



*Fostering Relations*

# TRANSITIONS

Education Report 2013



Fostering Relations... with children... with carers... with you!

# Transitions

Transition to Secondary School is widely recognised as a potentially traumatic experience for children, this is especially the case for children who are looked after and accommodated.

This explains the focus of this year's Educational Report given both the inherent issues attaching to transitions as well as the particular issues attaching to the children we look after.

Crucial to a successful outcome is inter-agency co-operation and best practice this report looks at this area.

**Fostering Relations** carers look after 11 children who have transferred to a new school in the last few months – 8 boys and 3 girls, affecting 44% of our foster families. As the agency's Education Support Coordinator, my remit is to support our carers to achieve better educational outcomes for

the children in their care. Last year I surveyed all our carers and young people and identified that transition to a new school, in particular transition to secondary school, was one of their major concerns. This year I have focused on the transition experiences of these children and their carers and considered their views and experiences. These are our children's stories.

**Nursery > Primary 1: D**

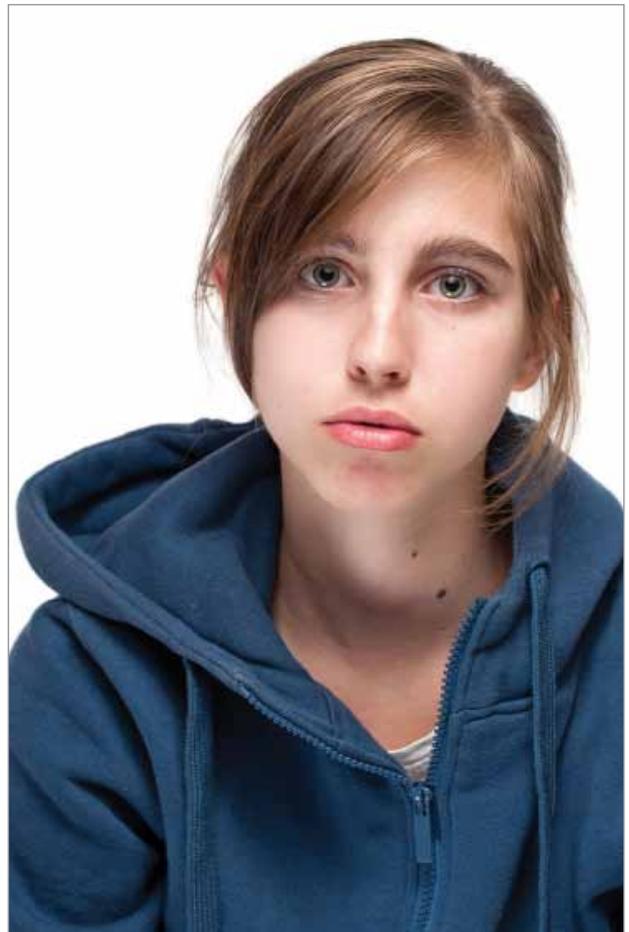
**Primary School > Primary School: S, T, K\*, C, M\*\*.**

**Primary School > Secondary 1: L, S, J, M, M.**

**Secondary School > Secondary School: J.**

\* 2 Primary moves in 4 months

\*\* Primary move and transition to secondary school within 4 months





Nursery > Primary 1

## Child D

### Complicating factors

- Behavioural/attachment issues
- Therapist involvement
- Three social workers working with the family plus changes in workers
- Another foster child leaving the placement
- Permanency under consideration

### Issues

- Same local authority provider for nursery and primary but whose policy did not lend itself to specifying additional support required on transition to primary school
- No direct educational psychologist input prior to transition

### Positives

- Planned, positive enhanced transition programme
- Meetings professionally managed by nursery school with very good communication
- Receiving school aware of the additional support needs of the child

### Outcome

Traumatic start to primary school; child unable to cope resulting in violent/aggressive behaviour towards staff and children. Urgent psychological services input was requested to advise staff on strategies to help them manage his behaviour.

Primary School > Primary School

## Child K

### Complicating factors

- Lack of maturity
- Cross local authority transfer with the resultant assessment and funding issues
- Home authority wished to have deferred year to allow him to make up lost ground and experience primary seven with the peer group accompanying him in transition to S.1
- Sibling transferring placement and school at the same time

### Issues

- Dissension and lack of clear shared vision of corporate approach as to best interests of child; host authority policy against deferment.
- Poor communication leading to eleventh hour decision by host authority to allow deferred year resulting in stress for the child, foster carers and other workers involved
- No chance for planned/enhanced transition

### Positives

- Strong clear leadership from the first primary school making proactive links with receiving school
- Strong support for this plan from social work, foster carers and psychological services
- Child one year in placement

### Outcome

Desired result for a deferred year was achieved. The child and foster carer report that this is going very well.



## Child S

### Complicating factors

- Cross local authority transfer with the resultant assessment and funding issues
- Previous history of mental health issues
- Enrolled extremely quickly after placement
- No educational information available to the receiving school at point of enrolment

### Issues

- Difficulty in obtaining the necessary education information from home authority to allow receiving school to be aware of, and plan how to meet, child's additional support needs
- Lack of additional support provision in receiving school created difficulties in managing the child's presenting behaviour of very poor concentration and aggression towards peers
- Poor information and communication from home authority exacerbated problems

### Positives

- Academic potential of child
- Proactive approach of receiving school authority

### Outcome

Fragile start. The receiving school had made strenuous efforts to bring all the relevant professionals together to obtain necessary information about the child. This was hampered by poor co-operation and lack of information from the home authority. The school's attempts to provide a supportive placement are on-going.

## Child C

### first move

### Complicating factors

- Cross local authority transfer with the resultant assessment and funding issues
- End of term placement and school transfer
- Brand new carer and first placement proposed to be long-term

### Issues

- After initial successful placement, foster carer resigned due to family issues
- Child had to be moved to another of our carer families at short notice and the transition process begun again

### Positives

- Exemplary transition planning for education was a high priority for the home authority
- Good educational information available for transition
- Good home authority educational psychologist overview
- Very receptive host authority school quickly identifying useful supports and assessment profile quickly undertaken to ensure additional support needs met at the start of next term
- Child settled very quickly

### Outcome

After a very positive start, child suffered the loss of her hoped for "forever family" and the new friends she had made and had to uproot herself after one term and move to a new respite placement.



## Child C

### second Primary School move

#### Complicating factors

- Stress of loss of new placement and move at short notice to another new placement
- The respite carers also being brand new carers with their first placement

#### Issues

- Placement on a respite basis until social work evaluate its suitability as a long-term placement with another set of new carers

#### Positives

- Back in home authority for education
- Child was able to return to her previous school where she had been very settled

#### Outcome

A stressful start to new placement for child. Opportunity to return to her first primary school where she was very happy and secure and hopefully she will be able to stay there until transition to secondary school in a year's time if her current placement is assessed as suitable for long-term care



## Child M

### First Transition - to Primary School

#### Complicating factors

- Cross local authority transfer with the resultant assessment and funding issues
- Change of placement to a brand new carer
- Carers' first placement with a child needing a long-term placement
- End of term placement, enrolled in a new school
- Severe behavioural issues with a team of professionals involved
- Change of local authority social worker and educational psychologist around transition
- Therapeutic team was drawing over the transition period
- Very short time in new primary school prior to transfer to S.1

#### Issues

- Slow provision of full education file at transition to new primary
- Concern about missing information and possibly sanitised file

#### Positives

- Long term involvement of educational psychologist up to the point of transition planning for the move to S.1

#### Outcome

Child had well supported few weeks at his new primary school but without any additional support hours provided by his home authority. Professional meetings helped plan for his transition to secondary school and 25 additional hours of support were agreed for the start of S.1.



## Child M

### Second Transition - to Secondary School

#### Complicating factors

- Child had missed most of the P. 7 transition process
- Secondary school had minimal information on a child's strengths and weaknesses

#### Issues

- There was a lot of shared anxiety among professionals, carers and the child over the loss of the major support team at the point of transition to secondary school and the non-replacement of the retiring educational psychologist at that point.

#### Positives

- 25 hours of additional support had been agreed
- Primary schools staff had arranged weekly support club access for him over the summer months
- Primary/secondary liaison had arranged tailored visits to the secondary school for the child in the last few weeks of P.7 term with the link worker who would continue to be a point of contact for him at the secondary school.

#### Outcome

While emotional problems continue, very early reports from the secondary school are positive.



## Child T

#### Complicating factors

- Cross local authority transfer with the resultant assessment and funding issues
- New placement over the summer holidays so no transition planning possible
- Severe behavioural issues with counselling input
- No educational information available to receiving school at point of enrolment other than she should be enrolled in primary three.

#### Issues

- The lack of educational information about the child meant the school had no clear idea of the additional support that would be required to meet her needs
- No support plan able to be put in place for the start of term.
- It quickly became evident that the child was 1 to 2 years behind academically and the receiving school had to begin the process of applying for additional support hours for the child.
- Home authority counsellor proposed fortnightly counselling sessions in home authority which would necessitate the loss of half a day's education for each visit.

#### Positives

- Child happy about new placement and new school despite behavioural difficulties

#### Outcome

A stressful start at the new primary school for the child, carer, and school staff while they endeavoured to access accurate information about her prior education and additional support needs. Staff provided what support they could while waiting for a decision on the application for funding for additional support hours from the home authority. Negotiations about the location and timing of counselling input are on-going.





## Child L

### Complicating factors

- Cross local authority transfer with the resultant assessment and funding issues
- Child has complex additional support needs requiring a co-ordinated support plan

### Issues

- Physical, emotional and behavioural issues within the placement can affect education.

### Positives

- Good enhanced transition process and information transfer.
- Mainstream specialist unit option within the secondary school to meet his additional support needs
- Five years in placement
- Long term on-going input by the home authority educational psychologist.

### Outcome

Smooth enhanced transition process allowed child to gain some confidence in taster experiences prior to transfer to secondary school. A good support package with the flexibility to be able to meet his additional support needs also allowing him to participate in mainstream classes where appropriate.

## Child S

### Complicating factors

- Underlying potential physical health issues possibly affecting his ability to learn.
- On-going mental health issues receiving counselling
- Extremely anxious about primary school and the transfer to secondary school
- Permanence issues/process on-going

### Issues

- Medical staff unable to determine the extent to which the child's identified rare condition is likely to impact on his educational attainment
- Carers' belief that the above health issue is a major factor in the child's continuing anxiety levels and difficulties in achieving his potential.
- Lack of clarity as to whether a co-ordinated support plan is required

### Positives

- Four years in placement
- Good enhanced transition process

### Outcome

Inevitably stressful transition time despite the planning meetings and transition visits. Particularly stressful time for his carers who are also dealing with the permanence process, counselling work and health concerns for the child.



## Child J

### Complicating factors

- Cross local authority transfer with major assessment and funding issues
- Possibly underlying unidentified as yet health factors affecting his learning currently under investigation by paediatrician and occupational therapist and potentially CAMHS.
- Significant delay due to chronic neglect and chaotic attachment issues
- Extremely anxious about transition to large secondary school
- Permanence issues/process on-going

### Issues

- Extremely difficult transition process due to the lack of clarity and disagreement amongst the professionals involved as to the extent of his additional support needs and how best to meet these
- Conflicting views as to how to determine the best secondary placement for the child
- Carers' belief that unidentified health issues are a major factor in his difficulties

### Positives

- In placement for two years prior to transition to secondary school
- Extremely committed carer advocating on his behalf
- 20 hours additional support funded by home authority

### Outcome

J and his carers have had a very stressful start to S.1 with J displaying extreme anxiety to the point of mild self-harm.

## Child M

### Complicating factors

- Cross local authority transfer with the resultant assessment and funding issues
- The child's behaviour and attachment issues were severe enough to require PSSS part placement in primary seven to stabilize the primary school placement.
- The unknown impact of the loss of this service on transition to secondary school

### Issues

- Loss of the crucial support of his classroom assistant at point of transition to secondary school
- Host authority policy was not to allow for the six week continuation of previous classroom assistant support at start of S.1 as requested by the home authority
- Transport. Concerns regarding the potential recurrence of bullying by older pupils previously at the same primary school on the school bus journey to and from secondary school

### Positives

- In placement 1 ½ years prior to transition to secondary school
- Good enhanced transition process
- Good communication amongst professionals involved
- Strong support from home authority
- 15 hours additional support funded by home authority

### Outcome

A positive start to secondary school for M. A lot of support was in place in class, at breaks and lunchtime so initial reports are positive. Minor bullying incidents on journey to school have been addressed.



## Child J

### Complicating factors

- New placement over the summer holidays so no transition planning possible
- Host authority schools reopened a week before the home authority schools and no educational information was available to allow child to enrol at the start of term
- Major incident at previous school required child to be educated in a support base for the most part so accessing this information was crucial to determining the support required in her new school.
- Child had requested for the opportunity to repeat S.2 due to lack of schooling

### Issues

- Delay obtaining permission for deferred year while home authority schools still on holiday
- Child's education file still unavailable to host authority school a week after enrolment
- Home authority policy not to send the child's original education file to the receiving school who were informed they had to wait until the file could be photocopied and a copy sent on to them

### Positives

- J was able to enrol in S.2 as she had requested
- She was able to access the strong support structure at her receiving school



### Outcome

J enrolled a week and ½ after the start of the new term. Bullying issues arose within the first three days of her starting school and the lack of the full educational background and file made this more difficult to deal with appropriately. At the request of the child, it was agreed to withdraw her from modern languages and allow her to receive literacy, numeracy and homework support in a small group class instead. The level of additional support required yet to be determined and agreed with home authority.



# Overview

Difficult attachment behaviour issues were present to a greater or lesser extent for all of these eleven children. Eight of them have previous, active or pending specialist input to help with mental health issues. Placement issues (e.g. new placement, permanency process) affected nine of them. The inevitable complications and stresses arising from cross boundary school transfer affected nine of the children and this was a very contentious issue for at least one of them. When it came to maturity and readiness for transition to the next sector of education, this was a major issue for all six children affected. One boy deferred to repeat primary seven, one primary school argued for it on behalf of another boy, two required specialist unit places in the receiving secondary school and one boy is attempting to cope with mainstream secondary school with 20 hours additional support while the assessment process is on-going for the child in primary one. For the four children who transferred across the same sector, one deferred a year, one currently receives 25 additional hours of support, and the additional support needs of the remaining two are currently still being assessed.

The lack of educational information/school file on transfer was a major issue for four children, resulting in a very difficult start in their new school for the children, school staff and carers. When the school file did eventually arrive for one boy, the head teacher was concerned about the sections missing from the file and voiced her suspicion of it being a sanitised file. For two of the children, their new placement and consequent school transfer happened around the summer holidays. It was generally agreed at meetings that education is the only professional area which closes down impenetrably for seven weeks resulting in no access to information for vulnerable children being available to the receiving schools to inform them as to how to best meet their additional support needs. In social work referral paper work, increasingly following the GIRFEC model, there is a section for educational information to be shared. However,

it is generally blank and social work staff do not appear to view it as part of their remit to include educational information about the child beyond the name of the last school attended. This tends to be the case no matter how long they have had contact with the child and held regular LAAC reviews where the child's educational needs and plan were considered. Perhaps there is a case to be made for a proactive named person to expedite the transfer of essential educational information for looked after children, especially at holiday periods. It might also be of great benefit to children in this position if each school in each local authority had a designated member of staff who could be contacted for essential school file information over the holiday periods.

The length of time children have been in placement, and how secure they feel in that placement, can also have a great influence on how well they cope with transition to a new school. Five of our eleven children were securely attached to carers they had lived with for a year or more and this gave all the boys invaluable strength and support to face the challenge with greater resilience to cope with the difficulties they faced.

Increasingly, we are finding that host authority schools are becoming more skilled, and better prepared, to provide a proactive support framework for looked after children. However, as evidenced above, this is a two way process and much can be done by the home authority to make the experience less painful for the child and those supporting the child. An excellent example of good practice can be seen in the case of one of our 11 children. At the point of referral to the agency, the home authority judged that a good school transition was a crucial factor in making the placement. Social work and education staff went to great lengths to ensure that the child had a smooth, well supported transition, providing full background information and requesting information about schools local to our proposed foster carers.





At their request, the deputy head and I visited prospective schools to determine the best school placement for the child. Unsurprisingly, this child had the best school transition experience of the eleven children considered here.

Good link working between schools was a major factor in smoothing the transition process for another six children. Another positive factor assisting the transition process for five of the eleven children was the clearly identified number of funded additional support hours provided by their home authority prior to enrolment in the receiving school.

The issue of school transitions for looked after children is one which currently troubles many professionals. It was a topic under discussion at a recent meeting of the Scottish LAAC Education Forum. I have detailed below a summary of the key concerns raised by the members of this body who comprise representatives from most local authorities in Scotland and independent agencies like ourselves, and who inform Scottish Government education policy on factors affecting the education and wellbeing of looked after children.

### **Problems affecting school transitions**

- Numerous changes of school placement
- Lack of maturity

- Readiness for secondary school
- Poor peer group relationships
- Emotional/behavioural issues
- Lack of parental support
- Held back or retained in nursery
- Educated out-with home authority
- Carer's view of the appropriate school
- Placement break down in primary seven
- Problems communicating carefully the learned strategies from primary school to secondary school teachers to ensure all the information transfers to the class teachers in the secondary school, and there should be universally agreed staged intervention procedures in place.
- Some authorities are overwhelmed by the number of looked after children with additional support needs e.g. 100 plus in Edinburgh.
- In school to school transitions the looked after child often doesn't get any support.
- Danger of non-assessment versus those of assessment:
  - Need to be comfortable first and can be dangerous, if just used for labelling
  - Need a balance of positive strengths and weaknesses
  - The correct strategies can be missed when not properly assessed





- Support addresses barriers so you need to be careful to define the barriers accurately
- Complaints are being received that full information is not coming up with the child and there is some concern over “sanitised files” and the desirability of a “fresh start”.

### **Other issues affecting looked after children in school**

- Exclusion policies vary from school to school and authority to authority
- The degree to which teaching staff are aware of the effect of attachment issues on a looked after child’s wellbeing, ability to focus on, or cope with, education
- Level of staff training on this issue
- Schools individual SMT policy on this issue

The members of the Forum were also concerned to share good practice:

### **Factors which may help**

- The child’s plan should employ strategies which can assist progress

- Case conferences can be very helpful but timetable constraints make them difficult to arrange.
- In secondary schools, for pupils with an IEP, a list of strategies should be supplied to all class teachers but you can’t guarantee usage and how they will be employed
- All S.1 pupils with additional support needs should have a page on the school intranet to explain their needs and strategies via the PT Support for Learning and made available to all class teachers. Do class teachers read it? Some schools require teachers to sign that they have read it. However you can’t legislate for supply teachers. It’s important that the child knows about the strategy list to be able to indicate to a teacher unaware of this, that information is available explaining the help they need.
- Secondary school support staff should meet with primary school staff to discuss all the children likely to have difficulties transferring. Legislation states that they should meet one year before the transfer happens.
- Some schools identify a personal buddy or mentor for vulnerable children who could be a class teacher or a senior pupil.
- There is a need for examples of good practice to give to designated managers in schools.
- The primary head teacher, social worker and designated manager need to meet before Easter for a looked after child transferring into S.1 at the summer.

While everyone agreed that looked after children benefitted from an enhanced transition process, this varies widely, and can mean extra visits, extra meetings and possibly a chance to start to build up of relationship with key staff and pupils. In one local authority, for example, vulnerable groups of children have more visits; they visit Art one week, Home Economics the next etc. The class teacher or a classroom assistant visits the secondary school in primary seven and on into S.1, working closely with the guidance teacher feeding information to guidance staff then withdraws as a relationship grows between the guidance teacher and the



child. However, the local authority representative indicated that current practice is not as intense as before as they have lost support staff due to funding cuts. In one authority, group work provided by the local social work team is disappearing due to lack of funding. This was case led work which took place over the summer and is now being dramatically cut back and viewed as a big loss. Summer schools and home school partnerships were also considered to be very useful.

The level of difficulty experienced by young people in secondary school is increasing. One local authority representative stated that, "We run out of options after three weeks for S.1 boys. The nature of the developing scene is scary. We are no longer dealing with 'big, bad boys'. We now see a lot more of mental health problems. This year we had four young people scared to leave their homes and SQA exams were taken to the house for these children who couldn't face the anxiety level of the exam hall." Another local authority representative concurred, and reported an increase of anxiety, phobia and school refusal in S.1 and S.2 due to mental health problems. She reported a change of focus within day provision from S.3 challenging behaviour, to anxiety, phobia and the socially inept in S.1 and S.2. There was general agreement amongst all present that mental health issues were a major concern.

**Children in Scotland** recently published a special supplement focusing on children's mental health. One of the articles by CELCIS (Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland) stated: "Research has shown that many looked after children in Scotland and the rest of the UK have significantly poorer mental health than their peers, often struggling to cope with personal trauma that can include neglect or abuse." **Children in Scotland: A Matter of Mental Health-a special supplement** (April 2013, page eight). Scottish Government policy makers are aware of this and are addressing the problem: "The mental health strategy 2012 to 2015 launched in August 2012, sets out our plans to build on recent developments in specialist child and adolescent mental Health Services (CAMHS)...

through significant investment in the workforce - increased by 36% since 2008... Other areas where we want to make more progress include early years and looked after children..." (p.4). The day to day experience of our carers and foster children bears out the need for this increase in mental health services for the improved wellbeing of looked after children. In the same publication, this is acknowledged by the Scottish Government Mental Health Division:

*"LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - There have been many positive developments with looked after children particularly, with an increase in direct therapeutic services and indirect mental health support e.g. basic mental health for training for people working with of caring for looked after children, however there is still work to do to improve the way in which CAMHS, local authority and third sector providers work together to address the mental health needs of looked after children."* (P.5).



# Summary

As part of my work with schools, I increasingly receive requests for materials to help staff understand and appreciate the impact of attachment issues on a looked after child's behaviour in school, and advice on how to deal with challenging behaviour. I have found that many primary and secondary teachers have appreciated the booklets written specifically for this purpose available from PACS (**Post Adoption Central Support**). This need is echoed by Aidan Collins-policy officer with the **Scottish Association of Mental Health** (SAMH): "There are already good training programmes for teachers on mental health but it does not seem that there is always a strategic approach to ensuring that those in the profession are exposed to these." (p.6)

The following extracts from the Scottish Government's recent report, **Education outcomes for Scotland's looked after children, 2011/12 – Scottish Govt. June 2013**, clearly show the need for everyone to work together to support the education of looked after children:

*"...looked after young people tend to have lower levels of educational qualification and are less likely to go on to positive destinations after school than young people who are not looked after, although there have been improvements over the last three years." P.2*

*"Looked after children continue to have lower attainment, but their average tariff score is improving. The fewer placements looked after young people have during the year, the higher their average attainment." P.4*

*"Looked after children still less likely to go into positive destinations after they leave school, but the gap is narrowing." P.8*

In **Fostering Relations**, we train people wishing to become foster carers from the nervous stage of self-deprecation whereby one applicant, during a recent induction workshop for her pre-approval online training in attachment, compared her skill with a computer mouse to a, "coo wi' a gun", to the skill of an established foster carer's level of professional advocacy witnessed at recent, contentious, cross boundary professional meetings trying to agree on the best provision for Child J leaving primary seven. She quietly, politely and consistently drew all the corporate parent representatives back to considering the reality of the anguish her foster child faced in taking this step into an unknown world, carrying the burdens of years of neglect and mental health problems he has had too little time with her to come to terms with, to be able to embark on his secondary school career on an equal footing with his peers.

A similarly professional level of advocacy was shown by other carers.

Another dedicated carer consoled M on the loss of his cherished classroom assistant on moving to secondary school, comparing her to Nanny McPhee, there when he needed her but leaves to help another boy or girl when he doesn't really need her any more.

Once again, I wish to express my gratitude to our foster carers who care for our children and work hard to support their education and advocate on behalf of these most vulnerable young people and help them to achieve their potential in the face of adversity.

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