

School Transition

Successful school transition for Year 6 or Year 8 children to secondary school.

Primary Principal's Sabbatical Report

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Purpose

The purpose for this sabbatical study is to research successful school transition for Year 6 or Year 8 children to secondary school and to investigate what transition means.

Background

Dunsandel School is one of three contributing schools to the local secondary school. Over the time I have been at Dunsandel School there has been inconsistency in transition for our children which as a result I believe we have no real set expectations or clear communication from either side.

The Leeston Learning Community Cluster - Ngā Mātāpuna o Te Waihora has done some work in 2014 on Transition to School from Early Childhood Centres. Dr Sally Peters has taken a staff Professional Development session as part of this work – this was specifically based around transition to school from ECE. As a result of this we are making some changes to our transition to school programmes, communication and expectations for our new entrants.

My intention is to investigate what transition to secondary school means for our children, our parents and our staff.

Methodology

There are three important groups involved in transition -

1. The Children
2. The Schools
3. The Parents

I selected four schools to speak to about their experiences with transition. Questions were done face to face with the school and pupils I spoke to and parents emailed in their responses. Questions to these three groups were as follows -

The School

The following questions were asked and discussed during face to face meetings at the school -

What does transition mean to you as a school leader? What do you think are the key features of a successful transition?

What happens with regard to transition for the children leaving your school?

- *What is offered?*
- *What does your school do?*
- *What level of information regarding an individual child, is passed between the primary and secondary school?*

Do you see any room for improvement from a school stand point?

- *What changes could be made?*

Is there established network that you have with the local high school?

How do you as a school promote the local high school/s?

- *What knowledge do you have of the local high school?*
- *How much is based on personal experience and interaction?*

In an ideal world what would a successful transition look like for the children of xxxx School?

- *From what you've seen of transition in your area, could you tell me three things that are successful about the system and three things that if you had a magic wand you could change?*

What did transition look like at other schools you have been at?

In your opinion where does the responsibility for transition lie?

Parents

I used a group of parents that I knew had children who had transitioned to a new school or were going to have children about to transition to a new school at the end of this year. They were emailed the following -

Thinking of the school your son or daughter will attend next year are you aware of any activities that have been put in place to help with the transition to this school? If yes what are the activities you are aware of?

What do you think will be the biggest challenges for your son/daughter next year?

What expectations do you have for your son/daughter next year at their new school?

What do you think your role is in as your son/daughter transitions from school to another?

Children

I met face to face with a group of children who were about to transition to a new school. I used the following questions for them to answer.

Next year you head to a new school which will mean a change for you. I am doing some work on what that means to you and how you feel about moving on from xxxx School.

- 1. What do you think will be the best things about your new school next year?*
- 2. What do you think will be the biggest challenges for you next year?*
- 3. Do you have any questions that you want answered before you start your new school?*
- 4. Who do you think would be the best person to answer these questions?*
- 5. Do you have any brothers or sisters at your new school?*

Findings

From the Schools

- For primary school management transition is about transferring knowledge to the high school which should benefit the individuals and groups of students. Information provided by the primary schools should help paint a picture of the student.
- Primary School's appear to willingly share information about their students with the high school including Special Needs requirements.
- There is a variety of engagement levels between the primary schools and high schools outside of the 'transition' time. Some schools have a healthy relationship with their High School eg senior pupils coming to do sports at the primary school.
- All High Schools chose to administer their own form of testing – either on a transition day or when the students start at the new school.
- When asked about the school students are transitioning to, senior management personnel say respond in a professional manner and do give strategies to parents regarding communicating with the high school.
- All schools believe that transition is a shared responsibility.

From the Parents

- All parents had concerns for their children but were confident that their children would meet these challenges.
- All parents were aware of some form of transition programme being offered by the High School.
- For each challenge they could see a positive aspect eg not being with their primary school friends results in new friends being made.
- A majority of the parents had expectations of their children embracing the change.
- A majority of parents see an increase in academic workload for their children. They knew they would play a part in managing this.

From the Children

- Responses from the children regarding being at new school next year included making new friends, new opportunities, the school will be bigger and taking new subjects eg Japanese, metal work.
- The children had a variety of challenges they expected to face – they were very individual in their responses with this question. For some it was travelling on a bus to school for the first time, for others they have to get up earlier, for some they have a preconceived idea the work is going to be much harder. A majority mentioned that the school they are going to will be bigger and they have concerns about getting lost.
- Making adjustments to having several teachers in a day and a more structured timetable.
- Starting again at the ‘bottom’ of the school – there can be a temporary loss of status.
- There was less questions about their new school from the children who had older siblings at that school.

Ideas to make Transition Successful

These ideas are taken from discussion I have had over the past term from children, parents, principals and teachers -

- Information shared between schools to be valued.
- Use past pupils to come back and talk to the Year 6 or 8 group about their experiences when transitioning.
- One high school I spoke to has a booklet written by a student that answers all those organizational and ‘silly’ questions children have – children and parents have found this a valuable resource.
- Include key personnel in the orientation visits eg Deans, Principal, office staff, head Boy/Girl.
- A clear school map for new children.
- Have a transition programme outline available to parents and children.
- To allay fears over organisation have timetables and whole school organisation with the children before school starts.
- Report back in term one on how the transitions have gone – how are the children faring.
- Have clear expectations but not expressed in a way that had a detrimental effect.
- While transitions are done as a group – make them about the individuals within the group.
- Have a Q and A session – more than one session.
- Have visits from High school children showcasing the school – make it fun.
- Principal’s in regular contact with each other.

I believe schools needs to come together and have a transition programme that can address the needs and concerns of the children. This could differ each year based on the group.

Conclusion

It is my belief there is joint responsibility to try and ensure a successful transition for all pupils when they move to a new school at the end of Year 6/8.

Parents have a responsibility to be enthusiastic about the new move – they are in the best position to see any anxiety or issues. Parents need to be proactive in letting the appropriate people know so any issues can be addressed.

Schools have a responsibility to ensure transition is well managed at both ends – it is in the best interests of all stakeholders and the community that children have a positive transition to a new school. Primary Schools and High Schools need to talk about what is best for the children in terms of transition.

Children have a responsibility to take all the new opportunities and challenges that come with starting a new school. While we transition groups of children it is my belief transition to a new school is very personal and individual. There will always be anxiety about change for children – it should be a team effort to manage any transition and everyone needs to play their part. It is a responsibility of schools, friends and families to help make the transition as successful as it possibly can be.

References

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