving schools should carry out some of the following to support student transitions to secondary school:

- Ensure students experience success so they stay engaged
- Identify vulnerable students prior to entry
- Put in place learning and pastoral care support
- Monitor the wellbeing and progress of all students
- Continue to support students through the year
- Ensure that support includes appropriate specialist personnel and families

Communication between schools and positive relationships between schools at all levels- leadership and classroom teachers- will assist smooth transitions. The importance placed on transition will encourage successful transitions. If a school does not consider it important to focus on transition from Year 8 then probably most students will transition successfully but others who need more support will not.

Year 8 teachers have a significant role in providing a seamless transition into secondary school. Some of the successful practices, which were evident in the schools, I talked with were:

- Setting up visits to the secondary school through open days, open mornings, taster days so that the Year 8's see the school in action.
- Helping parents to manage the enrolment process and advocating for families to ensure that their children get into their school of choice.
- Face to face visits with key secondary school staff
- Organising buddies for each child
- Great communication particularly of expectations at secondary school
- Preparing students for a new school culture
- Listening to students' concerns about going to secondary school
- Ensuring that students have strong learning foundations and the necessary skills
- Encouraging students to be positive about change
- Getting Year 9 subject teachers in to teach lessons at primary school

It is really important that the Year 8 students have many opportunities to meet their new teachers and visit their new school on more than one occasion. It seems that schools who encourage multiple meetings and visits have more success. Schools where all student needs –not just academic ones- are discussed with the appropriate people help to make the transition seamless. It is also vitally important that prior knowledge of all student needs is taken into account when placing students in classes. One secondary school I have experience of asked for information from us and then ignored it and placed students in the same classes. Secondary schools cannot just rely on a profile form, they must make the effort to meet with the Year 8 teacher. The more effort put in by both schools ensures better transitions for all students.

As a Catholic principal, I am also conscious that most of my students transition to Catholic secondary schools and I need to keep working on our relationships with all these schools. We have two in our Kahui Ako whom we are developing good working relationships with. We need to develop our relationships with the other four that our students transition to. It is important to me and to the other Principals I spoke to that, a Catholic secondary education is available to all our students. This means often being an advocate for our families particularly if hardship or financial issues prevent them being able to send their child to the school of their choice. It would be good to assist parents with ideas of how to finance items like Uniform and Attendance Dues. It is also important that families for whom English is not a first language are helped when it comes to enrolment time. It is also important in a Catholic context that the dignity of these families is protected.

Transition is a process that requires a great deal of thought, time and effort by everyone involved. Secondary schools, primary schools, students, family, whanau and aiga all have a part to play in this process which is all about developing and strengthening positive relationships. This in turn will lead to all students enjoying success in both their transition to secondary school and their ongoing success and engagement over their 5 years at that school. From here I am going back to my school to develop and enhance our transition process to include the best practice I have seen and read during this sabbatical.

## **References:**

Dockett, S & Perry, B University of Western Sydney 2001 *Starting School: Effective Transitions*

Petone Basin TLIF Final Report Ministry of Education 2017 *It's a big deal for all of us: Supporting transitions from early childhood education services to school*

Education Review Office 2012 *Transition from Primary to Secondary School*