

Volume One

**PUPILS' VOICE ON PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION:  
INSIGHTS FROM SMALL SCHOOLS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Primary to secondary school transition is considered to be challenging for pupils. Research lacks a cohesive approach to the integration of the child's voice, particularly in relation to pupils who attend small schools ( $\leq 75$  pupils). This thesis addresses this gap in the literature by investigating how pupils from small schools construct the transition to secondary school (RQ1), identifying strategies that they consider to be helpful (RQ2). This research emphasises how, and to what extent, pupil voice can support the transition (RQ3). Working with Y6 pupils, the research used three tasks (individual and group) and the results were analysed using thematic analysis. The results suggest that pupils consider the transition as a change, particularly in relation to three key themes; environmental changes, changes in relationships and personal growth. Based on the findings, an intervention approach is proposed, offering a child-led approach to support the transition. This thesis concludes by reflecting on the research limitations and suggestions for future research. Implications for EP practice are discussed.

## **Dedication**

To my family.

You have supported me throughout and in more ways than you will ever know. And to the ones I treasure most: Finnbar and Matilda...you make everything worthwhile.

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## Acronyms

<b>BPS</b>	British Psychological Society
<b>CASE</b>	Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education
<b>CYP</b>	Child or Young Person
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>DfEE</b>	Department for Employment and Education
<b>EAL</b>	English as an Additional Language
<b>EI</b>	Emotional Intelligence
<b>EP(s)</b>	Educational Psychologist(s)
<b>FSM</b>	Free School Meals
<b>G</b>	Group
<b>KS</b>	Key Stage
<b>Ofsted</b>	Office for Standards in Education
<b>PPT(s)</b>	Participant(s)
<b>RQ(s)</b>	Research Question(s)
<b>SEND</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disability
<b>SCQ</b>	School Concerns Questionnaire
<b>STEP-ASD</b>	Systemic Transition in Education Programme for Autistic Spectrum Disorder
<b>TA</b>	Thematic Analysis
<b>TST</b>	Transfer Support Team

## **Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Overview of the investigations**

This thesis reports on research into pupils transitioning from small primary schools to secondary school. The enquiries are centred on pupil voice, with the aim to understand issues around transition from the pupils' perspective. As such, it emphasises positive and negative aspects of transition, as well as approaches that pupils identify as helpful in the process of transition. Based on the findings, a transition approach is proposed, which endeavours to support pupils prior to, during and following the transition process.

Transition to secondary school has been widely researched and considered to be a significant change for children (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019). Typically, children in the UK transition to a secondary school at 11 years of age. A range of methods and measures have been adopted to understand the transition, ranging from academic measures (Galton et al., 2000), well-being measures being (Marks, 2004) to investigations considering the pupils' views (Ashton, 2008).

In general, primary schools are considerably smaller than secondary schools, with the average primary school being attended by 282 pupils, whereas the average secondary school had 965 pupils in 2019 (Department for Education, DfE, 2019b). Thus, most pupils experience a significant change in school size when transitioning to secondary school. Largely, research has focused on investigating transition in the context of average-sized schools and, on the whole, there are few investigations that consider the potentially different experiences of pupils whom attend very small schools. Yet, the change from a very small school to a larger secondary school may be very different than the move from an average or larger primary school to a larger secondary school. Thus, the focus of this research is on the transition from small primary schools to secondary school.

The terminology around school size is not clearly defined and terms used to refer to school size are not strictly classified. Whilst labels such as tiny, small and large are used to refer to the number of pupils attending the school, there is no cut-off that outlines clear categories defining school size. The literature varies in the definitions for small schools and categorises small schools as those that are attended by fewer than 70 pupils (Harber, 1996), 90 pupils (Audit Commission, 1990) and 100 pupils (Carter, 2003; Hargreaves, 2009). Regional variations add to the difficulties defining small schools, with head teachers in South East England judging schools with 100 pupils as (too) small, whereas the threshold is thought to be 60 in the rest of the country (Craig and Blandford, 2004). This is particularly important in the context of primary schools, which have increased in size (see 2.5.2. below) and thus parameters and definitions may change over time. For example, a school with 100 pupils might historically have been judged to be within the average range, whereas now it may be considered to be a small school. Spielhofer et al. (2002) point out that "there is no agreement about where the boundary should be drawn" (p.6). This creates difficulties in comparing different research findings, as results might be based on investigations from different cohorts. For the purpose of the current research, it is accepted that small schools vary in size and findings from research involving schools with 100 or fewer pupils are considered.

Initially, this thesis offers an overview of the current literature into transition research, pupil voice and small school research (chapter 2). It then outlines the rationale for the research and research questions before the methodology is presented (chapter 3). Results are reported in relation to the key findings (chapter 4) and the discussion is presented in relation to the research questions (chapter 5). Finally, a transition approach is proposed (chapter 6), prior to reflections being offered (chapter 7).

## **Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction to literature review**

This chapter outlines key findings in the literature, reviewing pertinent studies in relation to the transition to secondary school with a focus on how pupil voice has been utilised to investigate how pupils conceptualise the transition. The review shows a lack of existing research from small schools, highlighting a gap in the literature. The existing approaches reviewed below have enabled to shape this research approach, theoretically and in practical terms. Thus, the research strategies and methodologies of this thesis are embedded within the existing conceptual framework, identifying key research questions that have not yet been addressed by the literature.

### **2.2. Focus of literature review**

The focus of this literature review is to position this thesis within the existing conceptual understanding of transition to secondary school. As such, the foci are threefold; firstly conceptualising the general understanding of primary to secondary school transition, secondly the role of the child's voice in relation to this transition and thirdly the question is raised whether there is a special case for small schools. It is acknowledged that these research topics are wide and thus emphasis is given to investigations relevant to the context of this thesis. Thus, this literature review aims to address the following key areas:

- The conceptualisation of the transition to secondary school, including how it is measured as successful and how it might be supported
- The principles underlying pupil voice and how this has informed the transition to secondary school
- The special case of small schools and how they may be different to larger secondary schools

Relevant literature is explored and evaluated. Given that many small schools are often placed in rural locations, research into rural schools is also considered. Whilst this review considers worldwide findings, emphasis is given to research conducted in the United Kingdom due to the specific educational context in which this research took place.

## **2.3. Transition to secondary school**

### **2.3.1. Defining transition**

Transition can be defined as "the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another" (Lexico Dictionaries, 2019) and in relation to humans, transition can be seen as (significant) changes in life. In the educational context, typically, three key transitions take place; the transition from early years to primary school followed by the transition to secondary school and finally the move to further education/work. This thesis is concerned with the transition from primary to secondary school, a transition that is described as "crucial and significant" (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019) for a child or young person (CYP) during their education. Although there are some variations across regions in the UK, most children make this transition at the age of 11 years. Primary to secondary school transition is placed upon pupils due to processes outside their control and pupils have no choice *when* to transition, however, they and their parents may have choice about *where* they transition to.

### **2.3.2. Primary-secondary transition and identity**

The principle of Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998) states that identities (and therefore transition) cannot be seen as an isolated individual development, but as a community event that involves other community members and social interactions (Crafter & Maunder, 2012). Prior to leaving primary school, pupils are likely to have developed identities as a 'primary school pupil' within their (school)



community and the transition to secondary school is thus a transition to a new Community of Practice (i.e. the secondary school). Therefore, transition is a shift in (social) identity, emphasising the process of joining a new community. The shift from participating in the primary school community to participating in the secondary school community can thus be viewed as a transition of community identity, rather than an individual shift in identity.

The primary-secondary transition is considered to be challenging (Zeedyk et al., 2003) as it involves significant changes in the school environment (with new buildings and academic demands) and the social environment (with new friendships and social rules). In addition to this, the transition happens at the same time as significant changes in the physical development happen, as many pupils enter early adolescence (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004). This period is marked by a quest for independence, which requires the pupil to adapt to new (intellectual) demands (Letrello & Miles, 2003), supporting the move to increased freedom and responsibility. Hines (2007) defines the time around transition as a significant period of change, during which a child experiences transformations in relation to their cognition, psychosocial and emotional development. Thus, pupils experience a range of internally-driven changes (puberty related) as well as externally-driven changes (new school).

### **2.3.3. 'Successful' primary-secondary transition**

Defining what constitutes a 'successful' transition is challenging, as the parameters of 'success' vary dependent upon viewpoint and agenda. In an attempt to define successful transition, Evangelou et al. (2008) put forward 5 measures that should be observable following transition:

- Development of new friendships, self-esteem and self-confidence
- Settled at school
- Increased interest in school and school work
- Familiarity with new routines
- Curriculum continuity

Thus, effective transition is thought to be a combination of social and environmental adjustments, with sustained or increased interest in one's own development.

However, West, Sweeting and Young (2010) concluded that "the question remains controversial, in large part because the evidence base remains inconsistent and incomplete" (p.22). In a longitudinal study, West et al. (2010) tracked 2000+ Scottish pupils and analysed data collected prior to transition, whilst at secondary school and beyond school age. They found that specific groups of pupils (lower ability and lower self-esteem) were particularly vulnerable to poor transitions and that the effects of negative school transitions are long-lasting (beyond secondary school), with pupils experiencing lower attainment levels and an increase in issues around well-being. Thus, West et al. (2010) emphasise the importance of a successful transition, ensuring pupils are able to develop their full potential.

Furthermore, research findings suggest that the effects of primary to secondary transition are created by the physical and social move between schools. Scott and Barona (2011) found that USA pupils who attended one school throughout their education do not experience lower academic achievement and/or social self-concepts around the age when pupils ordinarily transition. Whilst it is acknowledged that such schools may differ significantly in their approach to education, and pupils' well-being might be positively supported by the different school ethos, the question remains as to why some pupils experience negative outcomes following the primary-secondary transition. Thus, it appears that the actual transition leads to significant positive or negative effects on the development of the pupil, which may, or may not, interact with internal developments.

There is a lack of consensus in defining successful transition, with various interacting factors contributing to the transition process and development following transition. There are no clear protective/risk factors identified in the literature, as these factors interact and the same factors can have positive or negative effects at different points over time (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019). Overall, transition challenges have remained fairly constant in the past 40 years, with findings suggesting that the issues for stakeholders have not changed significantly (Mellor & Delamont, 2011).

#### **2.3.4. Transition and academic outcomes**

According to the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the academic development of pupils relies upon a successful transition from primary to secondary school (Ofsted, 2015). They suggest that these transitions lack focus on academic development and do not build on the academic progress made in Key Stage (KS) 2. Hence, one way of defining a successful transition is by considering academic progress following transition.

A number of studies have explored academic progress following transition to KS3 and, whilst most pupils manage the move to secondary school without major disruptions (Brown et al., 2004), academic progress can be negatively affected by the transition (Galton et al., 2000). This includes the academic achievement of academically (highly) able pupils (Phelan et al., 1994). Ding (2008) points towards the difficulties in identifying those likely to be negatively affected by the transition in relation to academic development. Findings suggest that gender and ethnicity can impact on the success of transition. Whilst both, male and female pupils can experience difficulties in transition, the decline was found to be more pronounced and longer lasting for male pupils (Roderick, 2003). Some pupils do not 'recover' from the decline following transition and continue to make lower than expected academic progress (Reyes et al., 2000). Investigations by Ding (2008) explored a number of within-pupil parameters that might make the individual more or less likely to have a successful transition. Measuring academic performance in Maths and English, he

found that, whilst a large percentage of pupils have no difficulties, many experience negative transitions. Ding (2008) developed 4 transition profiles on the issues encountered following transition in relation to academic change. These include pupils who may be less academically able, external changes (e.g. change of teacher, course) and pupils who have less stable (academic) development. It is proposed that by categorising pupils the most suitable transition intervention may be implemented. Ding (2008) found no gender effect, but found evidence that ethnicity affects academic progress following transition, with white pupils being the least affected.

Whilst there may be individual differences, a literature review by Jindal-Snape et al. (2019) concludes that there is "fairly robust evidence that there was a decline in pupils' educational outcomes after they move to secondary school" (p.14). They conclude that the decline in academic achievement may, in part, be connected to school motivation, attitudes and an increase in absences. Taken together, the research suggests that transition can affect individuals in a number of ways, one of which may be measured by a decline in academic performance.

### **2.3.5. Transition and well-being**

An alternative way of evaluating whether transition is successful is in terms of pupil well-being. Marks (2004) reports on research into measures of well-being and describes a significant drop in well-being of secondary pupils in comparison to primary aged pupils. At primary school, 65% of pupils report school as a positive experience, whereas only 27% of secondary aged pupils report school as positive. This figure is relatively stable across pupils' time at secondary school and it is unclear whether it is due to the nature of secondary schools, the transition or other internal and/or external factors. Marks (2004) suggests that consideration should be given to the educational model implemented at secondary school, increasing focus on curiosity and personal growth to increase pupils' school satisfaction rates.

Transition may also be affected by the sense of belonging that a pupil associates with the primary and secondary school, with pupils who experience positive connections with the (secondary) school being more likely to be motivated and therefore engaged (Cueto et al., 2010). Martinez et al. (2011) report on gender differences in the perceived social connections, with girls struggling to adjust to the new friendship groups and boys finding it difficult to adjust to the 'school functioning'. Girls from divorced families are particularly prone to be affected by the effects of the new friendship groups (Hines, 2007).

Jindal-Snape et al. (2019) present mixed findings in their review of the literature with regards to the effects of primary to secondary transition on well-being. They conclude that the transition *may* negatively impact on well-being. This may be in terms of higher levels of misbehaviour as well as reduced feelings of school-belonging. Furthermore, pupils may experience an increase in social-emotional issues as well as higher levels of depression/anxiety. Taken together, the research suggests that transition and well-being may be connected, however the direction, level and length of impact are unclear and there appear to be significant individual differences.

### **2.3.6. Experiences of transition**

Transition can be viewed as a process that needs individualised support, as the same experiences can lead to different outcomes (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019). Some groups of people may be more vulnerable to experience negative effects as a result of primary-secondary transition. For example, CYPs with special educational needs and disability (SEND) may, whilst not more likely to experience difficulties, be more significantly affected if issues arise (Maras & Aveling, 2006). Equally, learning difficulties can present as behavioural difficulties following transition (Lovey, 2002) and pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) or for whom English is an additional language (EAL) are more likely to experience negative transitions (Galton et al., 1999). Interventions targeting the transition for pupil with SEND include within-child approaches such as literacy programmes (Bark & Brooks, 2017), and methods that

include systemic approaches such as the Systemic Transition in Education Programme for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (STEP-ASD, Mandy et al., 2016) and the Transfer Support Team (TST, Bloyce & Frederickson, 2012). Overall there is limited evidence of the negative impacts of transition on pupils with SEND, although individuals may benefit from differentiated support to manage the transition (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019).

A literature review by Hanewald (2013) found five main themes across studies investigating the primary to secondary transition:

- Student well-being (belonging)
- Support from teachers and parents
- Role of peers
- Academic attainment
- Family-school connections

She emphasises the importance of the knowledge and skills of the teacher in the transition process and the involvement of teachers, pupils and their parent/carers in the process. Teachers are seen to significantly impact on the experience, motivation and well-being of pupils, however, as pupils progress through school the teacher support is perceived to decrease (Bru et al., 2010). Whilst this decrease is gradual and needed for the development of independence of the CYP, some children may perceive this as a threat to their ability to function, thus calling for targeted intervention for pupils who need additional support in relation to the five areas identified by the review (see above).

In the context of this research, it is important to acknowledge that the transition to secondary school may be affected by a number of factors, many of which are outside the individual's control. This emphasises the need to investigate how pupils construct the transition, as interventions aimed at aiding transitions need to be in line with pupil's constructs and individual needs.

### **2.3.7. Interventions supporting transition**

Given the different approaches on how successful transition is constructed, research aimed at supporting transition ranges from academic interventions to those associated with pupil's well-being. Investigating an academic transition project in Ireland, McCormack, Finlayson and McCloughlin (2014) researched the effects of implementing an adaptation of the Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE) programme (Adey & Shayer, 1993), an intervention programme which is designed to support formal operational thinking. The programme utilises Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) and encourages peer or adult mediation to make use of undeveloped cognitive skills. It also uses Feuerstein et al.'s (1980) Instrumental Enrichment Program, with a focus on applying learnt concepts in other areas (transfer of skills). McCormack et al. (2014) found significant cognitive gains following the intervention (compared to a control group). However, the effects were not significant a year following the intervention, which may have been due to the shortening of the original programme (it was designed to run over 2 years but was not fully implemented in the study). Thus, there appears to be some evidence that interventions targeting cognitive development may be useful in the transition to secondary school, particularly in the initial stages of the transition. In addition to this, Siddiqui et al. (2016) report on the effects of a reading programme for pupils who were poor readers at primary school. Findings suggest that such programmes are effective, however, they may not be effective for pupils who are most 'at risk' (Siddiqui et al., 2014).

Other interventions focused on emotional well-being. Qualter et al. (2007) investigated whether emotional intelligence (EI) interventions are helpful in pupil's development of coping strategies and, in turn, minimising the potential negative effects of transition. High levels of EI are thought to be advantageous in coping with (negative) life events and are linked to academic success (Petrides et al., 2004). Qualter et al.'s (2007) findings show that only pupils who participated in EI interventions showed a rise in EI, whilst other pupils experienced a decrease in EI. They argue that low EI is in line with the general negative outcomes for transition

(see Fenzel, 2000) and that EI interventions are therefore successful in protecting pupils from such negative effects. Thus, there is some evidence that targeted emotionally-based interventions are beneficial in the transition to secondary school.

Tobbell (2014) suggests that transition is *work* for pupils and that they engage in the process through constant observation and engagement with the new environment. He suggests that disengagement may be the result of pupils feeling excluded at secondary. Thus, Tobbell (2014) concludes that "the management of transition is (not) the task of the primary school. It is the responsibility of the secondary school to understand how their rituals and goals impact on the new pupils..." (p. 14). A number of studies investigated transition intervention programmes and found that, for example, systemic changes, including work with future class mates and curriculum continuity, led to a lowering of school anxiety (Neal et al., 2016). Furthermore, additional social-emotional learning interventions prior to transitioning has been found to decrease the 'academic dip' experienced by many pupils (Rosenblatt & Elias, 2008). Finally, Sheperd and Roker (2005) investigated the effects of an after-school support group for withdrawn children, aiming to build self-esteem and resilience. The intervention led to fewer school concerns, as well as positively affecting self-esteem and social skills. Thus, there is some evidence that interventions supporting transitions may have positive effects on the pupils' development.

### **2.3.8. Summary transition research**

Overall, research suggests primary-secondary school transition may impact on the academic and/or social-emotional well-being of children. There are however, issues around the definition of those difficulties and the causes of them, with an interaction of external and internal factors most likely to be contributing to the experiences of the individual CYP. There is general consensus that the transition is challenging for many pupils, however, most pupils are not affected in the long-term by the effects of the transition. Particular groups of pupils may be more likely to experience significant



difficulties in the transition to secondary school, which include pupils from vulnerable groups (e.g. EAL, FSM and SEND). Targeted interventions in relation to academic and/or social support may be effective, however, there are concerns about the longevity of those interventions and their implementation. Most promising findings suggest that, in addition to targeted support for pupils identified at risk of transition issues, systemic changes to the secondary school system may support a positive transition to secondary school for all pupils. Issues around transition continue to be ill-defined, particularly in relation to how secondary schools can adapt their approaches to accommodate the needs of the CYP.

## **2.4. Transition and pupil voice**

### **2.4.1. Defining pupil voice**

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) states that the views of the child are to be respected in all matters affecting them. Thus, the opinions, views and understanding of the child should be explored and appropriate measures need to be implemented to respect the child's voice. Definitions of pupil voice vary, however, it is generally understood to be the "...way in which pupils are allowed or encouraged to offer their views or preferences" (p.6, Whitty & Whisby, 2007), leading to the CYP taking an active part in decision making processes.

Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation (see Figure 1 below) can be used to clarify what is meant by active participation with regards to child's voice.



Rung 8	Shared decision-making
Rung 7	Children & young people lead
Rung 6	Adults initiate
Rung 5	Consult and inform
Rung 4	Assign
Rung 3	Tokenism
Rung 2	Decoration
Rung 1	Manipulation

**Figure 1:** Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation

Hart (1992) groups levels of participation into 8 categories, ranging from CYP not being involved in the decision making process (e.g. manipulated or tokenism) to the CYP being at the centre of the decisions that are affecting them (e.g. child-led, shared decisions with adults). Whilst it is acknowledged that a CYP benefits from the higher levels of participation, schools are continuing to be challenged by the implementation of child-initiated approaches (Lundy, 2007). Ashton (2008) emphasises that "much of what students express(ed) may seem like small, even trivial details to the adult around them. But to the child, it is of great importance..." (p. 180). Given that the child's voice should be central in the decision making processes that concern the CYP, for transitions the child's voice should be gained and measures need to be put in place that accommodate the identified preferences and needs.

#### **2.4.2. Transition research and child's voice**

Ashton (2008) researched how pupils perceive the transition to secondary school and found that Y6 pupils are able to communicate their thoughts about the transition. Gathering pupils' voice via a large scale questionnaires (over 1600 responses) and more in-depth activities with three Y6 classes, she found that pupils had mixed

feelings about the forthcoming transition and concludes that pupils are able to construct and communicate their thoughts and feelings about transition. Thus, Ashton (2008) argues that pupils' voice should be taken into consideration when planning for transition.

Bagnall, Skipper and Fox (2020) conducted in-depth research into the pupils', teachers' and parents' experiences of the transition, investigating the period prior to transition as well as the adjustment following transition. Pupils participated in a semi-structured interview, which was conducted once they had settled into Y7 (around half way through Y7). Bagnall et al. (2020) found that pupils' main concerns were around peer affiliation and that pupils would like support from school and parents in managing the changes in friendship groups. In line with findings by Tobbell and O'Donnell (2013), they argue that greater emphasis needs to be placed upon the social support at secondary school, with a focus on building relationships. Bagnall et al. (2020) conclude that this may be best achieved by developing an emotion-based transition intervention, founded on the lived experiences of all stakeholders (pupils, parents and teachers). However, consideration needs to be given to the fact that Bagnall et al.'s (2020) investigations are based on retrospective data, collected around 6 months following transition. Thus the findings may not accurately reflect the feelings pupils and other stakeholders felt prior to the transition, as recollections may have been affected by selective retrieval and/or forgetting (Hardt & Rutter, 2004).

For most pupils transition issues are found to be short-lived (Huggins & Knight, 1997). Pupils anticipate the transition with 'anxious readiness' (Zeedyk et al., 2003) and express a mixture of anxious and optimistic anticipation as well as a feeling of challenge and threat (Sirsch, 2003). Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008) investigated the way in which pupils adjust to the transition in more detail and found that a third of pupils display adjustment issues 6 months following the transition. Furthermore, some groups are more vulnerable during and following transition and findings showed that poverty (Nisbet & Entwistle, 1969), disabilities (Jindal-Snape et al., 2005) and being of an ethnic minority (Kristen, 2002) can negatively affected transition (Topping, 2011). Overall, children are most concerned about peers,

bullying, external networks and self-esteem/mental health issues (Jindal-Snape & Foggie, 2008). In contrast to this, teachers' view on transition focuses on the academic decline in performance, with recovery taking up to 2 years. Thus, teachers are mainly concerned about curriculum issues and school strategies, such as pedagogical approaches and exchange of information (Topping, 2011). This further supports the notion that the child's voice should be a central focus in the transition process, as it may reduce the negative effects of the transition process.

In their review, Jindal-Snape et al. (2019) conclude that primary to secondary school transition can be associated with positive and negative experiences, with the same issue triggering different experiences for different children. The most prominent issue raised by pupils is around peer relationships, with positive aspects (e.g. wider friendship group, new friends and older peers) and negative experiences being emphasised (e.g. losing friends, bullying, dealing with older/bigger pupils). Similarly, in relation to the physical environment, pupils felt optimistic about moving between classes, better/more resources and higher school population, whilst also reporting issues that they felt negatively about (such as getting lost, larger environment, travelling to school). Overall, there is increased focus on the negative aspects of transition (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019) with intra and inter-individual differences accounting for the contrasting reported experiences. Thus, despite pupils experiencing broadly the same issues around transition, the experiences of this transition can vary greatly between them.

Looking into Y6 and Y7 pupils' attitudes in more details, Chedzoy and Burden (2005) found that pupils change their feelings about key measures regarding the transition. Using a questionnaire, they measured six parameters of transition; anticipation and reaction, academic work, relationships with teachers, ethos of new school, peer-friendships and personal development. Participants included 207 pupils, who first completed the questionnaire towards the end of the summer term in Y6 and then again 6 months later (when attending their new school in Y7). Considering the concerns prior to transition, Chedzoy and Burden's (2005) findings are in line with those found by Measor and Woods (1984) in that pupils had similar hopes and

concerns about the forthcoming transition (e.g. size and complexity of new school, pedagogical approaches and socio-emotional issues, including friendships and bullying).

Chedzoy and Burden's (2005) research suggests that most pupils have been able to resolve these issues within the first term of attending secondary school. This is in contrast to Measor and Woods' (1984) and Tobbell's (2003) findings, which suggest that the issues can be longer-lasting. These differences may have been due to the changes experienced (e.g. size of school may be an issue prior to transition, but most pupils will have adjusted to this within the first few weeks of attending the new school) and the high level of transition support pupils received from their secondary schools. Chedzoy and Burden (2005) conclude that many of the Y6 pupils' anxieties stem from myths, which are hard to ignore or rationalise (e.g. prevalence of bullying, high level of academic demand). However, they also point out that the primary-secondary school transition allows transformation and that the differences between the two schools support this transformation. Thus, the research provides further evidence for the value of listening, understanding and implementing pupils' voice.

#### **2.4.3. Utilising pupil voice in transition**

A number of studies have investigated how the views of pupils on the transition may be gained and how this can inform approaches and policies. In a large-scale study, Ashton (2008) explored a number of ways that the child's voice may contribute to the understanding of the transition process; she included questionnaires, group discussions, written answers and responses collected through drawings, involving 1673 pupils in total. The data collection included questions about the transition in general as well as questions about who might be helpful when moving school and what the settling-in process may be like. Furthermore, direct work with three Y6 classes included a number of group and paired activities, aimed at eliciting what pupils are worried and excited about in relation to the forthcoming transition. Key findings from the research suggest that pupils are mainly concerned with social

connections (e.g. friends, bullying, being the only child from a particular primary school, teachers, race), practical issues (e.g. school choice, getting lost, knowledge/experiences of the secondary school) and general questions around growing up. Overall, pupils reported mixed feelings, being able to see positive and negative aspects of the topics. Ashton (2008) suggests that Y6 pupils could be supported in the transition process by setting and communicating realistic expectations, building positive relationships with those who are at the secondary school and that there should be an understanding that the conditions for learning should be set up in a way that meets the child's basic needs. Ashton (2008) concludes that pupil voice should not only be gathered and heard, but that the view of those who are experiencing the transition should shape the approaches to it. As such, it should form the basis of how transition is developed and delivered, with a view to improve practice.

In line with Ashton's (2008) findings, Brown, Croxford and Minty (2017) investigated pupils' views on transition and 'active citizenship' in Scottish primary and secondary schools via questionnaires (738 pupils) and focus groups (17 groups involving 130 pupils). Brown et al. (2017) conclude that there is a need to further implement pupil voice in policy development. They point to particular areas, including cross-sector differences between primary and secondary schools, gender differences in the perceived ability to impact on decision making (girls reporting higher levels of impact), areas where pupil voice is not consistently heard and/or implemented (e.g. staff recruitment) and the involvement of groups of pupils that are less involved in school life. This places pupil voice at the centre of decision-making processes, supporting pupils' input in the transition process.

In a literature review on how the child's view is implemented in the transition process, van Rens et al. (2018) conclude that, despite positive relationships between stakeholders being seen as important, the views of the child (and parents) are not fully incorporated in the process. They emphasise "the need for communications with children rather than about children" (p. 55). A further literature review by Topping (2011) evaluates key findings in primary to secondary transition research. The review

focuses on children's and teachers' perspectives on primary to secondary school transition, as Topping (2011) found this to be the most prominent focus of research areas in relation to transition. It includes 88 studies and concludes that the pupils' perspective differs from the teachers' perspective, with pupils being concerned about the social-emotional aspects of the transition and teachers raising issues around attainment. This discrepancy is also reflected in the above mentioned difficulties around defining successful transition, with stakeholders citing different issues and therefore suggesting different intervention and measures. Tobbell (2014) argues that transition is experienced by the CYP at an individual level, thus providing further evidence for the notion of listening to the child's voice when planning for transitions.

#### **2.4.4. Interventions based on pupil voice**

In their literature review, van Rens et al. (2018) summarise a number of general approaches that may provide useful interventions in supporting pupils' transition. These range from providing adequate information about the new school to support in forming friendships. Some more specific findings suggest that pupils need support to become more independent learners (McGee et al., 2004), effective communication between the school and parents (Coffey, 2013) and ongoing exchange of information between primary and secondary school teachers (Green, 1997). However, most research does not offer specific intervention programmes and simply point to areas of general good practice, based on the investigations into pupil voice on transition. For example, Lester et al. (2012) suggests that early targeted intervention is needed to minimise the potential negative impact of transition, with support being offered at primary school and secondary school. In line with this, Waters et al. (2012) suggest that interventions should follow best practice guidelines, yet these are guidelines are under-defined and not yet grounded in evidence-based practice.

Taking the findings from the literature review, Topping (2011) concludes that a number of transition approaches and interventions appear to have a positive effect on the transition. These include:

- Monitoring during the first term (being vigilant)
- Same-age peer affiliations (reduces bullying)
- Structured peer-interactions with older peers
- Formative assessment (to enhance self-esteem)
- Setting targets that have been identified by the pupil
- For Y7 to be the only year group in the school at the start of term

In addition to this, the review suggests a number of approaches that may support a positive transition, however there is less evidence for these. These include the development of a peer mentoring programme, an early transition programme (decreasing anxiety) and implementation of a specialist math outreach programme. Overall, Topping's (2011) review demonstrates that pupils' voice can significantly enhance our understanding of how to shape transition to minimise its potential negative impacts.

Pupil voice has been incorporated to develop interventions, including government initiatives such as the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (Wigelsworth, Humphreys & Lendrum, 2012), which aimed to support pupils in their socio-emotional development (see also Targeted Mental Health in Schools by Wolpert, Humphreys, Belsky & Deighton, 2013). Thus, there is increasing emphasis placed on pupils' emotional development. This ties in with the increase in the belief that pupils' view can contribute to the understanding of need and development of policies and interventions.

There are many methods in which pupil voice may be collected, from questionnaires, interviews to written work and drawings. Rice, Frederickson and Seymour (2010) used the School Concerns Questionnaire (SCQ, Thomasson, Field, O'Donnell & Woods, 2006) to investigate whether it would be an appropriate, quantitative tool to measure issues surrounding transition. Given that the effects of transition may be long lasting, Anderson et al. (2000) point out that one of the advantages of using a quantitative questionnaire is that it can be completed at several points over the course of transition, measuring changes over time (this is also true for qualitative



measures, however data collection can be more time consuming). Rice et al. (2010) found that the results from their quantitative and qualitative approaches were in line with each other and thus conclude that the SCQ is a reliable and valid way of measuring pupils' concerns regarding transition. Rice et al. (2010) argue that the SCQ should be used in the development of whole-school transition interventions. However, Rice et al.'s (2010) research focused on the concerns regarding transition, largely ignoring the positive aspects of transition. Taking a solution-focused approach may be beneficial in supporting the process of transition as it may enable all stakeholders to engage in constructive and progressive planning (rather than planning around potential pitfalls). This may allow interventions and support to be planned more effectively.

Most interventions based on pupil voice are focused on a sub-group of pupils (such as pupils with SEND or EAL). Bunn, Davies and Speed (2017) developed a transition booklet based on focus group research with pupils with SEND and then evaluated its implementation. The transition booklet contained a section in which pupils were asked to find out information about the new school (to address the feeling of 'being lost') as well as providing information about the pupil and their feelings, listing questions pupils may have and how pupils anticipate the 'new school and me' to be like. A small focus group evaluated the effectiveness of the transition booklet, and reported to have found it beneficial in the process of the transition. Bunn et al. (2017) acknowledge "that a booklet is as good as the ones who facilitate it" (p. 243), indicating that a personalised approach is needed, particularly for children with SEND.

As can be seen from the findings presented above, there is no uniform approach to transition interventions and schools and teachers have to navigate the complexities on their own, adjusting their approach to those who need a more tailor-made approach to transition. It appears that, whilst research has focused on what children feel and say about transition, there is a distinct lack of evaluated application of these findings. In line with this, Evans, Borriello and Field (2018) conclude that "...much

more research is needed to assess the effectiveness of different types of intervention programmes, with greater sample sizes and longitudinal investigations." (p. 13).

#### **2.4.5. Summary pupil voice and transition**

Pupil voice has been used to gain a more holistic understanding of the issues that pupils may experience when transitioning to secondary school. As such, it has provided valuable information and the research has shown that pupils have good insight into their own thoughts and feelings. Overall, pupils are concerned about social-emotional and practical issues, as well as reporting positive aspects that they are looking forward to upon transition. Whilst there is controversy around whether the negative feelings are long-lasting, the issues present the reality for the pupil prior to and immediately after transition. Thus, they are important to the CYP at the time they are experienced, even if the concerns decrease following transition. Interventions incorporating pupil voice range from focusing on the social-emotional aspects of transition to supporting academic learning. However, it is acknowledged that the effectiveness of interventions is dependent upon its implementation by the adults around the CYP. No coherent approach that is built on pupil voice has, as yet, been developed.

### **2.5. The special case of small schools**

#### **2.5.1. Small and/or rural schools**

By their nature, many small schools are located in more remote areas that are sparsely populated. Thus it is challenging to disentangle the effects of school size from its location. Rurality may add issues to education of CYP that go beyond the experiences offered by the school.

Ovenden-Hope and Passy (2019) argue that educational isolation may be experienced by schools in rural locations, which they define as "A school experiencing limited access to resources for school improvement, resulting from challenges of school location" (p.4). They outline those challenges in terms of geographic remoteness (e.g. distance from other schools, lack and high cost of transport), socio-economic disadvantages (e.g. fewer high-performing employers, reliance on seasonal work) and cultural isolation (e.g. less access to museums/theatres and fewer interactions with multi-cultural communities). To combat the potential negative effects of educational isolation, Ovenden and Passy (2019) suggest that policy makers need to have a thorough understanding of the challenges faced by rural schools and support schools via extra funding as well as maximising the potential positive impact of all stakeholders and the location. This has, in part, been addressed by the review of the national funding formula (Department for Education, DfE, 2017), which allocates a proportionally higher than average increase in funding to small rural schools. In this context it is important to emphasise that the extra funding has been allocated to create a fairer access to education as it is acknowledged that educating CYP in small rural schools is more costly than educating CYP in larger urban areas. Investigating the 'Running (of) rural primary schools efficiently', the DfE (2019a) publication comments on financing, staffing, collaboration and teaching. As such, it is acknowledged that running costs of small schools will be higher and that rural schools face specific issues in relation to staff retention and are more significantly affected by changes in pupil number.

Thus, research into school size is likely to be affected by school location, as densely populated areas need to cater for a greater number of pupils and are therefore more likely to offer a higher number of school places. This research focuses on small school research, however, it is accepted that most small schools (including those that contributed to this research) are in rural locations. Whilst it is impossible to separate the effects and interaction of size and location, emphasis is given to the size of the school (rather than its location, as rural locations also host larger schools).

### **2.5.2. Local context and development**

On average, schools have been increasing in size in England since 2006 and the latest statistics found that a typical primary school is now attended by 281 pupils (DfE, 2019b). This represents an average increase of 44 pupils per school since 2006. There are regional variations in school size and the local authority where this research has taken place is located within a large shire county. The county, which has around 470 primary schools, is sub-divided into three geographical areas and this research focuses on an area that includes rural areas as well as towns and a city. Primary schools in this area are typically somewhat smaller than schools in more urban areas and are, on average, attended by 195 pupils. There are 116 primary schools that serve the area, 23 of which are small schools, educating 75 or fewer pupils. Thus, just under 20% of local primary schools can be classified as small schools. The reasons for the relatively high percentage of small schools are varied, but most likely due to the widespread nature of the county, with many smaller villages surrounding the area's towns and city. Historically, schools were located in local communities which meant that most villages had a (primary) school. Whilst there has been a sharp decline in smaller schools in England, with the loss of about half of all schools that are attended by fewer than 200 pupils since 1980 (Jackson, 2017), the local area maintained a relatively high proportion of small schools.

Significant changes in the government's agenda regarding small schools allowed a shift from high levels of rural school closures in 1983 (when 123 rural schools closed in one year) to around 30 closures a year until 1997 (DETR and MAFF, 2000), dropping to 2 closures in 1999/2000 (Department for Employment and Education, DfEE, 2000). The change in attitude towards small schools in rural locations is, in part, attributed to the DES (1985) paper, which emphasises the social and geographical need for schools in more isolated locations and in 2000 the DfEE (2000) suggested that "Government action has halted the decline of rural schools and put them back at the heart of their communities...".

Small schools are continuing to be of political interest and the White Paper on 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' (DfE, 2016) stipulates for most small primary schools to join multi-academy trusts to ensure high standards via the exchange with other schools (and thus reducing external intervention). Furthermore, the White Paper ensures higher levels of funding to compensate for less flexibility in reducing costs experienced by small schools. Thus, current understanding acknowledges that small schools are an important contributor to the education system and the communities they serve.

### **2.5.3. Transitioning from a small primary to secondary school**

When investigating primary to secondary transition, research has focused on average sized schools and there is limited research on transitioning from small primary schools. The most notable exceptions are presented here and, albeit being somewhat dated, they indicate that transition may be experienced differently for pupils from small primary schools. Research from the UK is scarce, thus the research presented is mainly taken from international investigations.

The use of international research presents a range of difficulties, mainly in relation to the question whether its findings are transferable to different cultures. This is particularly relevant in the educational context, as school and approaches to schooling vary across countries. In a literature review, Foster, Addy and Samoff (2014) included 605 journal articles that investigated educational research. They conclude that focus is given to the wider circumstances of the research (e.g. political, economic and social issues), which are culturally bound. As such, educational research suffers from being highly diverse and not necessarily transferable. It is thus lacking in convergence, which implies that international comparison can be challenging. For the purpose of this literature review, international research is included when there is insufficient research carried out in the UK context and it is accepted that the results may not be transferable and valid in a different context as they may be culturally specific.

Brown et al. (2017) investigated pupil participation in the transition to secondary school and found that the size of school impacts on pupils' decision making processes. Pupils attending smaller schools are thought to be 'more involved' in decision making processes at school, suggesting a less hierarchical school structure. Thus, pupils from small schools may have, in addition to a different outlook, a different set of skills that encourages active participation in decisions affecting their education.

Kvalsund (2000) presents primary to secondary school transition in Norway from the perspective of a life course event. Some issues, such as concerns about the new demands and the move from being the oldest to being the youngest were shared between pupils, regardless of school size. However, Kvalsund (2000) points out that the many pupils from their small school cohort had already experienced and/or visited the larger secondary schools due to specialist provisions offered (e.g. swimming lessons or specialist subject facilities), thus reducing anxieties around unfamiliarity. Furthermore, they are more likely to have closer bonds with older children in the secondary school who previously attended their primary school, as they typically had been educated together in the past (this gives them access to 'inside information'). Pupils from small schools report greater change with regards to the teaching and learning methods, with an increase in directed, individual work. Kvalsund (2000) considers primary to secondary transition by reflecting on how the small school environment shapes the social relations and thus views transitions in the context of the school and community.

Furthermore, Cotterell (1992) evaluated school transition in Australia from an ecological perspective, investigating adjustment to secondary school for pupils from smaller and larger primary schools. Whilst the research is over 25 years old, it showed that pupils from small schools were initially more optimistic (prior to the move), but also reported greater levels of anxiety immediately following the move. However, in the medium-term (around 4 months following transition), the research showed no effect of primary school size on adjustment to secondary school. Cotterell (1992) argued that the transition is greatest for pupils from small schools, negatively

affecting pupils, but that effects of this move can only be measured in the short-term. These findings are somewhat in contrast to Kvalsund's (2000) conclusions, in that Cotterell (1992) shows the negative, but not the positive effects of transitioning from a smaller primary school. Thus, there is some evidence that pupils experience the move to high school differently, depending on what size school they transition from, however the direction and size of the effect remains unclear.

Reporting on applied creative thinking techniques, Montgomery (1995) investigated transition from secondary school to adulthood for pupils with SEND. Whilst this is potentially a very different transition, she emphasises that new solutions must be found to address the challenges experienced by small/rural schools, such as the small economic base, travelling time, lack of services/staff and physical labour oriented work ethic (Elrod, Devlin & Obringer, 1994). Montgomery (1995) argues that by using structured problem-solving models, unique solutions can be found that aid the transition. This is in line with findings from the more recent transition research, which indicates that pupils with SEND benefit from tailor-made approaches to transition (e.g. Bark & Brooks, 2017) and suggests that there is no single solution to transitions, whether a CYP attends a small or a larger setting.

#### **2.5.4. Pupil voice: Transitioning from a small primary school to secondary school**

Whilst there is research on school transition, pupil voice and small schools, these topics have been researched as separate entities and Hargreaves (2009) emphasises "...the almost complete absence of pupil voice on educational experiences in small rural schools..." (p.126). There are two notable, yet somewhat dated, exceptions to this, with Pietarinen (1998a) and Johnstone (2001) reporting on pupils' experiences in the transition from rural primary schools to secondary schools from Finland and Australia respectively. Both investigations report on findings that were presented at conferences, rather than peer-reviewed journals. An overview of

these two studies is presented in Table 1 below and their key findings will be evaluated in detail in the following.



**Table 1:** Overview of key studies utilising pupil voice in the transition to secondary school from small schools

<b>Author, Year, Title</b>	<b>Aims</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Sample, Country</b>	<b>Key findings</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
Pietarinen (1998a)  Rural school students' experiences on the transition from primary to secondary school.	Investigating the perceptions of transition from pupils attending small/rural and larger schools. Help to inform the debate on small/rural school closures.	Qualitative data  Pupil voice through essays written prior to transition and following transition to secondary school	132 pupils  Schools: 13 small 1 village 1 city  Finland	Pupils from small/rural schools experience more significant adaptations, including greater changes to physical, social and pedagogical approaches. Prior to transition, they felt more supported.	Communication needed between primary and secondary school to ensure (social and academic) needs are met. This is particularly important in relation to the more significant changes experienced by pupils from small/rural schools.  Pupils from small/rural primary schools should be seen as a resource to shape the school improvement approaches. As such, Pietarinen (1998a) argues against the closure of small/rural schools.
Johnstone (2001)  The lived reality of the	Using pupil voice to inform understanding of issues faced by pupils	Qualitative data  Pupil voice through	10 pupils attending small/rural schools	Pupils' responses/key concerns: 1. Adaptation to organisational culture (e.g. finding the way	By the end of Y7, most pupils have settled into the culture of secondary school.  Loss of stable friendships and making of new friendships is key concern and

transition to high school for rural students.	transitioning from small/rural settings and improving practice.	interviews, questionnaire and journals.  Data collected in last 5 weeks of primary school and first three terms at secondary school.	Australia	<p>around), effect reduced over time, but was not sufficiently addressed by orientation days.</p> <p>2. Adaptation to social culture (e.g. making friends), pupils started forming friendships after one week at secondary school</p> <p>3. Personal reaction to adaptation (e.g. different coping methods), pupils respond to the transition with excitement and anxiety; significant individual differences.</p>	<p>some pupils may need support with this.</p> <p>Older students are often known to new Y7 pupils, therefore creating a sense of security.</p> <p>Recommendations include: bridging the gap in social cultural experiences of primary and secondary school (both schools need to adapt). Johnstone (2001) suggests a number of practical steps towards reducing transition concerns for pupils from small/rural schools, including the use of IT and adapting the organisational culture of the schools (e.g. lessons held in one classroom) and reviewing orientation day practices.</p>
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Taking the perspective of the pupil, Pietarinen (1998a) and Johnstone (2001) report on the experiences of pupils from small/rural schools. Pietarinen (1998a) reports findings from a study (Pietarinen, 1998b) that followed 132 pupils who attended different sized primary schools, including a sample of 41 pupils who attended rural schools (which are, due to their nature and location, small schools). The research was conducted in the context of a rural school closure debate, which was prominent at the time in Finland. It aims to add to the debate by gaining a better understanding of the pupils' experiences before and after transition to secondary school.

Investigating qualitative data collected through essays written by the pupils prior to and following the transition, Pietarinen (1998a) argues that pupils' experiences are shaped by their positive and negative experiences during their time at primary school. For pupils from small/rural schools Pietarinen (1998a) emphasises environmental advantages, including small class sizes, family-like teaching, few disciplinary issues and flexibility in teaching as well as disadvantages such as the remoteness of the school, planning of the teaching of multiple year groups, resources and availability of rooms. Personal growth underpinned the transition experiences for pupils from small/rural schools and academic achievement was found to be unrelated to how well pupils settled into secondary school. This is in line with general research on transition, for example Ashton (2008) found that pupils are occupied by the socio-emotional aspects of transition, rather than academic issues. Overall, the transition period required adaptation for all pupils and pupils from small/rural primary schools report more significant changes in relation to the physical, social and pedagogical environments (Pietarinen, 1998a), thus placing higher demands on their development. To address this, adaptations are needed in terms of the primary and secondary setting, giving pupils more similar experiences as well as better communication between the settings, thus creating a more gradual transition. Pietarinen (1998a) concludes that small/rural schools are a vital part of the community and the experiences of the pupils "should be seen as a significant resource in a process of school improvement especially during the transition period" (p. 10).

Johnstone (2001) presents research from Australia, in which 10 pupils from rural/small schools were followed through their transition to secondary school. Using interviews and open-ended questionnaires towards the end of Y6 and interviews, questionnaires and journal notes during Y7, Johnstone (2001) collected a range of qualitative data prior to and following the transition. Parents and teachers were also invited to be interviewed and/or to complete a questionnaire. Their findings showed three categories, with pupils from rural/small schools having to adapt in terms of *organisational culture*, *personal culture* and *personal reactions*. With regards to *organisational culture*, pupils were found to be concerned about the size of the new school, the layout and the number of teacher they will have. However, these concerns reduced quickly once pupils started attending the new school and new concerns arose regarding the organisational skills of the pupils and inconsistencies in management and style of teacher. Pupils were also found to be concerned about the *social culture* of the new school, with friendships (loss and formation of new ones) being a key worry for pupils. However, these concerns decreased fast and most pupils started to form new friendships within a week of attending secondary school. Older students were perceived to be either a threat (e.g. bullying) or considered to be a supportive factor (e.g. if the older pupil was already known to the Y7 pupil). Finally, Johnstone (2001) found significant variation in the responses to the transition and thus included a category for *personal reactions* to highlight the intense mixture of positive aspects (e.g. excited and anticipation) and concerns (e.g. scared and nervous) that students reported. Whilst pupils stated a diverse ranges of feelings before and during early transition, by the end of the Y7 pupils (as well as parents/teachers) reported to be settled. Thus, Johnstone (2001) concludes that pupils from rural/small schools would benefit from a range of interventions that support the transition, particularly those aimed at reducing the anxieties reported prior to the transition. They propose a number of strategies, such as internet-based activities.

One issue that arises is that Australia is geographically very different from western European countries. Large proportions (95%) of Australia are classified as rural as they are more than 50 kilometres away from more urban areas (Commonwealth

School Commission, 1988). Finland also has large areas of rural areas and, whilst being small and generally less populated, rural areas are often relatively isolated in terms of access to more urban areas. Thus, the experience of pupils attending rural schools in Australia/Finland may be very different from the experience pupils have in the UK, where rural areas are, due to its geography, generally closer to towns and cities.

#### **2.5.5. Summary small schools**

Although there is no clear definition what constitutes a small primary school, typically small schools educate 40-100 pupils. Small schools are often located in rural areas and many are smaller than their more urban counterparts due to being positioned in sparsely populated areas. With regards to transition, there is highly limited worldwide research into the transition from small primary schools to secondary school and the geographic, social and political approaches of different countries limit the transferability of research. Overall, findings indicate that pupils from small schools construct the transition to secondary school differently than pupils that attend larger primary schools and that therefore interventions should target the specific issues that arise by being educated in a small primary setting. Limited research into pupil voice from Finland and Australia supports the notion that pupils attending small schools experience a number of advantages and disadvantages arising from the nature of their setting but that the issues experienced are overcome during Y7.

#### **2.6. Literature review- Summary**

To summarise, the literature review highlights areas of research that have mainly been considered separately, namely transition, pupil voice and small school research.

Transition research indicates that the move from KS2 to KS3 is considered challenging for many pupils and that it may negatively impact on children's development in relation to academic progress and/or well-being. Intervention supporting transition have shown mixed results, with many only measuring short-term effects. Whilst systemic changes have been identified as most appropriate, there has been no wide-spread implementation of such approaches. Thus, it was concluded that transition and its associated issues continue to be complex and dependent upon the measure. Furthermore, interventions are lacking thorough evidence, particularly in relation to how secondary schools may adapt to aid the transition process for the CYP.

Research into pupil voice aids the understanding of transition issues and has made a valuable contribution to the debate, emphasising both, the positive and negative aspects of transition. It highlights that pupils' understanding of the process is instrumental in the development of approaches. Interventions based on pupil voice are heavily reliant upon the adult implementing the support and, as such, no single coherent approach has been developed.

Finally, the literature review considered research from small schools (40-100 pupils), as the experiences of the CYP attending such small schools may be different to those attending larger schools. The available findings suggest that pupils attending small schools face particular challenges. However, research into the transition from small schools utilising the child's voice has been highly limited, with no UK research being published. Tentative findings suggest that pupils experience transition differently to their peers who attend larger schools, highlighting a range of benefits and particular challenges that arise from attending a small school.

Utilising pupil voice, the research presented in this thesis aims to address the gap in the literature and investigates how children who attend small schools understand the transition to secondary school. In addition to contributing to the knowledgebase on transition, pupil voice and small school research, the purpose is to develop a transition approach that is based on the CYP's perception of the transition process

and is supportive of the potentially unique issues faced by pupils attending small schools.

## **2.7. Current study**

### **2.7.1. Rationale**

This research is concerned with children's constructs of the move from a small primary school to secondary schools. These investigations are of importance as previous research has not yet been able to form a cohesive understanding of the transition from the pupils' perspective and previous research has focused on investigations into larger primary schools. Given the complex and potentially very different experiences of pupils attending small primary schools, it is imperative to investigate how pupils construct this significant life event. As such, this research directly addresses some of the aspects highlighted in the literature review of primary to secondary school transition by Jindal-Snape et al. (2019). Amongst a number of other enquiries, their recommendations include further investigations into different school sizes to explore the impact of the range of factors that may affect transition. Furthermore, they suggest that data collection should focus on information gathered from, not about, the pupil. Thus, this research directly addresses identified gaps in the existing literature and aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of primary-secondary school transition by taking the views of children from small schools into account.

### **2.7.2. Aim and research questions**

The aims of the research are twofold. Firstly, it explores how pupils from small schools construct the transition to secondary school. Secondly, based on the findings, it is aimed to make inferences about how to best support pupils who attend

small primary schools in their transition to secondary school. As such, the research questions (RQs) are:

1. How do Y6 pupils from small primary schools construct the transition to secondary school?
2. What strategies do pupils from small schools identify as helpful in the transition to secondary school?
3. How, and to what extent, can pupil voice support the primary-secondary school transition of pupils from small primary schools?



## **Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. Introduction to methodology**

Based on the literature review and aims of the current research, this chapter outlines the approach adopted for this research and the rationale of the implemented approaches. The following RQs are addressed:

1. How do Y6 pupils from small primary schools construct the transition to secondary school?
2. What strategies do pupils from small schools identify as helpful in the transition to secondary school?
3. How, and to what extent, can pupil voice support the primary-secondary school transition of pupils from small primary schools?

This chapter considers the ontological stance as well as the epistemological position of the research approach and includes the rationale and reflections on the chosen methods. It outlines ethical considerations and ethical approval prior to giving an account of the development of the materials, including a focus group pilot study. The main study includes the research design, details of the participants and the procedure implemented in this research. Finally, approaches to the data analysis and steps taken in the analysis are stated.

### **3.2. Ontology and Epistemology**

Research is not done in isolation and consideration needs to be given to the researcher's view of the world (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) as this influences the questions that are addressed and approaches used. Thus, research methodology is inextricably linked to the underlying philosophical assumptions made and consideration needs be given to those assumptions in the development of the

research design (Pawson, 1991). The experiences of a researcher are likely to affect their interpretation of a situation, attaching meaning to actions, based on a person's prior knowledge (Scott & Uscher, 1996). Thus, the current research paradigm and its interpretation are considered to be interdependent upon each other and build one another. As such, "subject and object are inseparable" (p. 452, Levering, 2006) and therefore not neutral. This builds on concepts proposed by Kuhn (1962) who noted that research paradigms allow researchers to have a common understanding of how issues are understood and therefore how they are addressed. This means that the way we view the world affects how questions are asked and answered.

Ontology can be viewed as the study of reality and/or existence and it is concerned with the nature of such a reality. Debates within the area of social research approaches consider whether a measurable reality exists or whether there are multiple interpretations of the reality, which are subjective (Willig, 2001). Whilst it is argued that reality exists (Bhaskar, 1978), it is important to acknowledge that researchers cannot make inference about the nature of this reality (Maxwell, 2012). As such, experiences of events are just that, and the experience is an interpretation/experience of the actual reality and is therefore somewhat independent from it (Bhaskar, 1978).

This research assumes an ontological position that pupils are social actors (Mayall, 2000), thus adopting the notion that children can (and should) be heard in matters that affect them. It also assumes that children are able to relay their view and that their view might differ from those around them. As such, this research is interpretivist in ontology, considering that there is no single external reality and that "meaning is constructed, not discovered" (p. 18, Bryman, 2004). Interpretivism is founded in relativism, allowing the reality to be subjective and different for every person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Thus, "reality is individually constructed; there are as many realities as individuals" (p. 11, Scotland, 2012) and that reality is shaped by language (Frowe, 2001). This implies that meaning is constructed through the existence of something and the conscious interpretation of it. As such, this research accepts that it is limited to the specific context in which it was developed and conducted.

Research is not done in isolation and is embedded in knowledge, which raises the question what we believe knowledge to be and how those beliefs about knowledge affect research enquiries. This is considered in the epistemological approach of research enquiries and the theory of knowledge. The way in which we view the world, and how this view affects the interpretation of events, impacts on how we believe we know what we know. Thus the nature of knowledge, its origins and limitations need to be considered.

The approach taken in the research presented in this thesis takes an interpretivist epistemological stance and is thus built on the belief that, whilst the world is independent of the human mind, its knowledge and interpretation is a human and social construction (Crotty, 1998). It is the interpretation of the knowledge that gives meaning and enables responses to the world (Balbi, 2008). As such, the research aims to understand meaning that individuals give to specific context and acknowledges that the findings are interpretations of individuals in the context of this research. The approach taken in this research allows multiple interpretations and 'realities' and views knowledge as being constructed.

In line with this epistemological stance this research adopts qualitative research methods as the tool for investigations, limiting the manipulations and restrictions associated with quantitative research methods. Qualitative research methods allow a 'wide-angle lens' approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2003) to investigate a socially constructed phenomenon. Whilst this allows more in-depth investigations, the results are considered to be more subjective than those obtained through quantitative research methods and thus limiting its scope for generalisation (Cohen et al., 2011).

### **3.3. Rationale for research methodology**

This research explores how children understand the transition to secondary school and accepts that the methods used create meaning from the pupils' interpretation of their 'reality'. In addition to this, the researcher's interpretation of the pupils'

responses is also embedded within their own life context and understanding of the world. This interpretivist paradigm is affected by nature of the research, which is not objective, and the (social) situation, thus affecting the circumstances in which the research is taking place (Bernstein, 1974).

Various methods of data collection were considered in the development of this study, including semi-structured interviews and more formal written approaches. Whilst these would have been in line with the interpretivist approach of this research, they were considered to be less practical and appropriate respectively. Interviews were deemed to be too time consuming with the number of children taking part in the research and it was considered important to gain insights from a range of children with different characteristics that attend different small schools. Initially, more formal (questionnaire-type) research methods were considered, however, these were found to be not sufficiently differentiated to ensure they were accessible to all pupils taking part in the research. It was decided that the three tasks outlined below offered the most appropriate approach to investigate how pupils describe the transition to secondary school. Its benefits include accessibility (not relying on a single form of data collection), pupils could be supported throughout the tasks (e.g. by a reader/scribe) and individual descriptions as well as group constructs could be identified. As such, the research approach offered the most flexible approach to gain in-depth insights into the issue.

### **3.4. Ethical considerations and approval**

This research was conducted in line with the ethical guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2014) and the ethical procedures specified by Birmingham University (see Appendix 1 for the submitted ethics form and final approval). Key ethical considerations aimed to address some of the potential issues arising from the research. These include informed consent (parental and CYP), which was appropriately differentiated for the pupils to ensure that it is accessible (see below). Furthermore, confidentiality was ensured by anonymising answers and not

linking details of the individual to the research. Also, the right to withdraw from the research was set out in the consent form and reiterated at the start of each research session. Further considerations included the potential distress experienced by the participants. Lewis and Lindsay (2000) argue that particular consideration needs to be given to children's age, cognitive ability and emotional state. In view of the nature of the topic, it was anticipated that pupils may feel vulnerable following the research as they may not have previously considered some of their concerns regarding the transition to secondary school. To address potential issues for individuals and/or groups, it was ensured that all questions were answered by the time the research was concluded and that pupils felt well-equipped to meet the perceived challenges arising from the transition.

### **3.5. Development of materials**

#### **3.5.1. Materials**

The study included three distinct tasks, building on each other in terms of depth of thinking and moving from individual descriptions to group constructs. Tasks are outlined in Table 2 below, linking investigations to the research aims. All tasks addressed the three RQs, allowing the participants to develop their understanding of the aspects of transition they feel are most prominent.

**Table 2:** Details of research tasks and aims

<b>Task</b>	<b>Individual/ Group</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Aim</b>
<b>1</b>	Individual	Starter task to encourage thinking of transition (positive and negative aspects), pupils were also encouraged to write down questions they may have regarding the transition.	Initial exploration of how pupils feel about the transition to secondary school; allowing pupils to engage in topic and explore their thoughts.
<b>2</b>	Individual	Worksheet, considering four areas of transition (primary school, secondary school, considerations before/after transition and things that important in the transition).	Starting to describe thoughts on the transition to secondary school in more detail.
<b>3</b>	Group	Complete 'road/map' to secondary school to explore prominent thoughts and feelings about the transition, development of individual ideas as a group and sharing of ideas/understanding of different aspects of transition.	Explore group constructs of transition; in-depth exploration of most prominent issues and development of strategies to support transition.

In the school context, pupils are used to completing tasks independently (Task 1 and 2) and working in groups (Task 3), thus it was considered appropriate to include both types of tasks. The materials were developed based on tasks that pupils typically complete as part of their schooling experience. This was deemed important, as pupils are familiar with certain lesson structures, which should help them navigate the tasks and focus on the new content. Many lessons are structured around a brief and independently completed starter activity, similar to the one presented in Task 1. The aim is to engage pupils in the topic and for the pupils to start considering different aspects of the topic. This is followed by a more in-depth exploration of the prominent

issues, which is reflected in the task demands of Task 2. Finally, many lessons are structured around a group discussion, sharing of learning and/or further exploration of the topic in a group context. Thus, Task 3 was considered an appropriate approach that allows pupils to reflect the prominent issues with others, to exchange ideas and to develop a shared understanding of the transition to secondary school.

Initially, the use of the materials was explored with children who were of transition age, including the researcher's children and their friends. This informal feedback confirmed that the tasks were balanced for accessibility and challenge. In addition to the informal approach outlined above, a more formal pilot focus group was conducted with a group of children attending an average sized primary school (see 3.5.2.).

The tasks encourage the development of pupil voice and support pupils to communicate their understanding of transition. This open-ended approach is less restrictive than other research techniques (e.g. questionnaires, interviews) and thus should allow the individual to develop their own 'voice'. However, it is also recognised that the nature of the tasks may inhibit the development of personal constructs, particularly in the group task. Some pupils may be reluctant to share their thoughts in a group setting and thus their 'voice' may not be captured in Task 3. To guard against this, the two preceding tasks were designed to offer support in the development of the individuals' voice and, even if not shared in the group setting, every child's voice is recorded (and later acknowledged/addressed) in the approach.

In the development of the materials and task approaches, it is important to acknowledge that the chosen approach is likely to affect the potential findings of the research. By choosing tasks that rely on adult guidance, it is recognised that pupils may be affected by the researcher's input. This is particularly important in the context of pupil voice, as pupils develop their understanding of transition throughout the research tasks and every group of pupils presents a unique combination of strengths and needs. Whilst the tasks and their explanations were standardised, there are likely to be variation in the delivery. This may affect how pupils approach the task.

### 3.5.1.1. Task 1

Initially, the group was presented with three paper bags with different emoji symbols on each bag, as well as 'post-it notes' to write down answers (see Figure 2 below). Emoji are thought to be an appropriate visual tool to elicit the child's voice (Fane et al., 2016), allowing children to interpret the facial expressions. Emoji were chosen to eliminate the bias arising from using labels as it was considered that labels using words such as 'excited/worried' would narrow the way in which children may describe the transaction.



**Figure 2:** Materials used in Task 1



### 3.5.1.2. Task 2

For the second task, participants were asked to complete a 'worksheet' that considered aspects of the primary and secondary school. Please see Figure 3 below for a blank worksheet.

The worksheet is a rectangular piece of paper placed on a wooden surface. It features a central diagram and four thought bubbles. The central diagram consists of two school building icons, one labeled 'Primary' and one labeled 'Secondary', connected by a curved arrow pointing from the primary to the secondary school. Surrounding this central diagram are four thought bubbles, each with a question and lines for writing:

- Top-left bubble: "What is primary school like?"
- Top-right bubble: "What is high school like?"
- Bottom-left bubble: "Before moving to high school...." and "Once I am at high school ....."
- Bottom-right bubble: "3 things that are important to me when moving to high school:" followed by three bullet points.

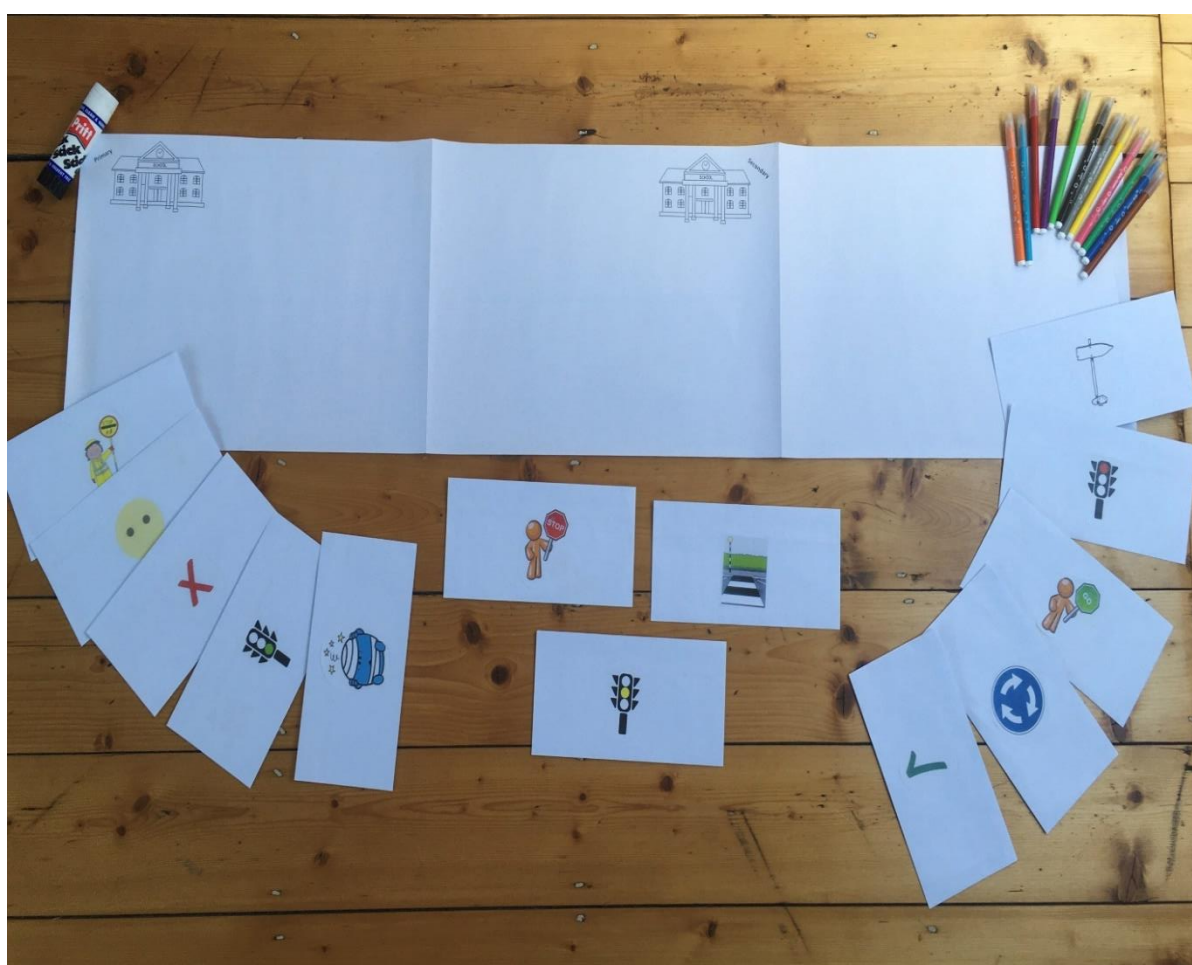
**Figure 3:** Worksheet for Task 2

Task 2 involved a worksheet and, based on findings from the pilot focus group research (see 3.5.2.), four specific aspects were given for the pupil to consider. These aspects included thoughts about primary school ('What it primary school like') and secondary school ('What is high school like'), followed by sentence starters that encouraged thinking about actions that the individual could take prior to and following

transition ('Before moving to high school...' and 'Once I am at high school...'). Finally, pupils were asked to consider '3 things that are important to me when moving to high school' and were encouraged to answer this question by using bullet points. Please note that the term 'high' school (as opposed to secondary school) was used for this task as the pilot research indicated that Y6 pupils tend to use the term high school.

### 3.5.1.3. Task 3

The final task was a group task, during which participants were encouraged to consider the 'road' to secondary school and to 'design' their own transition to secondary school. The task was open ended and each group was encouraged to consider the items they felt were most prominent. Figure 4 below depicts the materials and layout used in Task 3.



**Figure 4:** Materials used in Task 3

The materials used for the task consisted of a large sheet of paper, with a symbolic primary school being printed in the left top hand corner and a symbolic secondary school being printed at the top, around 2/3 along the paper (leaving room to insert responses further along). To facilitate conversations, pictures of generic symbols (blank emoji, Mr Bump, tick/cross, sign), alongside pictures of 'road signs' (stop, go, roundabout, traffic lights, zebra crossing, lollipop person), were given to the groups to use and interpret in any way they like. Multiple copies of each symbol were offered in envelopes. Glue was provided to stick the symbols on the large paper and coloured felt tip pens were used alongside pens/pencils.

### **3.5.2. Focus group**

The aim of the focus group was to practice the materials and procedure developed for this research, adapting the methods where needed. A pilot study was conducted with Y6 pupils from a medium-sized school in the area, which was run as a focus group (see Appendix 2 for information letter sent to the school). Information letters (Appendix 3 for parents and Appendix 4 for children) and consent forms were sent to 4 pupils and their parent/carers (Appendix 5 and 6 respectively), who were selected by the school. For three participants signed (parental/carers and child) consent was obtained and two boys and one girl participated in the focus group. One child was bilingual, with a mixed-European background and none had special educational needs.

The main purpose of this pilot study was to ensure that the tasks are accessible to the participants and that the investigations target the research questions. A more detailed account of the tasks can be found in the materials section (see 3.5.1.).

In the pilot study, children were first asked to independently write things that they are 'excited/worried' about and questions that they might have (for details see 3.5.1.1.). Pupils were able to access this task and wrote 1-3 items for each category. For the second tasks pupils complete the 'road' to secondary school (see 3.5.1.3. for details

of this task) and the group constructed their own interpretation of the task. It was noted that individuals were influenced by others' opinions, as they had not yet considered their own standpoint in enough detail. In addition to this, the task took a long time to complete, leaving no time for the final task (see 3.5.1.2. for details). This was partly due to the children writing on the 'road' themselves and negotiating the writing task. It was noted that pupils had limited 'feelings vocabulary' and they were unable to consider things/people that might help during the transition period. It was thus decided to present the last two tasks in reverse order, allowing each individual to form a more thorough development of their thoughts and feelings about transition prior to working with the whole group. Given the struggles pupils had in approaching the open-ended task, sentence starters and bullet points were introduced in the second individual task, encouraging pupils to consider their thoughts on transition in more detail. Thus, following the pilot study, the research materials were adjusted to make them more accessible to the pupils, whilst the intended measures remained consistent with the research enquiries.

### **3.6. Main study**

#### **3.6.1. School and pupil selection**

I approached eight small schools, who are part of a cluster of schools in a rural area in the north of a large shire county. The schools varied in size, with the smallest educating 25 pupils and the largest being attended by 67 pupils (average: 44 pupils). Year groups were found to vary in size, with the Y6 cohorts ranging from 2 to 9 pupils. At the time of the research, I had worked or offered to work with all schools on a half-termly basis as part of the local authority's offer. I emailed the named school contact with detailed information about my intended research, including the information sheet developed for this purpose (Appendix 7). School staff distributed the invitation to participate to all Y6 parents/carers and pupils of their school (Appendix 8 and 9 respectively) alongside the consent forms (see Appendix 10 for parental and Appendix 11 for pupil consent). Signed consent forms were collected by

school staff and only pupils for whom signed consent was given by the pupil and parent/carer were included in the research.

### **3.6.2. Participants**

A total of 34 (20 females and 14 males) Y6 pupils, from 8 small primary schools in the north of a large shire county, participated in this research (see 3.6.1. for school and participant selection). *All* Y6 pupils from the identified small primary schools were invited to participate in the research. Only those Y6 pupils for whom signed (parental and CYP) consent was given took part in the research.

Of the pupils that participated, nine were on the SEND register (stated needs include: autism, cerebral palsy, dyslexia and dyscalculia), two children were in receipt of free school meals, one child was previously looked after and none of the pupils had English as an additional language.

### **3.6.3. Procedure**

The research took place in June 2019, prior to the transition to secondary school and was completed with the whole cohort of each school, including all Y6 pupils for whom signed consent had been gained (group size between 2-8 pupils). The research was conducted in the primary school setting that the children attended, in a quiet room/area with the researcher and a trainee educational psychologist, acting as an assistant, present.

The study was set up as a group task, participants and the researcher were seated together at a table to encourage mutuality, although some elements of the research were completed independently. Throughout the process a Dictaphone was used to record the data collection process. Following introductions, information about confidentiality was discussed and it was ensured that (signed and informed) consent

had been given. The topic of transition was introduced and it was explained that the group would consider the upcoming transition to secondary school. Tasks were completed in the following order:

**Task 1 (individual task):** Following the instruction to 'think about the transition to secondary school', each group discussed what aspects about transition might be associated with each of the emoji/bags (see Figure 2 above). Typically, pupils decided to put items that they are 'excited about/looking forward to' in the bag pictured to the left, things that they are 'worried/concerned' about in the middle bag and 'questions' in the bag on the right, which depicts a question mark. Post-it notes were used to collect the data and items were written down by each student and placed in the bag. Answers remained anonymous, however, each pupil's answers were tracked by the colour pen used (this was done to link pupils to the data and to ensure potential safeguarding concerns could be followed up). Pupils were encouraged to complete at least one item for each of the three measures. The task lasted 5-10 minutes.

**Task 2 (individual task):** The worksheets (see Figure 3 above) were completed by each participant individually and scribes were offered to those who preferred to verbalise their thoughts. In addition to this, pupils were encouraged to record their answers via drawing, using single words or in any way they liked. When pupils felt that they could not complete a section they were gently encouraged to think about the topic and/or to write that they 'don't know' or are 'unsure'. The task took 10-20 minutes to complete.

**Task 3 (group task):** The group was encouraged to construct their 'road' to secondary school (see Figure 4 above), using the symbols provided and sticking them on to the paper with glue. Participants were encouraged to use the symbols in any way they liked and the researcher made notes of the prominent points of the discussion. All responses were recorded and the groups negotiated what aspects were important to them and should therefore be elaborated on. The task lasted 15-30 minutes.

Following the completion of the three tasks, the researchers ensured that all questions that were raised in Task 1 were answered and addressed the questions that were not covered in the group discussion. Furthermore, a short group discussion was used to summarise the positive and negative aspects of the transition, ensuring that all pupils' input had been acknowledged. Finally, participants were invited to ask any question they may have and reminded that they are free to withdraw consent if they wish to do so. Typically, each research session lasted between 45-90 minutes, depending on the number of participants in a group and the type and amount of questions that were raised during the tasks.

### **3.7. Approach to data analysis**

The data collected was qualitative, focusing on text and its meaning as the object of analysis (Bernard & Ryan, 1998). Interpretation of the data depends on the research approach taken. Given that the epistemological stance of this research is interpretivist, thematic analysis (TA) was chosen as a data analysis tool. TA involves the identification, analysis and interpretation of themes in qualitative data is theoretically not bound to any particular epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006), highlighting that "thematic analysis is not one approach" (p. 739, Braun & Clarke, 2015). Braun and Clarke (2019) refer to their revised approach to TA as reflexive TA, emphasising the need to match the underlying assumptions of the research to the analysis approach taken and making the connection between concept and practice explicit.

The aim of this analysis is to extract meaning and experiences that are constructed, rather than summarising the truth for an individual. In addition to this, whilst most approaches to thematic analysis acknowledge the role of the researcher in the analysis (e.g. Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012), there is a lack of consensus as to how TA deals with (more obvious) semantic meaning and the (less obvious) latent themes that are in the data. Semantic interpretation through TA organises and describes the data according to the explicit meaning and relates to broader issues

(e.g. Patton, 1990). Latent TA relies on the interpretation of the data, creating meaning, assumptions and identification of underlying ideas of the data and is, as such, rooted in a constructionism (Burr, 1995). The data collected varied in their nature, with the first two tasks creating narrower findings that lend themselves to be analysed via a more semantic TA, whereas Task 3 is qualitatively different (allowing deeper exploration of issues) and thus creating data that lends itself to a more latent TA analysis. Given that the data was analysed as one complete set (investigating the same issue), it is deemed appropriate to analyse the data via a predominantly latent TA that incorporates aspects of semantic TA features.

Braun and Clarke (2019) argue that a reflexive TA approach acknowledges the role of the researcher, from the theoretical foundation to the interpretation of the data. This is in line with the approach taken for this research and TA is used within a constructionist approach, making use of TA as a predominantly latent framework. As such, the approach adopted for the analysis is in line with reflexive TA (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

### **3.8. Steps taken in data analysis**

The data was analysed by adopting a 6-phase TA, as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The phases are outlined below, including my approach/actions taken. An example theme, illustrating how themes and sub-themes were constructed, is detailed in Appendix 12.

#### **Phase 1- Familiarisation with data**

I read the data 6 times prior to engaging in any analysis. Through this process I started to notice similarities in the data and initial ideas were formed. I realised that the data needed to be presented in a more coherent format and typed up the data from Task 1 and 2 (see Appendix 13 for evidence for Phase 1). The data produced by Task 3 appeared qualitatively different and was thus initially separated. At this point, my comprehension of the data developed and I understood it in terms of



positive/negative aspects of transition, concerns around the practicalities around the new school and a focus on friendship.

### **Phase 2- Generating initial codes**

Initial codes were produced on the basis of the data (focusing on data from Task 1 and 2). Whilst some of the data fell into obvious categories and many data entry points were repetitions of each other (e.g. secondary school as an opportunity to make new friends), there was a wide range of data that required a more thorough interpretation of meaning. In this step, I organised the data according to meaning (Tuckett, 2005), based on very broad units and applied initial codes. At this stage, I typed up the data from Task 3 and integrated it into the data analysis, labelling it as data produced from Task 3 for later identification (see Appendix 14 for an example of these broad units). This was done as the analysis so far suggested that the content of all data was similar across all tasks, leading to the same initial codes. My understanding of the data was refined during this phase and I considered the more complex aspects, including the opportunity transition offers in terms of personal growth.

### **Phase 3- Searching for themes**

In phase 3, I moved away from colour-coding individual data entry points according to codes and started categorising them into broader themes. To manage the large amount of data, I used tables that allowed multiple themes and codes to be grouped (see Appendix 15). Alongside this, I started to use mind-maps that captured the data, starting to link and organise the themes. An early version of a thematic map is presented in Appendix 16. Whilst creating the thematic map, the data was understood in terms of three main themes, each supported by sub-themes.

### **Phase 4- Reviewing themes**

This phase was marked by two distinct tasks. Initially, I reviewed the coded data and ensured that the themes and sub-themes represented a complete and rational reflection of the original data. Some items were moved, to ensure a best fit between the data and (sub-) themes.

For the second task in this phase, I considered how/whether the themes are continuing to fit my understanding of the data and/or whether I need to re-code items. During this phase it became apparent that themes were connected by the notion of change and the data was considered to be best understood in terms of how change affects transition and/or how transition is change. Furthermore, it was considered that for all sub-themes, pupils considered a range of strategies that may be helpful in overcoming issues with the transition. Thus, a link from the themes to an overarching concept of strategies was included in the thematic map. A number of variations of thematic maps were created to reflect the changes in my understanding of the data (see Appendix 17 for examples).

#### **Phase 5- Defining and naming themes**

During this phase, I refined the thematic map, re-considering the names of themes and sub-themes as well as considering the connections between themes. In addition to this, two sub-themes were collapsed as the data was better reflected within a single sub-theme. By the end of this phase the final thematic map was created (see Appendix 18). As part of this process, it was acknowledged that there was a small number of data entries that were not included in the analysis because they were unclear in their meaning and/or considered extraneous information, unconnected to the topic (see Appendix 19 for data entry examples excluded from the final analysis).

#### **Phase 6- Producing the report**

Braun and Clarke (2006) include this step in their TA as it is a crucial step in communicating the findings. The findings are presented below in the results section.

## Chapter 4: RESULTS

### 4.1. Introduction

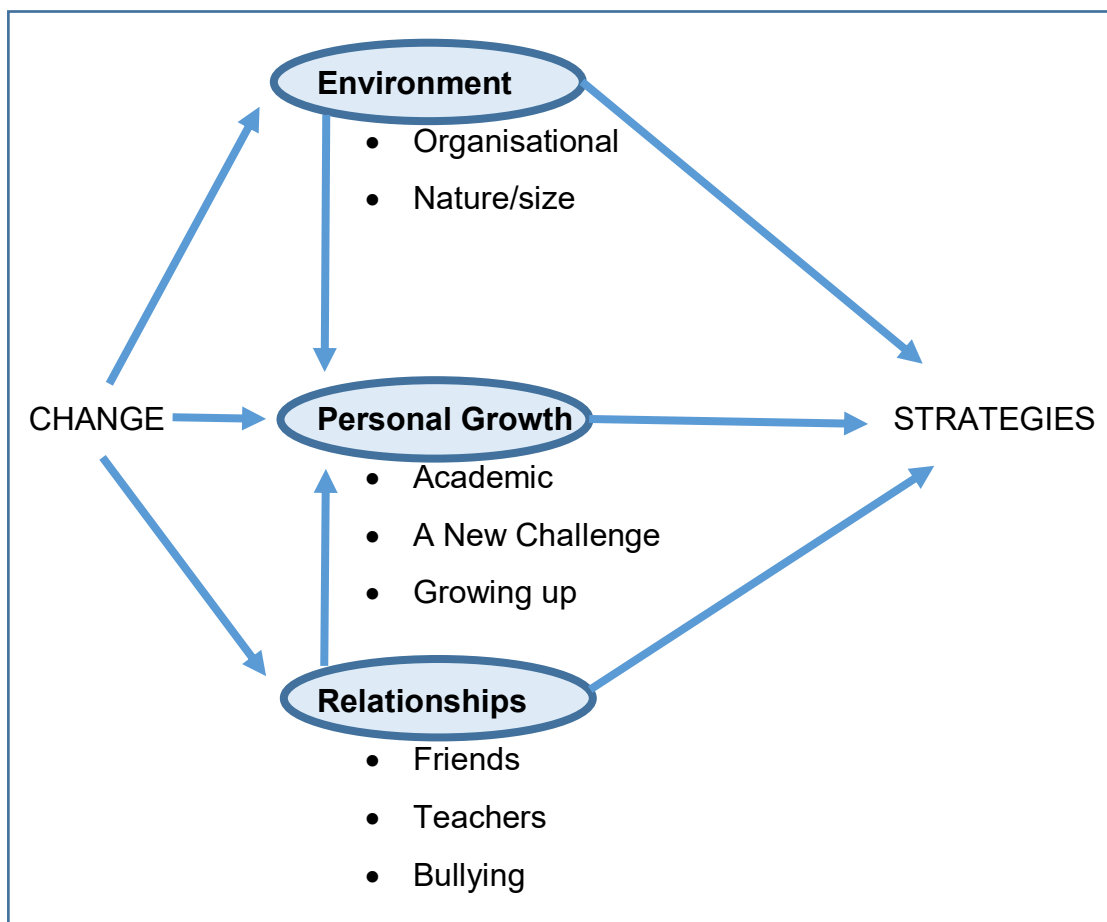
In this chapter the results are presented in light of the final thematic map that was created, describing key and sub-themes in detail prior to exploring links between themes. The concept of change is introduced and pupils' strategies highlight how this change may be addressed. Finally, considerations into how pupils develop constructs are explored.

Throughout the report, direct quotations from pupils are integrated in the text and are presented in single quotation marks and italics. Furthermore, each quotation is linked to its source, either by referencing the number of the individual participant (PPT, 1-34) or by referring to the group of participants (G, 1-8) who contributed the extract. Some identical quotations were given in the same context by multiple participants, in which case they are referenced to a randomly chosen participant. Appendix 20 shows an overview of basic demographic information of all participants and Appendix 21 details information regarding school/year group size for each of the schools.

The data is considered to be a homogenous unit, which reflects the data in its entirety. In referring to the data as a whole, it is important to acknowledge that each individual pupil contributed a unique set of data. As such, the individual pupil that contributed a referenced quotation is taken as a sample of the (sub) theme. Whilst this approach allows reference to the construct (strengthening its meaning), it may not capture the view of each individual participant. In the following, the results are referenced to 'the pupils', despite not every pupil necessarily contributing to every construct (or indeed agreeing with every construct). Given the summative nature of TA and the quest for over-arching themes, it is considered appropriate to refer to 'the pupils' as a group whose constructs, as a whole, are reflected in the results/findings.

## 4.2. Thematic Map

Based on the TA, a thematic map was created that captures the data set in its entirety. Figure 5 below depicts the thematic map, which comprises of three key themes, each being supported by 2/3 sub-themes. All themes are connected by an underlying construct of change and lead to strategies that aid the transition.



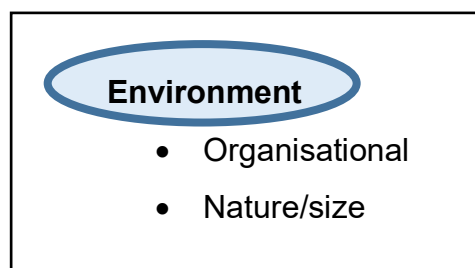
**Figure 5:** Full thematic map, highlighting themes (in ovals), sub-themes (bullet points) and the connections between themes and change/strategies

Three key themes were developed from the data: Environment, Personal Growth and Relationships and each theme is supported by sub-themes. These three key themes capture how Y6 pupils from small schools construct the transition to secondary school and the results will be presented on a theme-by-theme basis. This includes

the strategies that pupils consider to be helpful, linking the data from all sub-tasks. Following this, consideration is given to the connection between themes.

### 4.3. Theme 1: Environment

The key theme Environment summarises constructs in terms of changes in the (physical) setting (in comparison to the primary school) and the feelings associated with this. The pupils construct changes in the Environment in terms of organisational changes and changes in the nature/size of the school. Figure 6 below depicts the key and sub themes.



**Figure 6:** Key theme Environment with its sub-themes (organisational and nature/size).

#### 4.3.1. Organisational

Overall, the sub theme organisational emphasises the pupils' constructs of how their organisational skills may need to adapt due to the transition and the new environment that they will be entering. These are perceived as demands placed upon them and are, largely, suggested to be a negative (rather than a positive) change. Changes include: finding the way around the school, the journey to/from school, logistics, being late and specific issues that pupils may have.

As part of the organisational demands, the pupils are concerned about '*finding my way around (and) getting lost*' (PPT12) in the new environment, indicating that they

believe the environment to be significantly different. This is in contrast to their feelings about primary school, as it is *'easy to get around primary'* (G5), supporting the notion that change is anticipated.

In addition to this, the pupils talked about the journey to and from school. For example, the pupils question what *'getting to school on the bus and back on the bus'* (PPT13) will be like, including concerns about *'who will be on the bus? (and) where will I catch the bus?'* (PPT34). The change is perceived as significant (*'I've never been in a taxi/bus'*, G3) and mainly negative (*'I'd prefer to go in my mum's car'*, G3). The pupils have mixed feelings about *'being on my own for the first time'* (G5) and understand the implications of this change in terms of it being *'different and earlier'* (G4).

Furthermore, the sub theme organisational is supported by the pupils' understanding of the logistical changes following transition. As yet, the pupils had not yet developed an understanding of the logistics of the new environment, leading to questions being raised. These include concerns about *'more homework'* (PPT18) and issues around the running of the school day (e.g. *'what time is break?'*, PPT34; *'how many people will be in my class?'*, PPT25). This indicates that pupils are aware of the changes in how primary and secondary schools are managed and that the logistics of the two settings are likely to be different.

As a result of the anticipated organisational changes, the pupils are *'a bit confused'* (G2), with some feeling significant amounts of pressure (*'I might be sick because I am anxious'*, G2). The pupils were able to address (some of) the issues raised by developing strategies that they felt may be helpful. The pupils suggested that, overall, they *'have to be more organised and more focused'* (PPT12) and to develop a range of practical strategies that they felt would support them in addressing the organisational changes. These include *'practice catching the bus'* (PPT34), *'get all my school uniform'* (PPT24) ready and *'learn how to tie it (a tie)'* (G5). In addition to this, the pupils identified that *'exploring the school'* (PPT25) as helpful and wondered if they could *'get a day with just the Y7's so that we get to know the place a bit more'*

(PPT24). Furthermore, personal connections were identified as being positive; in both, the context of the journey to school (*'I know some people in the taxi/bus'* (G8) and within the school (*'knowing someone that works there'* (was identified as) *comforting'*, G2). Taken together, the sub theme organisational captures the concerns of the pupils about the perceived structural changes. Thus, pupils are able to not only reflect on these potential changes, but they also consider what or who may help in overcoming these challenges.

#### **4.3.2. Nature/Size**

The sub theme nature/size captures how the pupils construct the difference between primary and secondary school in terms of what each school offers and whether it is perceived as positive and/or negative. The pupils categorised the change in environment in terms of change in size and associated structure of the respective environments. The change is dominated by the issue of school size and the change from a (small) primary school to a (large) secondary school.

Regarding school size, the pupils describe primary school as *'small'* (PPT30) and believe that *'there will be a big difference when I move to high school'* (PPT25). Secondary school is thought to be *'HUGE'* (PPT9) and *'a lot bigger than my primary'* (G8). The pupils talked about school size as factual statements and there is little value associated to the size as such. Whilst the impact of school size was found to be a distinct construct, it is also raised when highlighted by other findings.

Whilst primary school is constructed as largely positive and described as *'fun, exciting'* (PPT31) and *'excellent'* (PPT32), the pupils also described it as *'a bit boring'* (PPT10). Mainly, the constructs of secondary school are governed by the notion that a larger school has *'a lot more people there'* (PPT24). Even though there were some concerns around *'seeing a lot more faces'* (PPT25), the pupils also believe that others at secondary school are *'friendly'* (PPT34).

In contrast to the comments about primary school being '*boring*' (PPT13) the pupils associated secondary school with '*lots of clubs*' (PPT21), stating '*I am excited about all the new activities*' (PPT11). This reflects an effect of the change in the environment (going from a small school to a large school) and indicates that the nature of the school is perceived to be different. However, overall, the data suggests that pupils found it difficult to create a coherent construct of secondary school, summarised by a pupil emphasising his uncertainties by wondering '*what a bigger school is like?*' (PPT1).

On the surface, these changes appear simple, however, pupils' constructs are less clearly defined and less developed in terms of their implications. Thus, pupils were less able to think about and formulise ways in which to adapt to address the changes in the schools' nature/size. This is most likely due to the uncertainties of what it means to attend a larger school and the unknown implications of the change. Pupils construct the transition as a '*big change because it is not even 100 people (at primary school) and there are over 1000 (in secondary school)*' (G2). At primary, pupils experience safety through '*I know everyone*' (PPT34) and '*I feel like I am cheered on*' (G3). Yet, secondary is thought of as '*better because (it is) wider and feels more right and (has) more space*' (G4). This emphasises a conflict between the values pupils hold about their primary and secondary school.

#### **4.3.3. Theme 1 summary**

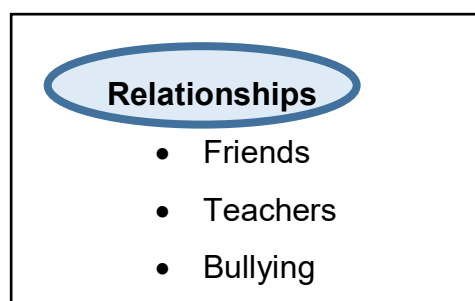
One way in which the pupils construct the transition to secondary school is in terms of changes to their surroundings, which is denoted by the key theme Environment. Two sub themes support this construct; organisational changes and the nature/size of the new school. Regarding organisational changes, the pupils raised concerns about the logistics (e.g. finding their way around), which the pupils perceive as pressure. However, the pupils developed a range of strategies they considered to be helpful in addressing organisational issues, including practical approaches and people who may help them. The pupils also felt that secondary school would be very



different in terms of its nature and size. Whilst primary school is considered to be small (and fun), secondary school is thought to be big, with pupils being less able to define the implications of the size of school. Taken together, the key theme Environment emphasises that the pupils consider the transition to place new demands on them in terms of navigating their new surroundings.

#### 4.4. Theme 2: Relationships

The key theme Relationships is supported by three sub-themes, which, taken together summarise the constructs of the perceived changes in Relationships. The sub-themes friends, teachers and bullying show how the pupils construct the current connections to others and how these may change as a result of the transition. Bullying is constructed in terms of how it may be different in secondary school. Figure 7 below depicts the key and sub themes.



**Figure 7:** Key theme Relationships with its sub-themes (friends, teachers and bullying).

##### 4.4.1. Friends

The pupils consider friends to be important as '*lots of friends*' (PPT27) help to feel '*less worried*' (PPT26) and said that friends '*stick up for you*' (G5). Friendships at primary school were described as positive and the pupils felt that the years in primary schools has given them a chance to '*make lots of friends*' (PPT26) as '*everyone is*

*friendly'* (PPT29) and *'we all get on really well'* (PPT2). The pupils are aware that the change in school is likely to affect their friendships and make sense of this in terms of a loss of friendships (*'I will be emotional and miss everyone'*, PPT29). To ensure the loss of old friendships has less negative impact, the pupils suggest that *'spending time with friends you'll leave'* (G6) is a good approach. They said that it *'is easy to make friends'* (G7) in a small school but that it might be more challenging at secondary school because there are *'lot of people...some are older, some are mean and some are nice'* (G7). In addition to this, pupils are concerned that *'you won't meet as many people because there are a lot more people'* (G3), feeling that *'distance and rushing around (leaves) no time to chat'* (G3). However, the larger space also offers opportunity in relation to avoiding peers as *'if there is somebody you don't get on there is more space to get away'* (G8).

In addition to feeling that the transition will result in a loss of friendships, pupils also constructed the move to high school in terms of making new friends. The opportunity to make new friends is perceived as both exciting and worrying. The pupils feel that they have the *'chance to make new friends'* (PPT23) and are *'excited to make new friends'* (PPT17). Yet, the development of new friendships is not only perceived as positive and whilst pupils feel confident and *'happy that I'll make other friends as well'* (PPT11), the pupils are also concerned about *'what will happen if I cannot find a friend?'* (PPT3). The pupils are *'nervous about making new friends'* (PPT11) and are concerned about *'having no friends and being alone'* (PPT21). Furthermore, *'making new friends could be nerve wrecking because you don't know what they are like'* (G2), emphasising the difficulties in developing new friendships. Thus, pupils construct the transition to affect their friendships in terms of the loss of old friendships (perceived as negative) and the opportunity to develop new friendships (perceived as both, exciting and worrying).

To address the changes in friendships, the pupils developed a range of supportive strategies. When *'making friends'* (PPT4) it is considered to be important to *'be yourself (and) don't try to be someone you are not'* (G5). Also, the pupils are thinking about how to choose friends (*'don't be with people you don't want to friends with'*, G5)

and believe that certain peers may make better friends (*'try to make friends (that are) the same age so that they understand what you like'*, G7). In order to make friends, the pupils have developed a range of strategies. These include *'go up to them- in a nice way'* (G4) and *'get (their) name and phone number and meet them'* (G3). Yet, it is acknowledged that *'it's hard to go up to them because you don't know them'* (G4). This feeling is mediated by knowing other people in school, particularly *'having my siblings there'* (PPT1) and getting to know new people might be easier because others may *'know your brother'* (G4). All pupils in the sample were educated in mixed-age classes and were therefore familiar with older peers going to high school. It was felt that this is positive, as *'older friends can help you at high school'* (G7) when, for example, making new friends.

#### 4.4.2. Teachers

The personality of the teachers at secondary school is a concern to the pupils, as they are *'worried about what the new teachers will be like?'* (PPT16). The pupils construct teachers at primary school to have different characteristics (*'kind'*, PPT24 and *'less strict'*, PPT17) compared to the characteristics of teachers at secondary school (*'teachers are going to be more strict'*, PPT21). The pupils believe that *'teachers (at secondary school) might be strict because at primary school it's relaxed'* (G5), particularly in relation to *'school uniform'* (G8) and being *'told off for being late'* (G6). Although there is the notion that secondary school teachers *'are strict when you are naughty'* (G4), the pupils also believe that they are *'nice when (there) is no need to be strict'* (G5).

Whilst the pupils feel that *'I will miss all the (primary) teachers'* (PPT32), they believe that saying *'a proper goodbye to my teachers'* (PPT23) will help them in moving to the new school. In order to settle into the new school, pupils would like to know *'what teachers I have'* (PPT14) and *'getting to know the teachers'* (PPT7). The pupils would *'like teachers that understand you and your difficulties'* (G5) and teachers that *'listen to you'* (G5). The pupils were found to be concerned about teachers not being

supportive (*'if you struggle they don't come and help you'*, G5) or teachers being unfair if, for example, if they *'have a favourite student (or) don't care when somebody is doing something wrong'* (G5). Having new teachers is also perceived to be an opportunity (*'different chances'*, G7) and to *'get to know lots of teachers'* (G7) was identified as a positive strategy to overcome the potential difficulties arising from the change in teachers.

#### **4.4.3. Bullying**

Pupils' experiences of bullying at primary varied from *'no one ever gets bullied'* (PPT21) to *'children can be mean'* (PPT16). However, even children who experienced bullying felt that it was a relatively minor issue (*'I am picked on easily, but (am) fine'*, PPT3). Pupils' constructs of bullying at secondary are vague and mainly focus on the general notion of bullying. These include being *'worried that I'm going to be bullied'* (PPT2) and questioning *'whether people are kind to me'* (PPT16). Also, the pupils wonder how bullying is dealt with at secondary school and *'if bullying happens, does it immediately get stopped?'* (PPT2).

There is an understanding that *'there will be bullies at secondary school because there are so many people'* (G5), supporting the notion that school size impacts on bullying. This is in contrast to primary school, as it is *'too small of a school to have bullies (and pupils) don't feel as much pressure (and/or) don't need attention here'* (G3). This suggests that primary school is constructed as a safe space, in which bullying is less prominent.

Whilst pupils' constructs of the nature of bullying at secondary school are fairly broad and under-defined, there is an understanding that bullying can take different forms, including *'cyber-bullying, emotional bullying and physical bullying'* (G5). The focus is on bullying in the context of getting physically hurt (*'my brother says there is a lot of fighting on the bus'*, G4). Hence, the pupils only consider the school's response in

terms of physical bullying. As such, they are concerned that *'older children might beat you up'* (G6), but believe that *'they'd be stupid to hit you (as) they get isolation'* (G6).

The pupils are able to draw on a wide range of strategies to deal with bullying. These range from practical strategies to avoid bullying (e.g. *'don't sit on the top or the back of the bus'*, G4; *'don't retaliate- it gets boring for the bullies'*, G5) to actions that can be taken if being bullied (e.g. *'tell an adult (or) contact the NSPCC'*, G2). Overall, the pupils believe adults are key in dealing with bullying and that if you *'don't tell someone nothing happen...because nobody knows about it'* (G4). This is also reflected in the belief that *'everything will be fine (if) you talk to a trusted adult'* (G2).

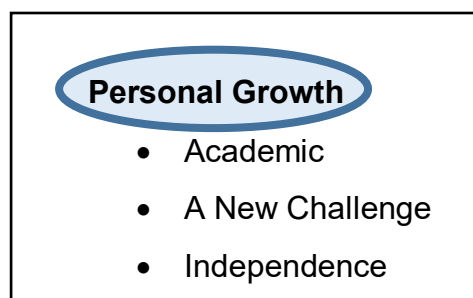
#### **4.4.4. Theme 2 summary**

The key theme Relationships captures pupils' constructs in terms of changes to their connection to others, focusing on friends, teachers and bullying. The sub theme friends summarises pupils' feelings of loss of friendships and making of new friends, with strategies being suggested as to how to make new friends. The pupils also felt their relationship to teachers will be different at secondary school, with teachers being stricter and more changes of teachers being anticipated. Finally, the pupils considered the concept of bullying and, overall, felt that bullying is more likely in secondary school. To address the potential issues of bullying, the pupils listed a range of strategies, including behavioural approaches (e.g. do not retaliate) and support from others (e.g. trusted adults). Overall, the key theme Relationships captures pupils' constructs that the transition impacts on *who* and *how* they connect with others at school.

#### **4.5. Theme 3: Personal Growth**

The key theme Personal Growth is concerned with how pupils feel the transition to secondary affects their character and changes their development. Whilst aspects of

personal growth underpin all areas of transition, pupils constructs concerning their development was found to be predominantly in relation to three key areas. The three sub-themes include academic development and independence (a sense of growing up) as well as transition being understood in terms of a new challenge. Figure 8 below depicts the key theme Personal Growth and its sub themes.



**Figure 8:** Key theme Personal Growth with its sub-themes (academic, a new challenge and independence).

#### **4.5.1. Academic**

The pupils feel that the transition will affect their academic development and that the secondary school will place different demands upon them, whilst offering more opportunities. Secondary school is felt to offer '*a better education*' (PPT16) and '*promises high standards of learning*' (PPT7). The pupils recognise that secondary school offers '*more opportunities*' (PPT30) and largely feel that this is a positive aspect of the transition ('*I think it will be good because you get to so more fun PE and fun science*', PPT14). Generally, the increase in the number of subjects offered is thought of as '*good because you get to learn new things (and you can be) doing the right subjects for your career*' (G2).

The academic demands are thought to change as '*primary school is easier than high school*' (PPT11) and that secondary school is '*harder work*' (PPT18). The pupils did not expand what harder work might be like, but felt that '*a little bit of (academic)*

*pressure is alright'* (G2). Yet, the pupils also felt uncertain about their ability to meet the new (academic) demands, and wonder *'will I be good at the work? (and) will I do well in tests?'* (PPT9). In addition to this, the pupils also raised concerns about the increase in homework at secondary school (*'they give you (an) overload of homework'*, G5) and that homework *'might be hard'* (G6). Furthermore, the pupils believe that the rules around homework at secondary school might be stricter and that if you *'forget it...you get detention'* (G6). To address the demands, the pupils felt that they would like to *'always work hard'* (PPT20), to *'do my best'* (PPT24) and to *'keep focused'* (PPT19) when at secondary school. Reasons for this include a desire *'to learn more'* (PPT25) and to be *'developing my learning'* (PPT6).

In order to address the perceived academic pressures the pupils felt that setting according to academic ability is *'good because they show you were you are'* (G7) and that the work is *'at the right level'* (G7). The pupils understand that they *'can change set, (which) can be good or bad, (with moving) up (being considered as) clever, (whilst moving) down (is) bad (as it implies that the pupil is) not smart'* (G5). It is acknowledged that *'everyone makes mistakes (and learning happens when) you don't make this mistake again'* (G3), suggesting that the pupils believe that they have capacity for learning and development. To help dealing with the academic pressures, the pupils also considered practical strategies (*'a planner helps'*, G5) and felt that the best approach is to *'just get it done'* (G3).

#### **4.5.2. A New Challenge**

The transition is considered to be *'a big change'* (PPT17), because the pupils have *'been at primary for so long'* (G6). This change is thought to be *'challenging but fun'* (PPT20), which leaves the pupils feeling *'excited and nervous for it'* (PPT1). The pupils have mixed feelings about moving to secondary school and consider it to be a *'strange'* (G2) and an *'exiting change'* (G8) that *'will be 'awesome'* (PPT8) and *'scary'* (PPT2) at the same time. The change may be *'challenging because of the amount of people there'* (PPT26) and *'scary- you are one of the young ones again'* (PPT2),

indicating apprehension towards the forthcoming transition. Yet, it is also thought to be *'an adventure (and) a place to start over again'* (PPT6).

Thus, the pupils expressed mixed feelings about the transition and constructed the challenge it in terms of being *'just different'* (G8) and therefore *'weird'* (PPT19). The pupils wonder *'will I fit in?'* (PPT2) at secondary school and question *'will I settle in?'* (PPT1). This challenge is perceived both, unsettling (*'will I get judged for my dyslexia?'*, PPT31) and positive because *'there will be other people like me'* (PPT16). Overall, the pupils feel that, despite their concerns, they are likely to settle in and identify their peers as a source of support (*'I am really scared for high school but I have friends that I know will help me'*, PPT1). The pupils acknowledge that it takes time to settle in, although the length of time might vary for individuals, with some feeling that *'once you have done a week or two you'll know'* (G5), whereas others feel that they make take longer (*'...by the time I get to know everyone, 2 months'*, G4).

To deal with the challenges, the pupils *'want to have fun there (the secondary school) in all things that are new to me'* (PPT6) and try *'to be happy'* (PPT21). Strategies as to how to achieve this are fairly vague and include *'don't get worried'* (PPT5), *'shine out in the things you love doing'* (G7) and *'to stay calm'* (PPT2). The pupils also identified that they may be challenged by the changes and need to be *'taking chances'* (G7). The pupils identified *'friends and doing the work'* (G2) as supportive factors in dealing with the challenges arising from the transition to secondary school. Friendships in small primary schools may develop over different year groups (due to children being educated in mixed-aged classes), which may lead to a breakdown in friendships when *'my best friend is not going this year, so I won't see her as often'* (G2).

#### **4.5.3. Independence**

The pupils associate the transition with an increase in autonomy and *'more independence'* (PPT12), as part of the general process of growing up. Being *'more*



*mature and not acting like a kid*' (G7) is considered to be positive, *'because you are like a young adult (and) trusted to do more stuff'* (G7). The pupils judge themselves ready to be *'moving on'* (PPT19) and feel that their behaviours may change in that they *'try to be less silly and more reliable'* (PPT23). The pupils feel that they have to learn many new skills and that, as a result of these, they *'will be more independent and used to it'* (PPT12) at secondary school. These skills include practical aspects (*'I want to be able to catch the bus and not worry'*, PPT34 and *'be organised'*, PPT15) and more general developmental traits (*'I will be more sensible'*, PPT14 and *'not be afraid to tell someone something'*, PPT16). Overall, the pupils have a sense that the transition to secondary school is linked to being more *'grown up'* (PPT30) and a move away from the *'place where I grew up'* (PPT6).

The pupils also feel that they would *'want to make the most of primary'* (PPT19) before attending secondary school (e.g. *'win a tournament of football'*, PPT4 or *'go on a fun school trip'*, PPT11). Emphasis is given *'to enjoy the time I have before the summer'* (PPT20), whilst at secondary school there is an expectation to *'being more responsible'* (G7). This suggests that there is a shift in identity, with the pupils constructing themselves as less *'grown up'* (G7) whilst attending primary school and more *'grown up'* (G7) at secondary school. However, the pupils also feel that, at primary school, the adults *'treat us like kids when we are capable of keeping ourselves safe'* (G4), which indicated tensions between pupils' self-identity and the independence offered by their surroundings.

Furthermore, there is conflict around the pupils' feelings of being *'more responsible, (which) feels sometimes annoying and sometimes good'* (G7). The pupils do not like the increase in responsibilities (e.g. *'feed pets'*, G7), whilst they appreciate the new freedoms associated with independence (e.g. *'trusted to do more stuff (and handling) money'*, G7). The pupils relate secondary school to a *'finish (and) look forward to finishing because you get your job (and) make money to buy homes and cars'* (G8). The constructs suggests that finishing school is a desirable goal and that *'you've learnt everything and you don't need to learn anymore'* (G8).

The pupils considered a range of strategies that may be helpful in their development of independence. They acknowledge that they may feel *'nervous (or) unsafe'* (G6) and were able to identify people that may be able to offer support (e.g. *'pupils, older siblings, friends, teachers, supportive people'*, G6). The pupils felt that *'tak(ing) care of each other'* (G7) and *'sharing worries (by) talk(ing) to a friend'* (G2) were important strategies to be *'safe'* (G6). In addition to this, the pupils identified a range of practical strategies that help them to become more independent, including road safety (e.g. *'stop, look, listen'*, G5) and how to deal with issues arising at school (e.g. if you have *'forgotten your books (you can) explain it to the teacher'*, G5). However, overall, the pupils felt that *'you know it's alright'* (G2) at secondary school, although *'you were worried before'* (G2) the transition.

#### **4.5.4. Theme 3 summary**

The key theme Personal Growth emphasises pupils' view that the transition presents a chance for development, particularly in relation to academic progress, as a new challenge and a step towards independence. Regarding the academic changes, pupils believe that secondary school will present both, academic challenges (e.g. more difficult work) and academic opportunities (e.g. variety of subjects). Furthermore, pupils considered the transition to be a new challenge, summarising the belief that the change is thought to be significant and both, exciting and demanding. Pupils belief that they can overcome the challenges over time. Finally, pupils felt that the transition affects their independence, increasing both, their freedom and responsibility. Thus, the key theme Personal Growth reflects pupils' construct that the transition is part of the 'growing-up' process.

#### **4.6. Links between the three key themes**

The three key themes Environment, Relationships and Personal Growth capture pupils' central constructs in relation to the transition to secondary school. Whilst the

key themes are autonomous and independently describe aspects of transition that are important to pupils, they are also linked. Underlying all aspects of transition is the opportunity for Personal Growth, thus the key themes Environment and Relationships support the key theme of Personal Growth. This is indicated in Figure 5 (see 4.2.) by the arrows, leading from the key themes Environment and Relationships to Personal Growth.

The constructs within the key theme Environment highlight how the changes in the environment affect the pupils' engagement with the new setting. Emphasis is given to a perceived increase in demands due to the changes in the organisational structure and the nature/size of the secondary school. The pupils perceive these changes as challenging (negative), yet also emphasise the opportunities offered following the transition (positive). Thus, the environmental changes are thought to be supportive of Personal Growth, enabling pupils to develop a range of independence skills.

The link between Relationships and Personal Growth is illustrated by how the pupils feel transition will affect their relationships with others, which is perceived as both, a loss of existing relationships and a chance to make new bonds. Underlying this is the notion of '*moving on*' (PPT19), reflecting on the value of their current relationships and how they would like to develop future relationships. Pupils' constructs around relationships are seen as an opportunity to utilise a range of skills, aimed at improving the nature of their relationships. Whilst the loss of some relationships is perceived as negative, the pupils understand it as foreseeable change and feel enabled to plan for it. Thus, the changes in Relationships support and/or reinforce Personal Growth.

#### **4.7. The concept of change**

Transition is constructed as a change, which underlies all key- and sub-themes. Mostly, pupils understand change in positive terms, such as a chance to develop new skills and negative terms such as the loss of the known circumstances. Uncertainties

arise from the pupils not yet knowing the true extent to which the transition is going to affect them and what their experiences of the new school will be. Despite their lack of direct experiences, pupils are able to formulate a range of strategies that are likely to support them in their transition and beyond.

The change in the Environment is evident in the notion that secondary school will place different organisational demands on the pupils and will provide a different setting. It goes beyond the concept of moving from a small school to a large school and addresses the issues that the pupils feel arise due to the change in the environment.

Changes in Relationships are marked by the pupils' constructs of their current connections with others and how these are affected by the transition. The transition is thought to change key bonds within the school setting (with friends and teachers) and the pupils feel that they can draw on previously learnt skills to address issues around bullying. Finally, pupils view the transition as a chance for Personal Growth, constructing the change as a catalyst for development. As such, the change is linked to both, an increase in the demands and an opportunity to become more independent. Thus, pupils perceive change to be central to all aspects of transition, which is reflected across all key-and sub-themes.

#### **4.8. Pupils' development of constructs**

The pupils developed their understanding of the transition throughout the research and deepened their comprehension of the constructs over the course of the three tasks. This is likely due to the nature of the data collection methods, with increasing consideration given to the topic with each task that pupils completed as the task demands encouraged deeper processing of the issues. Whilst the issues that pupils raised were the same throughout the three tasks, pupils were able to consider a wider range of complexities as they completed each task.

The development of complexities within the tasks is illustrated, for example, when considering issues around friendships. In Task 1 the pupils may have commented that '*friends*' (PPT4) are part of primary school. In Task 2 the pupils were able to expand on this construct by communicating their understanding of the development of friendships ('*friends...I never moved, so I made good friends*', PPT17). Thus, Task 2 allowed the pupils to consider the issues around friendships as a result of transition in a more detailed approach. Task 3, which was based on a group dialogue, enabled the pupils to develop their constructs around transition further, taking a wider range of perspectives into account. For example, pupils communicated their understanding of jealousy within friendship circles (I will be '*jealous if they have other friends*', G5) and emphasised the nature of positive friendships ('*friends don't leave you out and friends stick up for you*', G5). The results indicate that the pupils adapt and expand their constructs of the issues relating to transition, with increasing development of depth throughout the tasks. In addition to supporting the development of more refined constructs and themes, Task 3 supported the pupils in the development of approaches as to how to deal with the changes and new demands (see 4.9.). Thus, the increase in tasks demands enabled the pupils to develop their understanding of transition throughout the research tasks.

#### **4.9. Pupils' strategies addressing change**

The pupils identified strategies that they consider to be helpful for their identified issues arising from transition. Pupils' understanding of transition is complex and thus the strategies that aid transition are likely to be equally complex. The use of TA enabled the identification of approaches the pupils recognised as potential strategies to address the issues raised within the key and sub-themes. Thus, in addition to the development of key and sub-themes, thematic analysis also facilitated the understanding of the data with regards to *how* issues might be addressed.

The results suggest that throughout the research, the pupils' understanding regarding how to address the issues around transition were defined in more depth. Whilst the

initial tasks allowed the pupils to define transition and considered potential positive and negative aspects of this transition, the last task encouraged qualitatively different responses. As such, it allowed the pupils to consider helpful strategies that may aid the transition process and beyond. This difference in the type of data is most likely due to the different data collection methods adopted in each task. With an increase in the understanding of what transition is, the pupils were enabled to develop a range of strategies to address the perceived changes in demands placed upon them.

The pupils' identified strategies are diverse and address the issues they previously identified as challenging before/during/after transition. In addition to the pupils developing their constructs of an issue (see 4.8. for an example as to how the construct of friendship developed), the TA supported the development of strategies that pupils may find helpful when making new friends at secondary school. These include '*make friends with relative's children*' (G7), indicating that family links may be supportive in forming new bonds, and '*have more than one friend...a backup friend*' (G5), suggesting that the pupils anticipate potential friendship issues. Thus, the results show that with increasing reflection on transition, pupils are able to develop a range of supportive strategies that address their concerns.

#### **4.10. Results summary**

Pupils construct the transition in terms of change, which is the underlying concept of all key and sub-themes. The qualitative data analysis, adopting TA, identified three key themes (Environment, Relationships and Personal Growth), which are associated with a number of sub-themes. The key themes Environment and Relationships contribute to the key theme Personal Growth as the changes in the former two key themes give rise for opportunities to develop as a person (e.g. learning new subjects and forming new friendships supports the development of the individual as a person).

Pupils construct changes in the Environment in terms of organisational changes (e.g. logistics of getting to and from school) and changes in the nature and size (e.g. primary school is small and fun, secondary school is big and there are many people). With regards to Relationships, pupils believe that their connections to key people are likely to change. For friendships, this might mean the loss of current friends but also the opportunity for new friendships at secondary school. Equally, pupils anticipate that their relationships with teachers will change as they construct primary school teachers as generally positive and warm and secondary teachers as more strict and less personable. The transition is also understood in terms of negative relationships such as bullying, which is believed to be a more significant issue at secondary school. Finally, pupils construct the transition and changes resulting from the transition as an opportunity for Personal Growth. Pupils believe that the transition will give rise to an increase in academic demands, as a new challenge and as a step towards independence. The construct of Personal Growth is judged to be both exciting and positive whilst being equally unsettling and therefore negative.

Pupils felt that the new demands are likely to pose challenges for them. In addition to constructing transition in terms of the key themes, pupils associated strategies that may help them address the transition issues identified. Thus, pupils were able to identify skills and resources that would aid the anticipated difficulties arising from transition. These strategies included practical tools (e.g. telling an adult about bullying) and abstract/theoretical concepts (e.g. being more mature).

## **Chapter 5: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings and implications of this research in relation to the theoretical background, offering new insights into the understanding of how transition is constructed by pupils from small schools. As such, it contributes to the knowledge of how transition is best supported.

The research was set out to address three key RQs, relating to how pupil voice can be utilised in the understanding of the constructs of the transition to secondary school for pupils from small schools, strategies considered to be helpful in this transition and how transition can be supported. The findings are discussed in relation to these RQs and in the context of the existing research. Particular emphasis given is to the similarities and differences in the findings from research into small/average sized schools.

### **5.2. RQ1: How do Y6 pupils from small primary schools construct the transition to secondary school?**

Primarily, pupils from small primary schools construct the transition to secondary school in terms of *change*. This change is considered to place demands onto the pupils when considering how to navigate the new environment as well as affecting their relationships to others within the school environment. However, the change is also thought to offer an opportunity for personal growth, which is perceived to be positive though challenging. In the context of this discussion, these constructs are only summarised and a more detailed description can be found in the Results chapter.



### 5.2.1. Changes in the Environment

With regards to changes in the environment, pupils' constructs include two key considerations, the changes in the organisational structure of the school/day and changes in the nature and size of the school. Organisational changes are primarily due to logistical changes arising from the changes in travelling to school and navigating the new school environment. In addition to this, pupils construct the nature and size of primary school differently to secondary school and emphasise that the transition to secondary school will therefore be significant. Pupils perceive these new demands as challenging and, predominantly, negative. Pupils were able to clearly communicate their understanding of primary schools, constructing them as small and generally friendly environments. Whilst secondary school were constructed as big, pupils were less certain of the nature of secondary schools and considered positive and negative attributes of the new environment.

These findings are broadly in line with results from Johnstone (2001), who labelled the changes experienced by pupils from small (rural) primary schools as changes in *organisational culture*. Concerns arising from these changes are not unique to pupils from small schools, as Ashton (2008) found primary pupils attending averaged-sized schools raised *practical issues* as a primary concern. This suggests that, in terms of organisational changes, the way in which pupils construct the change is independent of school size, with pupils from both types of schools raising similar concerns. However, Pietarinen (1998a) argues that the changes in the physical environment are greater for pupils from rural schools compared to pupils from larger primary schools. Currently, the research does not quantify the size of the effect (for either school type) and it is questionable whether such measures would be helpful in the development of approaches aiding transition. The current research supports the notion that interventions should address the changes in the setting, taking into account the perceived differences in nature of the new environment and the perceived challenges that arise from this change.

### 5.2.2. Changes in Relationships

Regarding the changes in relationships, pupils were found to be concerned about how transition will affect key connections to others, particularly in relation to friendships, connections to teachers and bullying. Pupils associated the transition with a loss of existing friendships and an opportunity to create new bonds. This is in line with findings by Johnstone (2001), who found that pupils from rural/small schools were concerned about how transition affects friendships. Referring to this challenge as *social cultural*, Johnstone (2001) found that these concerns reduced very quickly once pupils started attending secondary school. Despite this, the current research suggests that the changes in friendships induces angst in pupils prior to the transition and thus interventions need to focus on enabling pupils to a. formulate their concerns and b. develop strategies to address the individual's concerns.

In addition to friendships, pupils construct the transition as a change in their connection to teachers (which is perceived to be less personal at secondary school) and pupils are considering the effects of bullying (which is thought to be more likely in secondary school). Ashton (2008), investigating pupil voice of pupils attending larger secondary schools, argues that social connections are a primary concern of pupils in the transition to high school and reports findings in line with this research. Thus, it appears that concerns are similar for all pupils, regardless of school size. However, Kvalsund (2000) argues that the *size* of change experienced by pupils from smaller schools is likely to be greater. This effect may be mitigated by the pupils' experiences as, for example, they may know older pupils at secondary school due to previously being educated in the same class with older pupils who transitioned earlier. This is in line with the current research, which suggested that knowing children in secondary school was identified as a positive factor. Thus, it is acknowledged that relationships are a key construct in understanding the changes in the transition to secondary school and there is no single way in which pupils may address the challenges.

### **5.2.3. Opportunity for Personal Growth**

Pupils construct the change associated with transition as an opportunity for personal growth. The notion of developing as an individual manifests itself in all constructs, for example, how navigating a new and larger environment encourages the development of new skills and the way in which new friendships can be built. Most prominently though, the construct of Personal Growth is reflected in pupils' desire to develop independence ('to grow up') and pupils view the transition as a new challenge and opportunity. In addition to this, pupils expressed a clear understanding that the demands of secondary school are linked to new academic demands, which was perceived as both, a welcome challenge and a pressure. Findings from research utilising pupil voice suggests that 'growing up' is linked to transition. This finding is supported by research into averaged-sized schools (Ashton, 2008) and (small) rural schools (Pietarinen, 1998a). Thus, this research supports the notion that "pupils from the rural area experienced this transition process partly as an opportunity to personal growth and independence" (p. 8; Pietarinen, 1998a). Findings extend the literature in that the construct of Personal Growth is clearly defined, raising issues perceived as fundamental by the pupils', such as autonomy and uncertainties that the change creates.

### **5.2.4. Academic attainment**

The literature suggests that academic attainment is an issue for the adults around the pupil who is transitioning and it is considered to be of less importance to the pupil him/herself (for a literature review see Topping, 2011). Ashton (2008) remarked that the environmental and relationships issues were of critical importance to the child and that academic issues were unlikely to be addressed until these issues were resolved. Yet, the research presented here identifies academic development as a sub-theme in the context of personal growth, presenting it as an issues for pupils prior to transitioning. Pupils did not consistently link academic development to school size, although there are some suggestions that secondary school is associated with

wider (academic) opportunities, which is likely to support academic development. Pupils from rural schools believe that secondary school is significantly different from their experiences at primary school and one way in which pupils believe these differences manifest themselves is in the academic demands and opportunities.

#### **5.2.5. RQ1 summary**

Pupils construct the transition to secondary school as a change that affects their relationships to others (friendships, relationships with teachers and bullying) as well as a change in the environment (organisational changes and changes in the nature/size of the environment). In addition to this, pupils view the transition as an opportunity for personal growth (academically, in terms of increased independence and as a new challenge). Overall, the findings are in line with previous research into both, average-sized primary schools and investigations into smaller schools. Most prominently, the research findings add to the existing literature by offering a more in-depth view of pupils' constructs around transition.

### **5.3. RQ 2: What strategies do pupils from small schools identify as helpful in the transition to secondary school?**

The research approach supported pupils in the development of strategies that they identified as potentially useful in the transition to secondary school. These strategies include practical strategies (actions), people (others that are identified as helpful) and personal attributes (character traits). Strategies were directly developed by the pupils within the research context and are reported as suggested by pupils. This is in contrast to the majority of transition research, which suggests transition strategies based on inferences made from the results in relation to the findings. As such, strategies by previous research may address key difficulties pupils experience in the transition to secondary school, but the proposed interventions were not directly developed by the pupil experiencing transition (thus, interventions were not directly

based on pupil voice). Previous research suggested a number of different approaches and strategies to support transition, including adapting the secondary school environment (Johnstone, 2001) and increased communication between primary and secondary school (Pietarinen, 1998a). In their literature review Van Rens et al., (2018) summarise a range of approaches, however, these are largely based on *interpretations* of pupils' needs, rather than having been developed *by* the pupils themselves.

An exception to this is the research conducted by Ashton (2008), which lists a range of ideas proposed by pupils and which pupils consider helpful in improving transition. Ashton (2008) argues that the issues raised by pupils may appear simplistic (e.g. "look at timetables" p.181), but that they are fundamental to the pupil experiencing transition. This is in line with conclusions offered by van Rens et al., (2018), who suggest "to learn from children by asking...about their transition...and what they can suggest to smoothen the transition for other children" (p.54). The research presented here offers this perspective and therefore enhances the current understanding of strategies that are considered to be helpful by the pupil. These strategies may form the basis of interventions supporting transition.

Pupils identified a range of strategies that they consider to be beneficial in the transition to secondary school (see below). These strategies fall into three categories; practical approaches, people that are identified as supportive and personal attributes that are considered beneficial. Whilst these strategies appear to reflect the key themes from the research (Environment, Relationships and Personal Growth), all three were identified across the key themes. Therefore, the strategies are independent of the key themes and are considered to supersede them.

The strategies listed below should be viewed as an indication of the types of approaches pupils consider to be helpful in the transition to secondary school. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list and strategies are likely to depend upon the individual and the particular circumstances. In this context, it appears most helpful to

consider the three categories of strategies as an indication of different *types* of support pupils identify as helpful, rather than direct interventions.

### **5.3.1. Strategy: Practical approaches**

Pupils felt that a range of practical approaches may help them in their transition to secondary school. These include things to do prior to the transition as well as approaches to implement when attending the new school. Strategies can be summarised into broad concepts such as:

- Enhanced visits to secondary school to become familiar with the setting
- Engaging in the transport arrangements to/from school
- Getting to know the school routine, layout
- Use of tools to manage demands (e.g. using a planner)
- Ways in which to make new friends
- The type of friend that is considered positive
- Practical responses to bullying (e.g. not to retaliate)
- Keeping safe (e.g. road safety and keeping away from potential conflict)

### **5.3.2. Strategy: People**

Pupils were also able to identify and explain *how* different people might be helpful in the transition to secondary school. A range of people from within school and outside of school were considered to be supportive before and following the transition. Here, pupils offer different ways in which others might be supportive, making the link between general supportive relationships and the way in which these relationships may be important. Overall, pupils identified specific people and traits they consider to be supportive in the process of the transition, including:

- People that are generally supportive (friends and/or adults)
- Identify people that are trustworthy to confide in them
- Knowing other people creates a feeling of safety (adults and/or peers)
- Having a family connection was considered positive
- Knowing older pupils in the school (note: does not need to be a friend)
- Friendships as a reciprocal concept
- Friendships that are positive/negative to nurture/avoid
- Shared interests
- Sharing of concerns

### **5.3.3. Strategy: Personal attributes**

Pupils considered themselves as active participants in the transition to secondary school, believing that their personal approach to transition can affect its outcomes. As such, they identified a range of personal attributes that they feel are helpful in the transition. Some of these are aspirational, whilst others acknowledge qualities the individual may have already developed. Identifying those attributes is thought to be positive because they are considered to be desirable in the process of transition and beyond. These attributes include:

- Being 'yourself'
- A 'can-do' attitude
- Making the most of the opportunities ('taking chances')
- Engage in the things you enjoy/are good at
- Being more organised/focused
- General positive attitude ('everything will be fine')

#### **5.3.4. RQ2 summary**

Pupils were able to develop a range of strategies that they consider helpful in the transition to secondary school. These include practical strategies, recognising people who are considered to be supportive as well as identifying personal attributes that are likely to ease transition issues. Whilst the strategies are not exhaustive, they clearly show that a. pupils are able to consider ways in which transition may be supported and b. pupils are able to develop and reflect on a wide range of approaches to aid the transition.

#### **5.4. RQ 3: How, and to what extent, can pupil voice support the primary-secondary school transition of pupils from small primary schools?**

Pupil voice is the central concept of this research, its theoretical background and its findings. The investigations encouraged pupils to be active participant in considering their transition to secondary school, involving them fully in the development of their understanding of transition and associated, beneficial, strategies. The pupils' involvement reflect an attempt towards placing the CYP at the centre of the decision making process, which is, according to Hart's (1992) 'Ladder of Participation', the highest level of participation. The value of this approach is evident in the rich results, which help to form an understanding of transition to secondary schools for pupils from small schools.

The findings presented in this research focus on the child's perception of transition prior to the event. Whilst there is general agreement that transition impacts on CYP, there is little consensus on the size and length of impact, as findings are inconsistent (West et al., 2010). Some research suggests that the negative effects of transition are short lived (Huggins & Knight, 1997; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005), whilst others found long-lasting issues following transitions (Measor & Woods, 1984; Tobbell, 2003). However, this research disregards whether the perceived issues are in line with the actual experiences of the child or not and whether the (negative)



experiences are lasting or not. The approaches taken in this research and its findings support this notion in that they offer a true understanding of the child's perspective of transition. This research is placed with an interpretivist perspective and supports the notion that individuals interpret situations and act according to their construction of the situation. As such, it stresses the constructs at any given time (in the case of this research this is prior to the transition) and it is, to some degree, irrelevant whether the constructs are 'accurate' when later evaluated by the individual and/or others. Therefore, emphasis is placed upon the child's prominent understanding of the situation in order to develop supportive interventions for the particular context at a particular time.

Central to the current findings is the notion that pupils' hopes and concerns are valid and valuable. Ashton (2008) argues that adults may perceive pupils' considerations as 'trivial' but emphasises that their thoughts are fundamental in developing an understanding of an issue. This is in line with the findings from this research in that some results seem predictable (e.g. concerns about making new friends) and/or minor (e.g. getting lost in the new environment). Yet, to the pupils, these issues reflect some of the most central beliefs about transition and their views should therefore be a vital component in the development of transition approaches.

This research therefore addresses some of the issues raised in the literature by providing an approach that not only allows the CYP to formulate their constructs around transition, but also encourages the development of strategies to support (the individual's) transition. Van Rens et al. (2018) conclude in their literature review that children's views are not yet incorporated in the actions supporting transition and that transition is viewed separately from the perspective of different stakeholders. Whilst it is acknowledged that the research presented in this thesis only contributes to the understanding of the pupils' view, it is argued that pupils are *the* key stakeholder in the transition to secondary school and that their view has, largely, not been effectively incorporated in the development of transition strategies. Furthermore, van Rens et al. (2018) identified a lack of research into the way in which pupils can be included as active 'partners' in the transition process as such approaches have yet to

be evaluated. Whilst this research does not offer an evaluated approach to transition, it supports the development of transition approaches based on pupil voice and is therefore an important step in the development of a more child-centred approach to transition.

Previous research involving pupils from larger primary schools showed mixed results with regards to the importance placed upon personal growth in the context of transition. Findings either do not report personal development as a priority for pupils (e.g. Bagnall et al., 2020, Jindale-Snape & Foggie, 2008 and Jindal-Snape et al., 2019 for a review) or found that pupils are considering how the transition may be linked to the notion of 'growing up' (e.g. Ashton, 2008, for small school research see: Pietrarinen, 1998a). This discrepancy may be due to the way in which investigations were conducted and whether the notion of 'growing up' was included in the data collection process. The current investigations were designed to be open-ended, with Tasks 1 and 3 in particular allowing the participants to develop their own constructs without guidance led by the research(er). This unrestricted approach might have allowed the participants to develop their constructs around the transition in a more independent and subjective manner. Most previous research utilised (semi-structured) interviews to gather pupils' view on the transition, which may have affected pupils' consideration of transition in terms of personal growth. However, Ashton (2008) used a range of activities (verbal and written tasks, focus groups) in addition to using a questionnaire (which also contained a question inviting pupils to add 'anything else' about the transition). Equally, Pietarinen (1998a) used open-ended essay questions to elicit pupils' views and both investigations found that pupils consider transition in relation to 'growing up'. It appears that by allowing pupils to construct their views on transition with fewer restrictions than might have been placed upon them by an interview, pupils were able to consider a wider range of constructs around transition. This places emphasis on both, the way in which research into pupil voice is conducted and the way in which pupils are supported in the transition process. Particularly in relation to the latter, it helps to inform the design of approaches used to address key issues around transition. As such, the research suggests that interventions should not be restricted to specific (pre-defined) aspects

of transition but should include a pupil-defined approach that allows the exploration of topics that are relevant to the individual.

#### **5.4.1. RQ3 summary**

The findings of this research support two key conclusions regarding the application of pupil voice regarding transition. Firstly, the research methods enabled pupils to develop their own constructs around transition and therefore the approach can be considered an appropriate way of gaining pupil voice. Secondly, the findings support the notion that pupil voice can and should be placed at the centre of the decision making process for issues concerning the CYP. Thus, the research directly addresses a gap in the literature and demonstrates how pupil voice can be utilised in the transition process.

#### **5.5. Small school and larger school transition**

At first glance, pupils from small school construct the transition to secondary school in light of issues that appear irrelevant to the size of school they are currently attending. Findings are broadly in line with issues highlighted in the transition literature (see Jindal-Snape et al., 2019 for a review), which focus on relationships (with peers/teachers), the physical environment, academic matters and engagement/motivation. Whilst there is some explicit reference to the size of the school (primary=small, secondary=big), the effects of size of primary are, largely, more subtly reflected in the data. For example, pupils feel that it is easy to make friends in a small setting and that their primary school is too small to have bullies. However, it must be considered that the pupils contributing to this research have limited experience of larger schools. In addition to this, primary schools are nearly always significantly smaller than secondary schools. Overall, references to school size were relatively rare and often not specific to the very small nature of pupils' school. The current findings are in line with Tobbell (2014) and it is suggested that

the predominant experience is that of change due to the transition from primary to secondary school, with the primary school size being less central to the way in which pupils construct the transition. Thus, the research findings are inconclusive with regards to whether effects were due to the particular size of the primary.

The current findings are in line with previous findings into small school research and transition which utilised pupil voice. Although Pietarinen (1998a) found that pupils from small schools faced greater change when transitioning due to nature of a small school setting, issues were broadly in line with general findings from the transition literature. Similarly, Johnstone (2001) reports on organisational, personal and culture changes and emphasises significant individual differences in the reactions to transition within a single cohort (pupils that attend small primary schools). These findings, together with the investigations presented here, suggest that transition from small primary schools is largely experienced as similar to the transition from larger primary schools, with individual differences accounting for a large part of the variation in the data. Being from a small school can therefore affect the transition to secondary school, but overall coming from a small school has less impact than the transition itself. Thus, when considering supporting pupils in the transition to secondary school, school size should be considered to be one aspect of a range of attributes that may, or may not affect the transition.

In addition to extending the understanding of the constructs of pupils attending small primary schools, this research also contributes to the knowledge of transition for pupils attending larger schools. The current findings are broadly in line with those from the mainstream transition research. Yet, the research adds to the understanding of transition issues by incorporating the integration of pupil voice in the development of transition approaches. This is beneficial in a range of contexts, including groups that are more vulnerable to transition issues (e.g. those on FSM or with EAL; Galton et al., 1999). The open-ended nature of the approach lends itself to be adopted by most settings, regardless of school size, context or the need of the individual CYP. This makes the research highly relevant in the mainstream transition literature.

As Ashton (2008) has shown, CYP can (and should) be asked about transition issues and their input needs to be incorporated in the development of transition approaches. This research adds to this understanding by offering an approach as to how this may be achieved. A truly child-led approach in the decision-making process, which is the highest level of participation (Hart, 1992) is desirable and achievable. This research is a step towards this (see also 7.3. for how the approach can be developed further to increase CYP participation).

## **Chapter 6: PROPOSED INTERVENTION**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter outlines an intervention approach that is based on the findings presented in this thesis. The research findings support an individualised approach to transition, in which pupils develop their own constructs of the transition and their personal challenges associated with it. Based on these considerations, pupils are encouraged to develop strategies that they consider helpful in the transition. Thus, this research argues against a universal approach to transition. This is in line with findings by Jindal-Snape et al. (2019) who suggest in their literature review that the same issue can be viewed as positive and/or negative and that, to a large degree, individual differences may account for the same experience leading to different outcomes. Consequently, transition approaches need to be in line with the individual's needs.

The following outlines a transition approach, aimed at supporting pupils prior to the transition. Based on the present research and in line with previous findings, materials have been developed to support the transition intervention. These are evaluated in terms of their advantages and disadvantages.

### **6.2. Proposed transition approaches**

Transition may be affected by a wide range of factors, including gender (Roderick, 2003), ethnicity (Ding, 2008) and SEND (Maras & Aveling, 2006). This research adds to the understanding that, attending a small primary school may be a further factor that can impact on the way transition is constructed and experienced. Given the breadth of different factors that may affect transition, it appears to be most appropriate to consider the size of primary school as a factor that may (positively or negatively) influence transition in the same way that a large number of other factors may affect

transition. Thus it appears to be most appropriate to consider transition interventions as individualised programmes, rather than a single programme that can be universally applied to all pupils. A transition programme must, therefore, start with understanding the development of pupils' constructs of transition in order to develop tailor-made transition approaches that are based on the pupils' constructs and strategies.

There are a number of different ways in which pupil voice has been utilised to understand and support secondary school transition, however, the majority of this research is based on questionnaire data and/or interviews (see van Rens et al., 2018 for a review). Thus, they do not offer direct interventions with regards to how to support transition and if they do, they tend to focus on specific sub-groups of pupils (see above). The research presented in this thesis is different in that it offers an open-ended approach that pupils can adapt according to their need. It is accessible to most pupils and is flexible enough to support the development of individualised approaches, in line with the need of the pupil.

Based on the investigations presented in this thesis, it is proposed that transition interventions should be based on activities in line with the ones used for this research. Such approaches are most likely to be effective as they are based on the pupil's constructs of the potential issues associated with the transition. Thus, transition support should incorporate the following steps:

1. Open-ended, individual task to engage pupils with the topic of transition, developing an understanding of their personal constructs. The approach taken in Task 1 of this research was highly successful in allowing pupils to consider their excitement, worries and questions and therefore it is proposed that the methodologies of Task 1 are adopted.
2. Further individual task to deepen the understanding of the constructs around transition. Most pupils were able to access Task 2 and developed their considerations regarding transition. In order to make the task more accessible

to some pupils, it might be helpful to have two versions of the handout, one with lines to encourage written answers and one with blank spaces to encourage pictorial answers.

3. A group task that encourages the exchange of constructs and the development of strategies to address transition issues. It is essential that this task is open-ended and uses tools to encourage conversation, rather than limiting topics. The materials used for Task 3 in this research present one way in which an open dialogue can be facilitated. The general layout of the 'road' to secondary school (and beyond) encouraged pupils to consider different aspects of transition and the signs facilitated communications. However, this task could be simplified (and therefore made more accessible) by reducing the number of signs used. Ideally, the signs to include should be either fairly well-defined (green tick, red cross, red/amber/green traffic lights) or open to interpretation (neutral emoji). Including a limited amount of signs has the advantage that pupils can focus on the content, rather than trying to match the content to a sign.
4. An additional task is proposed to be included in the intervention to facilitate the development of transition strategies and making those strategies explicit. For this, it is suggested to include an action plan that lists the issue, strategies, who can help and actions. A sample action plan is presented in Appendix 22. Whilst this should be done at the group level, this action plan can then be used to plan the transition at an individual level by incorporating specific strategies for individuals.

### **6.3. Advantages and disadvantages of the proposed approach**

There are a range of advantages and disadvantages of the proposed approach, highlighting practical and theoretical considerations. The most prominent are presented below.



### **Advantages of the proposed approach:**

- Individualised approach, based on pupil voice (pupil is active in the decision making process)
- A mixture of individual work and group work, supporting pupils in developing a thorough understanding of their constructs regarding transition
- Time efficient (for small groups of up to 8: Tasks 1-3 can be completed in a 45 minutes to 1 hour timeframe and it is suggested that Task 4 would take no longer than 10 minutes as it simply summarises/orders the outcomes of the previous tasks)
- Allows child-led, solution-focused action planning for transition
- Highly flexible (accommodating a wide range of need)

### **Disadvantages of the proposed approach**

- The impact of the approach is yet to be evaluated
- The limited structure may lead to misunderstandings in the application of the approach
- The implementation of the approach is highly dependent upon the adult supporting the Y6 pupils

## **Chapter 7: REFLECTIONS**

### **7.1. Introduction**

This chapter offers a range of reflections, placing emphasis on the impact of the research. Initial focus is given to the methodologies adopted for this research and the research limitations. This is followed by the implications for future research and implications for EP practice. This thesis concludes by offering closing remarks.

### **7.2. Methodological reflections and research limitations**

This research offers an applied investigation into the child's view of transition for children from small primary schools and therefore adds to the understanding of transition from the child's perspective. However, consideration must be given to the research limitations and possible issues in the development of the investigations, their application and interpretation.

Firstly, the research is limited with regards to its generalisability beyond the views of children who attend small primary schools. Whilst findings suggests that the general constructs are in line with findings from wider groups of pupils, the research is limited in its inferences in relation to support different groups in the transition to secondary school.

Secondly, the research sample was restricted in that participants represented a relatively homogenous sample (see Appendix 20 for an overview). Whilst it incorporated a fairly average number of pupils with SEND (26%), pupils from poorer socio-economic backgrounds were underrepresented (5% of pupils received free school meals) and, due to the purposive sampling technique, pupils with EAL (0%) were missing from the research. Similarly, the ethnic background of the sample was highly homogenous (100% of PPTs were white-British). The limited nature of the

research sample somewhat restricts the inferences that can be made for the wider population, even within the cohort of pupils that attend small primary schools.

Thirdly, the research focused on the child's view of transition and the materials used did not directly address the development of explicitly planned actions with the individuals. However, the tasks enabled pupils to formulate actions and strategies during the research. Preferably, the materials should have included the action plan proposed in Chapter 6.

Fourthly, some of the materials were unnecessarily complicated and/or confined to a singular use. Task 2 only included 'writing space' (indicated by lines), thus discouraging pupils from given alternative answers such as drawing a picture. Task 3 offered too many alternative symbols, some of which were limited in their interpretation to a single 'use'. Both of these issues are addressed in the proposed transition approaches (section 6.2. above).

### **7.3. Implications for future research**

Due to the limited previous research into the child's view on transition to secondary school in general and in light of the findings that pupils from small schools constructs of this transition is in line with wider transition research findings, there are a wide range of approaches that could be implemented in future research.

One approach for future research is to focus on the implementation of the adapted research materials, to include the development of explicit transition strategies/actions. The research application should be widened to include a heterogeneous sample. In addition to this, the research should be widened to include pupils who attend larger primary schools to ensure that the materials are universally functional. In this context it is important to note that, whilst the constructs and/or strategies may vary across different cohorts, initially focus should be given to the

suitability of the tasks (e.g. are they accessible, can they be completed with larger groups of pupils, are pupils able to develop a more explicit action plan- with support).

Furthermore, the evaluation of the proposed methods would triangulate the suitability of the approach. Keeping in line with the child-centred research stance, it is suggested that evaluation should focus on the pupils' perception of the suitability of the research approach. As such, it may be beneficial to develop a pre and post intervention questionnaire that addresses key concerns in the transition. A Likert-like rating scale (Likert, 1932) may be appropriate, as it allows comparison over time (e.g. prior to and immediately after the intervention as well as at the end of Y6). In addition to this, the longer-term outcomes could be assessed via a range of (external) measures, which may include academic outcomes and/or pupil well-being.

Whilst the materials/tasks have been developed with the CYPs' experiences in mind, they were not developed *by* the CYPs themselves. As such, this research could be developed further by involving CYP from different backgrounds in the (re-)development of the materials/tasks. Whilst this was done in an informal manner in the initial development of the materials, it was not done systematically and the CYPs were only involved in the refinement of the approach (rather than its original development). Adapting the approach to include CYPs at the earlier stages of research ensures that the approach reflects the input of the key stakeholder, the CYPs themselves. As such, the research would strive for the highest level of CYP participation.

As a result of the above mentioned involvement of the CYP in the (re-)development of the approach, the materials and tasks may be modified. Whilst it is impossible to predict the nature of such modifications, it is anticipated that the input of the CYP leads to adaptations of the approach, rather than an entirely new approach. Given that the materials were designed to be in line with learning tasks typically experienced by pupils in a school context, it is reasonable to expect that most pupils are familiar with the approaches used. Whether pupils would prefer a different

approach to investigate and support transition can only be established by involving the pupil in the research from the onset of its development.

Taken a wider research approach, future investigations may consider incorporating the views of other key stakeholders and how they can contribute to the understanding of the transition and strategies supporting the pupil. As such, the research could involve parents' view and key members of staff may be able to contribute to a well-rounded, individualised transition approach. It is important to note that such an approach should be considered to be adopted in addition to, and not as a replacement for, the in-depth gathering of the child's view on transition.

#### **7.4. Implications for EP practice**

EPs' involvement is considered essential in the further development of the approach as outlined above. However, beyond the research contributions, it would be unrealistic to expect EPs to be actively engaged in the administration of the intervention once the transition intervention has been evaluated and finalised. Hence, it is essential that the intervention can be administered by a range of school staff. EPs may be involved in training the school staff in the process.

Wider implications for EP practice should be considered in terms of how the child's voice is gathered and implemented. This research shows a relatively simple way in which pupils' voice can be used as a building block in matters that affect the child. It therefore raises the question to what degree pupil's voice is gathered and implemented in other areas of their education (or indeed, life decisions in general). The current approach may offer wider application and could be adapted to integrate pupils voice in the systemic planning of school development, giving pupils a true voice in the changes that may affect them.

Furthermore, the approaches could be modified to be applied with individual pupils and the planning of their future. For example, a similar approach might be useful in

the context of career planning (which can be done on a group and/or individual level) as well as development an action plans for specific pupils in specific contexts (e.g. pupils who move between schools, those at risk of exclusion, pupils who refuse to go to school). EPs are well-placed to support this work.

## **7.5. Concluding comments**

This research set out to investigate pupil voice on the transition to secondary school for CYP attending small schools. Central to the research is the notion that pupils can and should be involved in decisions that are important in their lives and the theoretical background of the research, as well as methodologies adopted for this thesis, place the individual at the centre of the approach. As such, the findings contribute to the current understanding of school transition by offering a detailed account of pupil's perspectives, including strategies that pupils consider to be helpful for the challenges they anticipate.

Unexpectedly, pupils placed less importance on the issues around transitioning from a small primary school, rather than a larger primary school. Whilst they acknowledge the 'fact' that they attend a small setting, the constructs around the transition were much broader and in line with findings from larger schools. The research found little evidence for the transition being significantly impacted by pupil's self-perception of attending a small school and advantages as well as disadvantages were associated with attending a small school. Thus, it is suggested that attending a small school is proposed to be *one* factor which may, or may not, affect transition.

Based on the findings, an intervention approach is proposed to support all pupils in forthcoming transitions. As such, it supersedes the issue of transitioning from a small school, as it allows a flexible and individualised approach for a CYP, which may include school size amongst many other individual differences. The research adds to the existing understanding of transitions by expanding on how pupils perceive the issues, enabling them (with support) to develop an action plan. This is in contrast to previous approaches, which focus on interpretations of pupil's needs and devising

interventions for the pupil. This shift is significant, as it places the pupil at the centre of the planning, therewith allowing the key stakeholder appropriate input. In addition to this, it is suggested that the planning tools developed by this research can easily be adapted to support different transitions. The proposed approach considers pupil's input as valid and valuable, offering a truly child-centred and flexible transition planning tool.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Completed and approved ethics form**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW</b></p>
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#### **Who should use this form:**

This form is to be completed by PIs or supervisors (for PGR student research) who have completed the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review of Research Self Assessment Form (SAF) and have decided that further ethical review and approval is required before the commencement of a given Research Project.

**Please be aware that all new research projects undertaken by postgraduate research (PGR) students first registered as from 1st September 2008 will be subject to the University's Ethical Review Process. PGR students first registered before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008 should refer to their Department/School/College for further advice.**

#### **Researchers in the following categories are to use this form:**

1. The project is to be conducted by:
  - staff of the University of Birmingham; or
  - postgraduate research (PGR) students enrolled at the University of Birmingham (to be completed by the student's supervisor);
2. The project is to be conducted at the University of Birmingham by visiting researchers.

**Students undertaking undergraduate projects and taught postgraduate (PGT) students should refer to their Department/School for advice.**

## NOTES:

- An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: [aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk). Please **do not** submit paper copies.
- If, in any section, you find that you have insufficient space, or you wish to supply additional material not specifically requested by the form, please it in a separate file, clearly marked and attached to the submission email.
- If you have any queries about the form, please address them to the Research Ethics Team.



**Before submitting, please tick this box to confirm that you have consulted and understood the following information and guidance and that you have taken it into account when completing your application:**

- The information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages  
(<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-of-Research.aspx>)
- The University's Code of Practice for Research  
([http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP\\_Research.pdf](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf))



<b>UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM</b> <b>APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW</b>	<b>OFFICE USE ONLY:</b> Application No: Date Received:
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### 1. TITLE OF PROJECT

Investigations into the child's voice on the transition to secondary school: The case of rural primary schools.
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### 2. THIS PROJECT IS:

University of Birmingham Staff Research project ☐  
 University of Birmingham Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student project ☒  
 Other ☐ (Please specify):

### 3. INVESTIGATORS

#### a) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS OR SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)

Name: Title / first name / family name	Dr Johanna Doerr
Highest qualification & position	PhD Trainee Educational Psychologist
School/Department	School of Education
Telephone:	-
Email address:	-

Name: Title / first name / family name	Dr -
Highest qualification & position held:	Ed Psych Doctorate,  Academic and professional tutor in Educational Psychology
School/Department	School of Education
Telephone:	-
Email address:	-

#### b) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF ANY CO-INVESTIGATORS OR CO-SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)

Name: Title / first name / family name	
Highest qualification & position	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

c) In the case of PGR student projects, please give details of the student

Name of student:		Student No:	
Course of study:		Email	
Principal			

Name of student:		Student No:	
Course of study:		Email	
Principal			

4. ESTIMATED START OF      Date:      1.3.2019      PROJECT

ESTIMATED END OF      Date:      30.10.2019      PROJECT

## FUNDING

List the funding sources (including internal sources) and give the status of each source.

<i>Funding Body</i>	<i>Approved/Pending /To be submitted</i>

**If you are requesting a quick turnaround on your application, please explain the reasons below (including funding-related deadlines). You should be aware that whilst effort will be made in cases of genuine urgency, it will not always be possible for the Ethics Committees to meet such requests.**

My research is dependent upon the academic school year and needs to be completed in May/June 2019. My measures require me to collect data prior to the transition from primary school to secondary school and is, as a result of this, time critical.

## 5. SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Describe the purpose, background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined and expected outcomes. This description should be in everyday language that is free from jargon. Please explain any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases.

The purpose of my research is to establish a deeper understanding of the particular issues faced by pupils when transitioning from a rural primary school to a larger secondary school. Past research focused on general transitioning between primary and secondary schools and interventions have been based on 'typical' primary schools, which can have up to 1000 pupils (the average primary school has around 260 pupils). However, the case of rural schools is very different, with many rural schools educating only up to 50 pupils. This may have significant impact on the experiences of schooling for pupils who attend rural schools as they are likely to be educated in mixed-aged classes within a very small setting.

The rationale of this research is to gain a deeper understanding into the specific issues faced by pupils when moving from a very small setting to a larger setting. The transition is thought to be much greater, as pupils not only face the challenges associated with the general transition from primary to secondary school (such as different teacher for each subject and increased independence/responsibilities) but pupils from rural schools also have to make a much more significant transition regarding the size of the school.

My research questions are:

- Do pupils from rural primary schools construct the transition to secondary school differently to pupils from larger primary schools?
- What are the perceived facilitating factors that are supporting transition?
- What are the perceived barriers in transition?
- Based on pupils' voice: what, if anything, can rural and larger primary schools learn from each other regarding transition to secondary school.

To investigate this, I will gather the child's voice from 2 groups of pupils, those attending rural primary schools and those who attend larger primary schools.

The expected outcome of the research is that pupils from rural schools experience the forthcoming transition differently to those attending larger schools. Facilitating factors and barriers will be investigated (for both, pupils attending rural and larger schools). Hence, the research should allow the development of a transition program that supports good practice for transitions from rural/ larger primary to secondary schools.

## 6. CONDUCT OF PROJECT

**Please give a description of the research methodology that will be used**

The key data collection tool is the questionnaire, which contains quantitative and qualitative measures. Thus, each participant will contribute both types of data by completing the questionnaire.

My research focuses on the child's voice, thus I shall be working closely with the pupils. I intend to work directly with small groups of pupils (2-4 pupils) to elicit their view on the transition to secondary school. To gather the data, I will visit each of the rural primary schools (7) and conduct semi-structured interviews, which includes rating scale questions, tasks to complete as well open ended questions. Please note that I plan to include methods to elicit the child's voice that rely less heavily on language, ensuring that my research is accessible to a wider range of pupils. As such, I will include a rating scales, visual tasks and make use of emoji. The latter will be applied either encourage more detail to be given or when a pupil is finding it difficult to express their thoughts verbally. A draft questionnaire is attached to this form.

To ensure that the research methods adopted in the larger primary schools matches the conditions of the rural primary schools, data will also be collected in small groups of 2-4 pupils. Within reason, I aim to match pupils with regards to their general demographics.

I will use a mixed-method design to investigate views on transition, collecting qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data will be the written/drawn/scribed answers from each child, which are recorded on the questionnaire (which will be presented as a semi-structured interview to help children to access the materials). At this point, I may make use of the additional visual resources, to ensure that all participants can access the questions.

I propose to analyse the data via a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which identifies themes within a data set. Priority will be given to investigating pupil's concepts and constructs of the forthcoming transition, focusing on pupils attending rural school (and comparing their views to those attending larger primary schools). Depending on the outcome, I will investigate whether any of the demographic factors (e.g. gender, academic achievement) link to the type of responses given by the pupils (again, focusing on rural versus larger primary schools if appropriate). Quantitative data is likely to be presented in tabular format (frequency) as, given the small sample size, in-depth statistical would be inappropriate.

**7. DOES THE PROJECT INVOLVE PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE OTHER THAN THE RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS?**

Yes ☒ No ☐

Note: 'Participation' includes both active participation (such as when participants take part in an interview) and cases where participants take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (for example, in crowd behaviour research).

**If you have answered NO please go to Section 18. If you have answered YES to this question please complete all the following sections.**

**8. PARTICIPANTS AS THE SUBJECTS OF THE RESEARCH**

Describe the number of participants and important characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc.). Specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used.

General characteristics of all participants:

- Year 6 pupils; age: 10-11 years old
- Gender: all pupils will be invited to participate
- Special educational needs: all pupils will be invited to participate, regardless of their level of need. Participation will be supported by adjusting the materials if needed.
- Exclusion criteria: pupils that are planning to transition outside the local authority

2 groups of participants:

- All year 6 pupils from up to 7 rural primary schools in a large shire county in England (expected sample size: around 14-21 participants)
- Matched sample of year 6 pupils from larger school in the county

**9. RECRUITMENT**

Please state clearly how the participants will be identified, approached and recruited. Include any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student).

*Note: Attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.*

#### Rural schools

All year 6 pupils of 7 local primary schools (which are part of the researcher allocated 'cluster') will be invited to participate. The recruitment will be done via the primary schools, who will forward any information to the pupil and/or their parent/carer. All pupils that are in their last year of primary school education will be invited to participate, therefore, no particular selection criterion applies (beyond attending one of the identified rural primary schools that form part of the cluster).

#### Larger schools

For the matched sample, one primary school within the shire will be contacted and appropriate participants will be identified by school staff. This school will be identified from within the same cluster of schools (being located in reasonably close proximity to the rural schools) and on the basis of school size (the school should have between 250-400 pupils). The school that fits most of these selection criteria will be first invited to participate. Should this school decline, the next most appropriate school will be contacted and so forth until a suitable school agrees to participate. Information sheets and consent forms will be sent out to identified pupils and their parents (note: not to the whole cohort). These pupils will be identified by matching some general demographic information to those pupils attending the rural primary school (e.g. gender, SEN status).

#### Sample size

All rural schools have between 50 pupils (whole school population, data freely available on the school websites). If we assume equal distribution across the 7 primary years and take an average sized rural school (40 pupils), we can assume that each year group consists of 5 to 6 pupils ( $40 \text{ pupils} / 7 \text{ years} = 5.7 \text{ pupils per year}$ ). I will contact 7 primary schools, thus, my total potential rural pupil sample will be 40 ( $5.7 \text{ pupils per year group} \times 7 \text{ schools} = 40 \text{ potential participants}$ ). In addition to this, a second group of participants will be recruited, which consist of a matched sample of pupils that attend an average sized primary school. Thus, the total number of children that will be invited to take part in the study will be around 80 participants. Despite this relatively high number, it is expected that around 14-21 participants will participate in the study from each group (rural and larger schools), thus the total expected number of participants is in the region of 28-41.

All information that is sent out to pupils/carers is further described in the 'Consent' section below.

## 10. CONSENT

**a)** Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain valid consent. If consent is not to be obtained explain why. If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate source of consent, including any permission / information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the consent.

Consent forms are differentiated according to need, please see the attached all information sheets and consent forms.

For pupils, the information sheet and consent form is written in a child-friendly language that makes the content accessible to them. Parental information sheets and consent forms include more background information, however, it is also written in a style that is widely accessible, avoiding jargon wherever possible or explaining key words and/or concepts.

If either (parents or pupil) does not give consent for the child to participate in the study then the child will NOT be able to participate.

*Note: Attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (if applicable), the Consent Form (if applicable), the content of any telephone script (if applicable) and any other material that will be used in the consent process.*

**b)** Will the participants be deceived in any way about the purpose of the study? **Yes**  
☐ **No:** ☒

If yes, please describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Include how and when the deception will be revealed, and who will administer this feedback.

n/a



## 11. PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Explain what feedback/ information will be provided to the participants after participation in the research. (For example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research, or access to the results of the research).

The findings will be communicated to the pupils that participated in the research, their parents/carers and the schools they attended at the time of the research. Pupils will receive an accessible, brief summary of the key findings, which hopefully illustrates how their participation allowed wider conclusions to be drawn. Parents and schools will receive a more detailed summary of the findings, indicating how the research can impact on school policy etc. I will also offer a debrief session to all schools, highlighting the findings and offering tailor-made support (depending on the findings of the research).

Once publicly available, all stakeholders will be invited access to the write up of the project (full thesis).

## 12. PARTICIPANT WITHDRAWAL

- a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project.

Withdrawal of the data will be possible until the final analysis is made, which will be in September 2019. Hence, pupil and/or parental consent can be withdrawn up until this point and participants are informed about this in their respective consent forms.

Once the final data analysis commences, withdrawal will no longer be possible and pupils/carers are informed about this.

- b) Explain any consequences for the participant of withdrawing from the study and indicate what will be done with the participant's data if they withdraw.

If a pupil/carer withdraws consent, the following steps will be taken:

- The pupils data will be identified from the whole data set
- The identified data will be excluded from the analysis
- The identified data will be deleted in accordance with the GDPR data protection act

## 13. COMPENSATION

Will participants receive compensation for participation?

i) Financial  
☐ No ☒

Yes

ii) Non-financial

Yes ☐ No ☒

If **Yes** to **either** i) or ii) above, please provide details.

n/a

If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

n/a

#### 14. CONFIDENTIALITY

a) Will all participants be anonymous? Yes  
☐ No ☒

b) Will all data be treated as confidential? Yes ☒ No  
☐

*Note: Participants' identity/data will be confidential if an assigned ID code or number is used, but it will not be anonymous. Anonymous data cannot be traced back to an individual participant.*

Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

Anonymity of pupil: Given that the research involves investigations with a specific cohort (very small schools), consideration needs to be given how to ensure anonymity of the pupil. Individual pupils will be given a pseudonym and only general demographic information of the pupil will be included (e.g. gender, free school meals).

Anonymity of the school: To protect each school's identity, schools will be given a pseudonym and the research location will not be revealed (it will be referred to as a 'large shire county'). In addition, the exact school size will not be revealed but will be given in rough measures such as 'between 30-40 pupils' or 'around 40 pupils'. This balances the need to indicate school size, whilst protecting the school's identity.

##### Safeguarding

If any safeguarding concerns are raised, the researcher will follow the school's safeguarding policy immediately.

If participant anonymity or confidentiality is not appropriate to this research project, explain, providing details of how all participants will be advised of the fact that data will not be anonymous or confidential.

All data will be treated as confidential.

#### **15. STORAGE, ACCESS AND DISPOSAL OF DATA**

Describe what research data will be stored, where, for what period of time, the measures that will be put in place to ensure security of the data, who will have access to the data, and the method and timing of disposal of the data.

All data will be stored according to the 2018 EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) on University of Birmingham equipment. Any information gathered on devices not linked to the secure storage provided by the University of Birmingham will be transferred at the earliest opportunity. This includes any drawings/worksheets that participants produce (or pictures of their work). All data will be stored anonymously, with codes linking the individual to their demographic information (which will be stored separately, in accordance with the GDPR).

Audio recordings will be gathered on Local Authority equipment and transferred to the University's secure storage system at the earliest convenience following the recording. Following the transfer, data will be deleted from the Local Authority equipment.

Only the researchers (Johanna Doerr and Julia Howe) will have access to the data. Johanna Doerr will keep the questionnaires in a securely locked cupboard, designed to hold confidential information until it is transferred onto a secure computer system and stored according to the 2018 GDPR.

##### **Data storage**

Hard copies will be stored in a locked cupboard that is designed to hold confidential information. The cupboard is located in a local authority building, which can only be accessed by professionals. The researcher is the only key holder to the cupboard.

Electronic data will be stored on the UoB's BEAR Research Data Store, prior to being stored in the BEAR Achieve once data analysis is completed.

OTHER APPROVALS REQUIRED? E.G. **CRIMINAL RECORDS BUREAU (CRB) CHECKS OR NHS R&D APPROVALS.**

☐

YES

☐

NO

☒

NOT APPLICABLE

If yes, please specify.

n/a

#### 16. SIGNIFICANCE/BENEFITS

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research

Following a literature review on rural schools in England, Hargreaves (2009) notes '...the almost complete absence of pupil voice on educational experiences in small rural schools...' (p.126). My initial research suggests that there has not been any significant contribution in the area of school transition and the proposed research aims to fill this gap.

Investigating the child's voice should allow conclusions to be drawn on how to improve the transition to secondary school for children. It is hope that the research highlights key themes in the transition from a rural school and that, as such, it may be possible to develop a program that supports this transition. Thus, my research has the potential to positively affect secondary school transition for children from rural schools. In addition to this, the research also has the potential to positively affect the transition of all pupils, regardless of the type/size of school they attend, if the findings suggest that pupils from rural and non-rural school have similar perceptions of the transition to secondary school.

#### 17. RISKS

a) Outline any potential risks to **INDIVIDUALS**, including research staff, research participants, other individuals not involved in the research and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap

All involved are invited to contact me or my research supervisor in case of questions or concerns.

#### Pupil

By participating in the research, pupils' awareness of the upcoming transition may be increased, potentially leading to them considering issues that they are 'worried' about. To minimise the risk I include a balance approach (which also considers the positive aspects of the transition). The questionnaire also includes a number of questions that ask the pupils to consider how/what/who might help them in the transition, thus enabling the individual to feel empowered do cope with it.

#### Parent/carer

Similar to above, by allowing their child to participate in the research, parents/carers' awareness of the forthcoming transition may be increased. As such, parents may question their choice of school for the child. To minimise the risk, parents are invited to contact me and the debrief summary should enable parents/carer to feel more secure in their school choice.

#### School staff

School staff may feel undermined in their approach to transition and feel that they are not providing adequate support to the pupils attending their school. To address this, I will offer de-brief sessions in which I will communicate ways forward (based on the findings of the research). For example, if children at the school feel under-supported, I may, in liaison with the staff, create a more comprehensive transition package that addresses the issues raised by the pupils.

- b) Outline any potential risks to **THE ENVIRONMENT and/or SOCIETY** and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap.

Depending on the research findings, the data may reveal issues with the approach of a school type and how transitions to secondary school are managed. This could impact (positively or negatively) on how schools manage transitions, which impacts on the school culture and beyond. I plan to manage these risks by offering school-specific support if needed and wanted (de-brief sessions), as well general feedback of the findings, their implications and ways forward.

**18. ARE THERE ANY OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES RAISED BY THE RESEARCH?**

Yes ☐ No ☒

**If yes, please specify**

n/a

## 19. EXPERT REVIEWER/OPINION

You may be asked to nominate an expert reviewer for certain types of project, including those of an interventional nature or those involving significant risks. If you anticipate that this may apply to your work and you would like to nominate an expert reviewer at this stage, please provide details below.

Name
Contact details (including email address)
Brief explanation of reasons for nominating and/or nominee's suitability

## 20. CHECKLIST

Please mark if the study involves any of the following:

- Vulnerable groups, such as children and young people aged under 18 years, those with learning disability, or cognitive impairments ☒
- Research that induces or results in or causes anxiety, stress, pain or physical discomfort, or poses a risk of harm to participants (which is more than is expected from everyday life) ☐
- Risk to the personal safety of the researcher ☐
- Deception or research that is conducted without full and informed consent of the participants at time study is carried out ☐
- Administration of a chemical agent or vaccines or other substances (including vitamins or food substances) to human participants. ☐
- Production and/or use of genetically modified plants or microbes ☐
- Results that may have an adverse impact on the environment or food safety ☐
- Results that may be used to develop chemical or biological weapons ☐



Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.

	ATTACHED	NOT APPLICABLE
Recruitment advertisement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Participant information sheet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consent form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Questionnaire	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interview Schedule	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## 21. DECLARATION BY APPLICANTS

I submit this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the

University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described

herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any

other purpose without my prior consent.

I declare that:

- The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to abide by University Code of Practice for Research ([http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP\\_Research.pdf](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf)) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines.
- I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.
- I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee via the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.

**Name of principal investigator/project supervisor:**  
**Date:**

Johanna Doerr

12.2.2019

Please now save your completed form, print a copy for your records, and then email a copy to the Research Ethics Officer, at [aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk). As noted above, please do not submit a paper copy.

**Final Approval:**

**From:** "-(Research Support Group)" <-@bham.ac.uk>  
**Date:** 14 March 2019 at 14:36:12 GMT  
**Subject:** Application for Ethical Review ERN\_19-0007

Dear Dr Doerr and Dr –

**Re: “Investigations into the child’s voice on the transition to secondary school: The case of rural primary schools”**  
**Application for Ethical Review ERN\_19-0007**

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly brought to the Committee’s attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University’s Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University’s ethics webpages (available at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx> ) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx> ) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review. Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University’s guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University’s H&S Unit at [healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk).

Kind regards

-

Research Ethics Officer  
Research Support Group  
Aston Webb Building  
University of Birmingham  
Edgbaston B15 2TT  
Tel: -  
Email: [-@bham.ac.uk](mailto:-@bham.ac.uk)

## Appendix 2: School information letter- focus group

Johanna Doerr  
SEND Services

-  
-  
-

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name of school contact) ,

My name is Johanna and I am a trainee educational psychologist from Birmingham University. I am on placement in Lancashire and interested in how children from primary schools feel about the transition to much larger high schools. Prior to the main research taking place, I need to run a focus group that tries to understand what language children use when speaking about transition. I hope that through this work, those working with children will gain a better understanding of what pupils feel about the forthcoming transition. This research will form part of my doctoral thesis.

I would like to speak to a small group of year 6 pupils (around 6 pupils). Focus of the research is to establish the language pupils use when speaking about their current school and hopes/fears for the future school. We may use pen/paper to record what is being said and/or to include visuals in the data gathering process. Overall, each child will be out of lesson for around 30-45 minutes.

All of the children's responses are confidential and individual's names or details will not be shared with anybody. Each child's name and demographic information, as well as the name of your school will be anonymised, ensuring that each child and his or her responses cannot be traced. However, if a child discloses a safeguarding issues and/or if I am worried about a child's well-being I will breach confidentiality and follow your school's safeguarding procedure.

I would appreciate if you could please distribute the attached parental information sheet and consent letter as well as the child's consent form to your Y6 parents and children and collect the returned consent forms for me. Without consent (from both, parents and children) I will not be able to work with the child at your school.

Thank you very much for reading this letter and please contact me (or my supervisor Julia Howe) if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,  
Johanna Doerr  
Trainee educational psychologist  
University of Birmingham

Supervisor contact details:

Dr -  
School of Education  
University of Birmingham  
Tel: -  
Email: [-@bham.ac.uk](mailto:-@bham.ac.uk)

### Appendix 3: Parental information letter- focus group

Johanna Doerr

Address

Dear Parent/carer,

My name is Johanna and I am a trainee educational psychologist from Birmingham University. I am on placement in Lancashire and interested in how children from primary schools deal with the transition to much larger high schools. I would like to investigate what language children use when speaking about the transition.

If your child participates in the project, s/he will participate in a focus group, which includes a group of year 6 children (around 2-4 pupils). A focus group is used to understand how people feel about a certain topic and I would like to understand what language children use when they speak about transition to high school. The group may want to use pens/papers to record their thoughts and I will guide this process. It also helps some children who may find it difficult to verbalise their views. Overall, your child will be out of lesson for around 30-45 minutes.

Given that your child is currently in Y6 at primary school, I would appreciate if you would consent for your child to take part in my research (your child will also be asked to give consent separately). I hope that by your child participating, my work can reflect the views of children when thinking about transition, which will help me in using the correct language for future research. This research will form part of my doctoral thesis.

All of your child's responses are confidential and your child's name or details will not be shared with anybody. Your child's name and demographic information, as well as the name of your child's school will be anonymised, ensuring that your child and his or her responses cannot be traced. However, because the research will take place in a group, there is a chance that other group members might speak about what happened outside the group. I will explain to the children prior to the research taking place and explain confidentiality. The only time confidentiality will have to be broken is if I am concerned about your child's well-being, in which case I will follow your child's school safeguarding procedure.

If you (or your child) wish to withdraw from the research, you (or your child) can do so at any time prior to the research being completed.

If you agree for your child to participate in the research, please complete the attached consent form and return it to your child's teacher.

Thank you very much for reading this letter and please contact me (or my supervisor Julia Howe) if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

Johanna Doerr

Trainee educational psychologist

University of Birmingham

Supervisor contact details:

Dr -

School of Education

University of Birmingham

Tel: -

Email: -@bham.ac.uk

## Appendix 4: CYP information letter- focus group

Hello

My name is Johanna Doerr and you may have seen me around your school as I visit from time to time. I am a trainee educational psychologist, which means that I work with many children and schools to make schools a bit better for everyone. Educational psychologists work with children and schools and help schools to understand children better. We listen to what children have to say.



I am writing this letter to you to invite you to take part in a focus group I am doing. The focus group is about how children feel about moving from primary school to high school. I would like to come to your school and speak to you in a group with other year 6 pupils for about 30-45 minutes during your normal school day. This is called a focus group and I would like to know how children in the school feel about moving to high school. I will ask the group questions about school and we will use some paper to write down what children in the group have said.

What you say to me is confidential, which means that I will not tell other people about it. Because we are in a group, some of your friends might tell others (we will speak about this at the beginning and I will ask everybody that we do not discuss what is being said with others). The only time I would have to tell others about what you said is if I am concerned that you might not be safe. If I am worried about you I will tell an adult at your school (this is called following the safeguarding procedure).

CONFIDENTIAL



On the next page there are a few things to fill in and some boxes to tick. It's your choice, you can take part in this research or you can decide that you don't want to do it. You can also change your mind later on. Even if you say 'yes' now but then think that you don't want to do it you can just tell me or an adult at home or school (they will let me know). If you change your mind you can tell me or an adult and you can leave the group at any time.

If you have any questions or want to stop being part of the focus group, you can ask your teacher to contact me via email on:



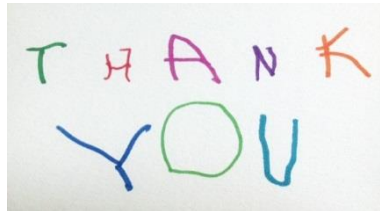
[-@bham.ac.uk](mailto:-@bham.ac.uk)

Because I am still at university, I have a teacher who is an educational psychologist. Her name is - and she is helping me with my project. Your teacher can contact her on this email address if you have any questions, are worried about something or if you don't want to be part of the project anymore:

[-@bham.ac.uk](mailto:-@bham.ac.uk)

I would really like you to take part in my focus group. If you want to help me then please fill out the form on the next page. Your parents can have to look at this form too, so please give it to them and they can send it to me.

Thank you very much!

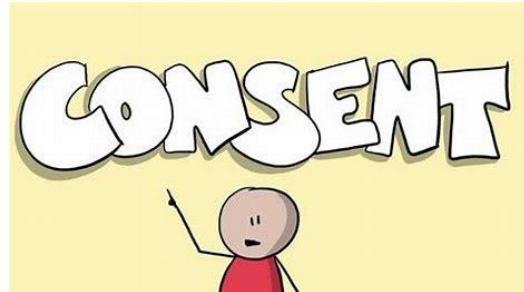


Appendix 5: CYP consent form- focus group

## Year 6 focus group: Consent Form

Name: .....

School: .....



To give consent means that you agree with what is being asked.

If you agree then please circle YES, if you do not agree please circle NO.

Even if you say 'YES' now, you can always change your mind and you do not have to be part of the focus group.

I would like to take part in the focus group	
YES	NO
I know that my answers will be confidential (that means that nobody else will know any details about me or what I said). However, because there are other year 6 children in the group I know that they might tell others.	
YES	NO
I know that I can stop being part of the focus group at any time before the focus group and that I can leave at any time. I only have to ask an adult at school or tell my parents and they will let Johanna know.	
YES	NO
I know that if the researcher (Johanna) is concerned about my well-being she will need to speak to another adult about it.	
YES	NO



## **Appendix 6: Parental consent form- focus group**

### **Parental Consent Form**

**Project:** Focus group to understand the language year 6 pupils use when talking about transition to secondary school

Parent name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Withdrawal:**

I understand that I (or my child) can withdraw from the project at any point between now and completion of the project. If I would like to withdraw my child I can contact the researcher (Johanna Doerr), her supervisor (Julia Howe) or my child's teacher. If you would like to withdraw your child from the project all data in relation to your child will be deleted and not used in the project.

#### **By signing this form,**

- I confirm that I have read and understood the attached letter that contains information about the project
- I give my child consent to participate in the above project
- I understand that I can withdraw consent until the focus group is finished

Signed (parent signature): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 7: School information letter- main study

Johanna Doerr  
SEND Services  
Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_(insert name of school contact) ,

My name is Johanna and I am a trainee educational psychologist from Birmingham University. I am on placement in Lancashire and interested in how children from rural primary schools deal with the transition to much larger high schools. There is very little research been done in this area and I would like to investigate how the children themselves feel about the transition.

Given that you are part of my rural school cluster, I would like to come to your school to complete research in the 'child's voice' on the transition to secondary school. I hope that through this work, those working with children will gain a better understanding of what pupils feel about the forthcoming transition and therefore potentially improving the transitions. This research will form part of my doctoral thesis.

I would like to speak to all of your current Y6 children and would work with them in small groups of 2-3 pupils, including all of your Y6 cohort. Focus of the research is to establish pupils' feelings towards the current school and hopes/fears for the future school. A questionnaire/rating scales will be used and I may also ask pupils to complete some paper-based activities (e.g. drawings) if they find it difficult to verbalise their views. I will also audio-record the conversation. Overall, each child will be out of lesson for around 30-45 minutes.

All of the children's responses are confidential and individual's names or details will not be shared with anybody. Each child's name and demographic information, as well as the name of your school will be anonymised, ensuring that each child and his or her responses cannot be traced. However, if a child discloses a safeguarding issues and/or if I am worried about a child's well-being I will breach confidentiality and follow your school's safeguarding procedure.

Following the research, I will be happy to provide you with a short summary of my findings. Children will also be offered a child-friendly version of the findings of my research.

I would appreciate if you could please distribute the attached parental information sheet and consent letter as well as the child's consent form, to your Y6 parents and children and collect the returned consent forms for me. Without consent (from both, parents and children) I will not be able to work with the child at your school.

Thank you very much for reading this letter and please contact me (or my supervisor -) if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

Johanna Doerr

Trainee educational psychologist (University of Birmingham)

Supervisor contact details:

Dr -

School of Education; University of Birmingham

-@bham.ac.uk

## Appendix 8: Parental information letter- main study

Johanna Doerr  
SEND Services  
Address

Dear Parent/carer,

My name is Johanna and I am a trainee educational psychologist from Birmingham University. I am on placement in Lancashire and interested in how children from primary schools deal with the transition to much larger high schools. There is very little research been done in this area and I would like to investigate how the children themselves feel about the transition.

Given that your child is currently in Y6 at primary school, I would appreciate if you would consent for your child to take part in my research (your child will also be asked to give consent separately). I hope that by your child participating, those working with children will gain a better understanding into the child's voice regarding transition, potentially improving the transitions from primary schools to larger schools. This research will form part of my doctoral thesis.

If your child participates in the project, I will audio-record a conversation between your child and me, focusing on his or her feelings towards the current school and hopes/fears for the future school. I may also ask your child to complete some paper-based activities (e.g. drawings) if they find it difficult to verbalise their views. Finally, there will be a short rating scale/questionnaire that your child may be asked to fill in. Overall, your child will be out of lesson for around 30-45 minutes.

All of your child's responses are confidential and your child's name or details will not be shared with anybody. Your child's name and demographic information, as well as the name of your child's school will be anonymised, ensuring that your child and his or her responses cannot be traced. The only time confidentiality will have to be broken is if I am concerned about your child's well-being, in which case I will follow your child's school safeguarding procedure.

Following the research, I will be happy to provide you with a short summary of my findings. Your child will also be offered a child-friendly version of the findings of my research. If you (or your child) wish to withdraw from the research, you (or your child) can do so at any time up to the September 2019 (after this I am hoping to have completed the final analysis and would be unable to take out his or her data).

If you agree for your child to participate in the research, please complete the attached consent form and return it to your child's teacher.

Thank you very much for reading this letter and please contact me (or my supervisor -) if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,  
Johanna Doerr  
Trainee educational psychologist  
University of Birmingham

Supervisor contact details:

Dr -

School of Education

University of Birmingham

-

-@bham.ac.uk

## Appendix 9: CYP information letter- main study

Hello

My name is Johanna Doerr and you may have seen me around your school as I visit from time to time. I am a trainee educational psychologist, which means that I work with many children and schools to make schools a bit better for everyone. Educational psychologists work with children and schools and help schools to understand children better. We listen to what children have to say.



I am writing this letter to you to invite you to take part in a project I am doing. The project is about how children feel about moving from primary school to high school and how schools help children with this move. I would like to come to your school and speak to you for about 30-45 minutes during your normal school day and will ask you some questions about school. There may also be some paperwork that we will do together and some questions on a paper for you to read and answer.



I will need to record what we are saying with a voice recorder. What you say to me is confidential, which means that I will not tell other people about it. The only time I would have to tell others about what you said is if I am concerned that you might not be safe. If I am worried about you I will tell an adult at your school (this is called following the safeguarding procedure).



On the next page there are a few things to fill in and some boxes to tick. It's your choice, you can take part in this research or you can decide that you don't want to do it. You can also change your mind later on. Even if you say 'yes' now but then think that you don't want to do it you can just tell me or an adult at home or school (they will let me know). If you change your mind you would have to let me know by the September 2019, so that I can delete your answers.

If you have any questions or want to stop being part of the project, you can ask your teacher to contact me via email on:

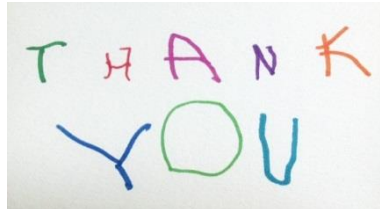
[jxd736@bham.ac.uk](mailto:jxd736@bham.ac.uk)

Because I am still at university, I have a teacher who is an educational psychologist. Her name is - and she is helping me with my project. Your teacher can contact her on this email address if you have any questions, are worried about something or if you don't want to be part of the project anymore:

[-@bham.ac.uk](mailto:-@bham.ac.uk)

I would really like you to take part in my project. If you want to help me then please fill out the form on the next page. Your parents can have to look at this form too, so please give it to them and they can send it to me.

Thank you very much!



**Appendix 10: Parental consent- main study**

**Parental Consent Form**

**Project:** Investigating the child's voice on the transition  
from a rural school to secondary school

Parent name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

**Withdrawal:**

I understand that I (or my child) can withdraw from the project at any point between now and the end of September 2019. If I would like to withdraw my child I can contact the researcher (Johanna Doerr), her supervisor (Julia Howe) or my child's teacher. If you would like to withdraw your child from the project all data in relation to your child will be deleted and not used in the project.

**By signing this form,**

- I confirm that I have read and understood the attached letter that contains information about the project
- I give my child consent to participate in the above project
- I understand that I can withdraw consent until September 2019 (as outlined above)

Signed (parent signature): \_\_\_\_\_

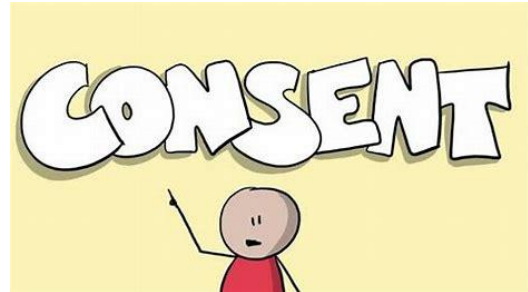
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix 11: CYP consent- main study

## Year 6 children: Consent Form

Name: .....

School: .....



To give consent means that you agree with what is being asked.

If you agree then please circle YES, if you do not agree please circle NO.

Even if you say 'YES' now, you can always change your mind and all of your details and everything you have said or filled out will be deleted. You can change your mind before, during or after the project, until the end of September 2019.

I would like to take part in the project	
YES	NO
I know that my answers will be anonymous (that means that nobody else will know any details about me or what I said)	
YES	NO
I know that the researcher (Johanna) will use a voice recorder to tape what we say.	
YES	NO
I know that I can stop being part of the project at any time until September 2019 (I only have to ask an adult at school or tell my parents and they will let Johanna know).	
YES	NO
I know that if the researcher (Johanna) is concerned about my well-being she will need to speak to another adult about it.	
YES	NO



## **Appendix 12: The development of themes- a worked example**

The aim of this worked example is to demonstrate how the data was analysed, highlighting the more in-depth understanding of the data and the adjustments that were made for each step of the analysis. The analysis follows the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to TA.

This example shows the development of one key theme throughout the analysis, illustrating the development of the key theme Environment, with its final sub-themes (organisational and nature/size). Initially, a simplistic categorisation grouped the data as positive and negative aspects of the environment (for both, primary and secondary school). In the final stages of the analysis, an in-depth understanding of the data is presented, with the constructs around the key theme Environment highlighting two sub-themes. The analysis linked transition to the experience of change, in terms of both sub-themes; the organisational demands being placed upon pupils and in relation to how the secondary school is different in its nature/size. Finally, the analysis linked strategies that pupils consider to be helpful in the transition to the sub-themes.

## Phase 1- Familiarisation with data

Initially, the data was understood in terms of positive and negative aspects of transition, with two very broad categories highlighting the practicalities of the new school (as illustrated below). At this stage of the analysis, it was apparent that change is perceived as both, positive and negative.

Practicalities of the new school	
Positive aspects	Negative aspects
Primary= small Primary= positive (fun)  More clubs New subjects More people  Change- it will be great/a new opportunity	Secondary= big Secondary= uncertainties  Finding way around/getting lost Journey to and from new school More homework Difficult Logistics  Change- leaving what is familiar, not sure what expectations might be

## Phase 2- Generating initial codes

Following the broad understanding of the data, initial codes were developed according to the meaning. The data was no longer understood in terms of positive/negative aspects of transition, as it was found to be too simplistic. More in-depth codes captured the range of data, which are illustrated by sample quotes below.

<b>Nature of the old/new school</b>	
<b>Small/big</b>	<b>Sample quotes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'My high school is a lot bigger than my primary'</li> <li>• 'Small (primary); Big (secondary)'</li> </ul>
<b>General opportunities</b>	<b>Sample quotes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'More subjects to learn'</li> <li>• 'The trips in high school'</li> </ul>
<b>Lost/late</b>	<b>Sample quotes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'I am scared that I get lost on the first day'</li> <li>• 'Worried about being late'</li> </ul>
<b>School arrangements</b>	<b>Sample quotes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'What time is break?'</li> <li>• 'Are school days longer or shorter than here?'</li> </ul>
<b>Sports/clubs</b>	<b>Sample quotes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'More after school clubs'</li> <li>• 'I am looking forward to using their sports facilities'</li> </ul>
<b>Primary= positive</b>	<b>Sample quotes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'It is so wonderful can't think of any words to describe this heaven of a school'</li> <li>• 'It's always made fun'</li> </ul>
<b>Secondary= uncertainties</b>	<b>Sample quotes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Seeing a lot more faces (note: worried)'</li> <li>• 'Sometimes it will be boring'</li> </ul>

### Phase 3- Searching for themes

In this phase, the broader initial codes were further developed and divided into sub-themes, which contribute to the key themes. The sub themes organisational, opportunity and nature/size were found to collectively capture the key theme Environment.

<b>Environment</b>	
<b>Organisational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finding way around school</li><li>• Journey to and from school</li><li>• Logistics</li><li>• Being late</li></ul>
<b>Opportunity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sports/ clubs</li><li>• General opportunities</li></ul>
<b>Nature/size</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Small versus big school</li><li>• Primary= positive</li><li>• Secondary= uncertainty</li></ul>

#### Phase 4- Reviewing the themes

When reviewing the data, it was found that the majority of data entries matched the themes. Some data contributions were moved between sub-themes, as they were found to capture the nature of a different theme better. For example, 'I only know a few people (in my new school)' was considered to reflect changes in relationships better than changes in the nature of the school and was thus moved to the key theme Relationships. In addition to this, the underlying concept of change was included in the thematic map, which reflects the notion that the transition to secondary school is considered to change the pupil's current experiences in terms of the three key themes. Finally, strategies addressing this change were developed.

Environment			
Strategies			
<b>Change:</b> Moving from a known (low demand) environment to an unknown environment, which is perceived to have high levels of demand (but also more opportunities)	<b>Organisational</b>	Finding way around school Journey to and from school Being late Logistics	'ask a friend' 'practice' 'leave earlier' 'be more organised'
	<b>Opportunity</b>	Sports/ clubs General opportunities	'explore, more fun' 'take chances'
	<b>Nature/size</b>	Small versus big school Primary= positive Secondary= uncertainty	'figure it out' 'split into forms' '...activities are aimed at everyone' 'I am used to a big school'- refer to experiences of visiting large settings'

## Phase 5- Defining and naming themes

During this phase, all themes and sub-themes were reconsidered to ensure that the themes and thematic map captured the data in its entirety. Some data points were excluded from the analysis at this stage, as they were unclear (e.g. a participant wrote the term 'unescapable' without any context). In addition to this, two sub-themes were merged. The sub-theme opportunity within the key theme Environment was considered to be better captured within the context of the key theme Personal Growth. Thus, the final thematic map for Environment shows the key theme (Environment) with its two sub-themes (organisational and nature/size).

<b>Key theme: Environment</b>		
<b>Change:</b> Moving from a known (low demand) environment to an unknown environment, which is perceived to have high levels of demand (but also more opportunities)	<b>Sub-theme:</b> <b>Organisational</b>	<b>Strategies:</b> For each sub-theme, pupils identifies a range of strategies that may be helpful to address transition issues. These include practical strategies and theoretical approaches (see 4.9.)
	<b>Sub-theme:</b> <b>Nature/size</b>	

Appendix 13: Familiarisation with data (Phase 1 in TA)

Results from Task 1



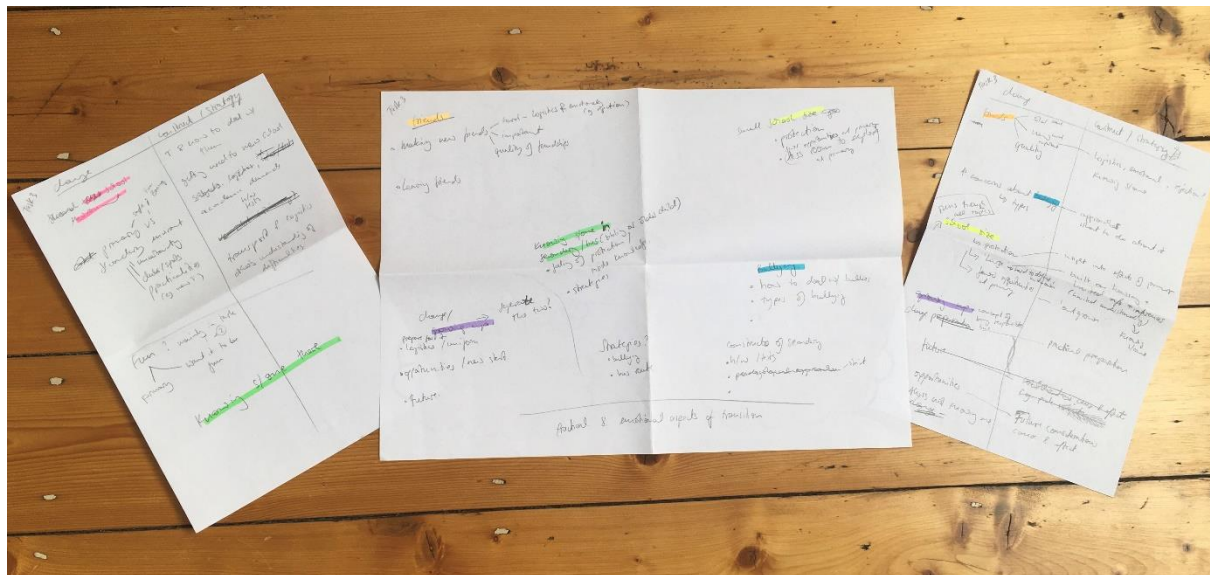
Results from Task 2

The image displays eight printed worksheets, likely from a task or assignment, scattered on a wooden surface. Each worksheet contains a table with columns for dates, names, and numerical values. Some cells in the tables are highlighted in green or pink, indicating specific data points or results. The worksheets are arranged in a somewhat circular pattern, with some overlapping. The handwriting is in black ink, and the overall appearance is that of a student's work or a collection of data sheets.



## Appendix 14: Generalising initial codes (Phase 2 in TA)

## Development of early themes

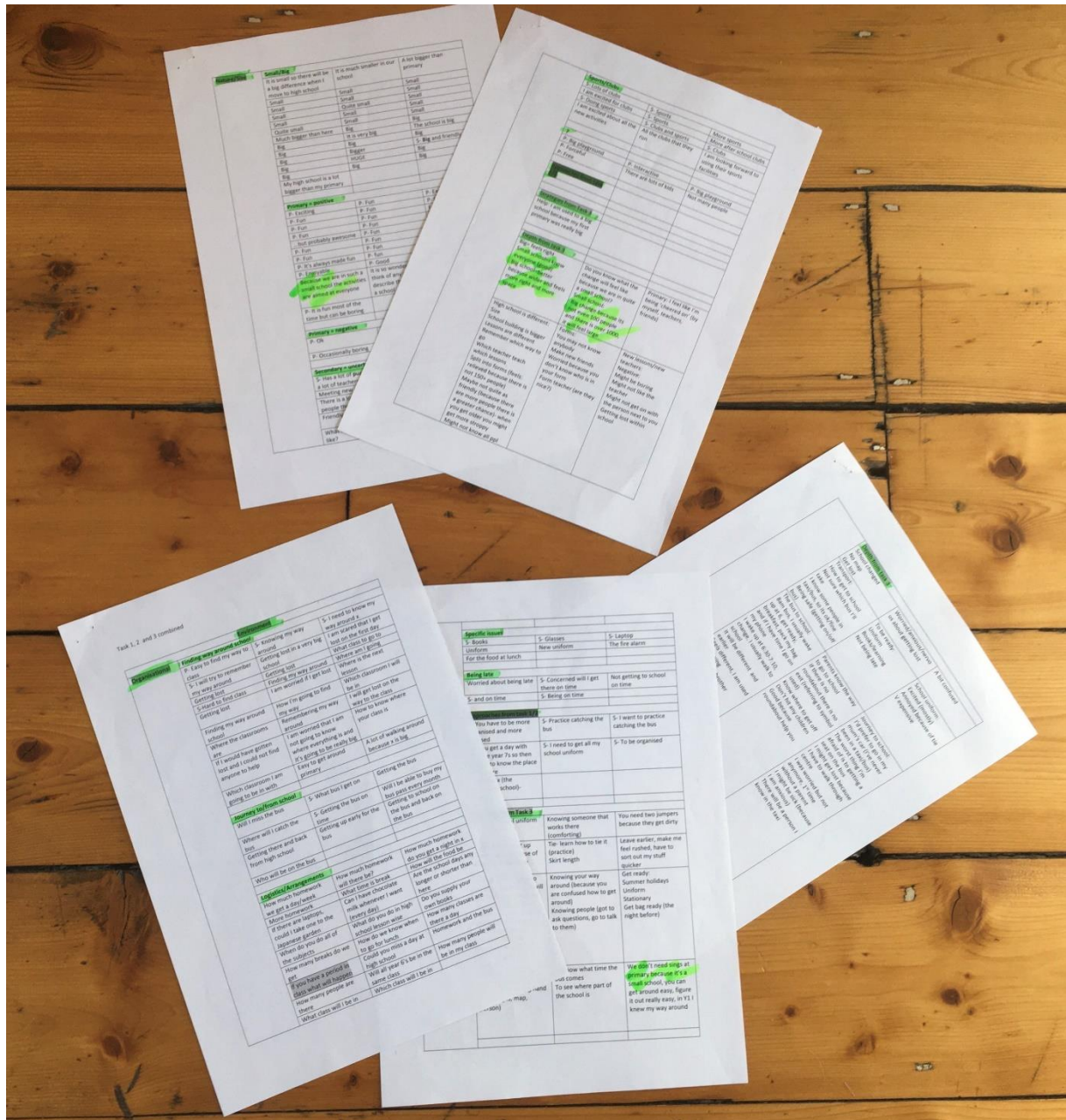


## Appendix 15: Searching for themes (Phase 3 in TA)

### Theme: Relationships

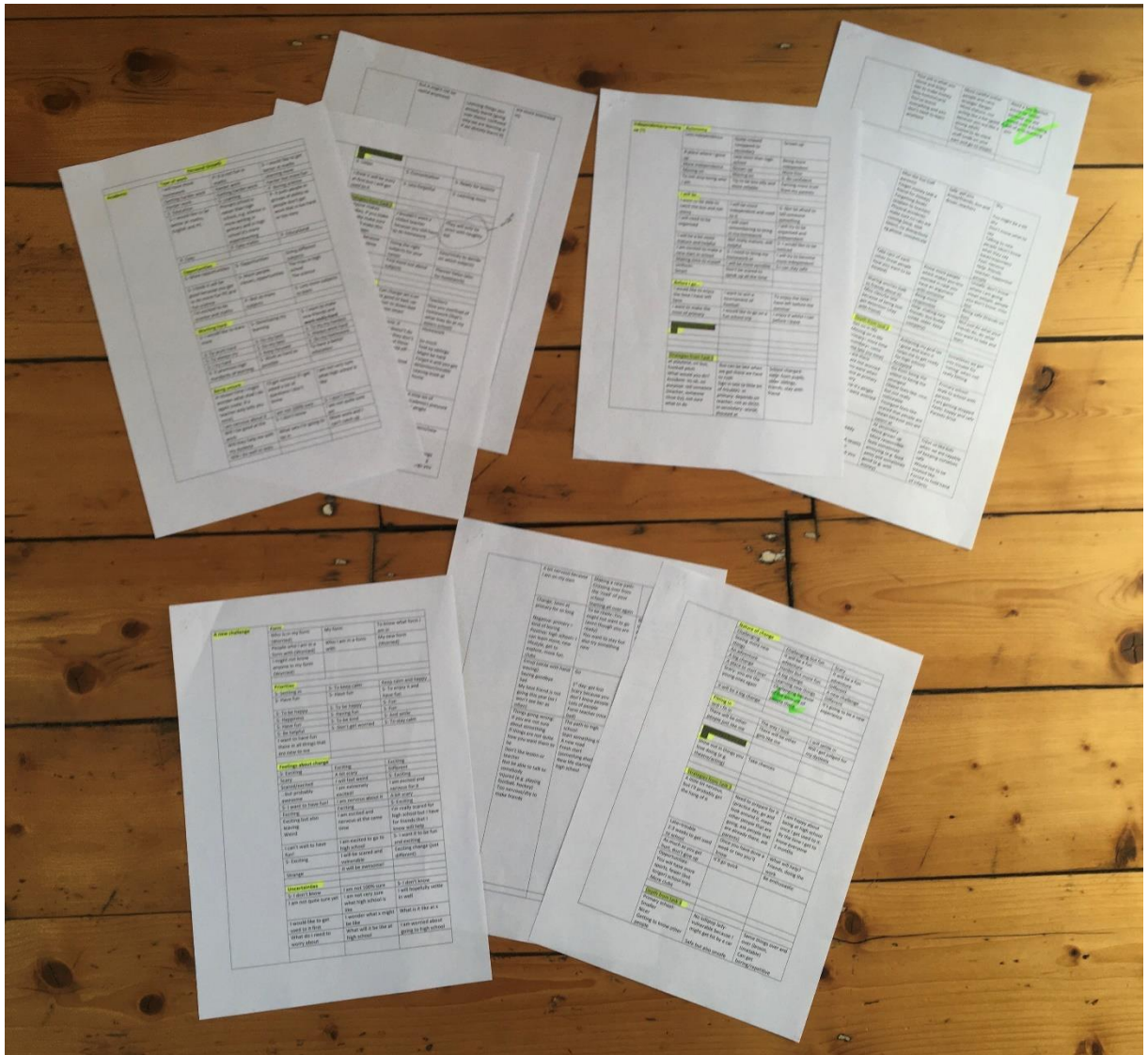


## Theme: Nature/Size



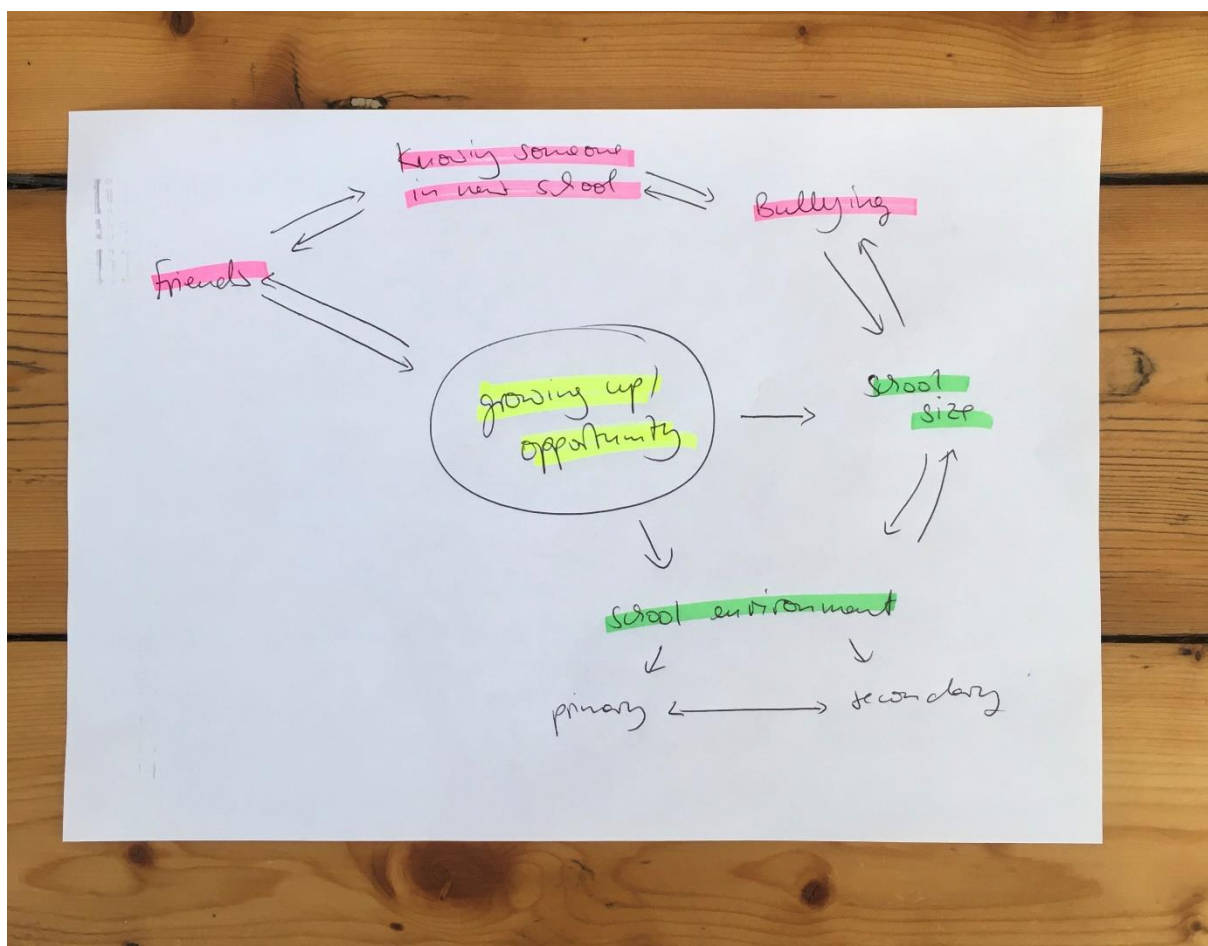


## Theme: Personal Growth



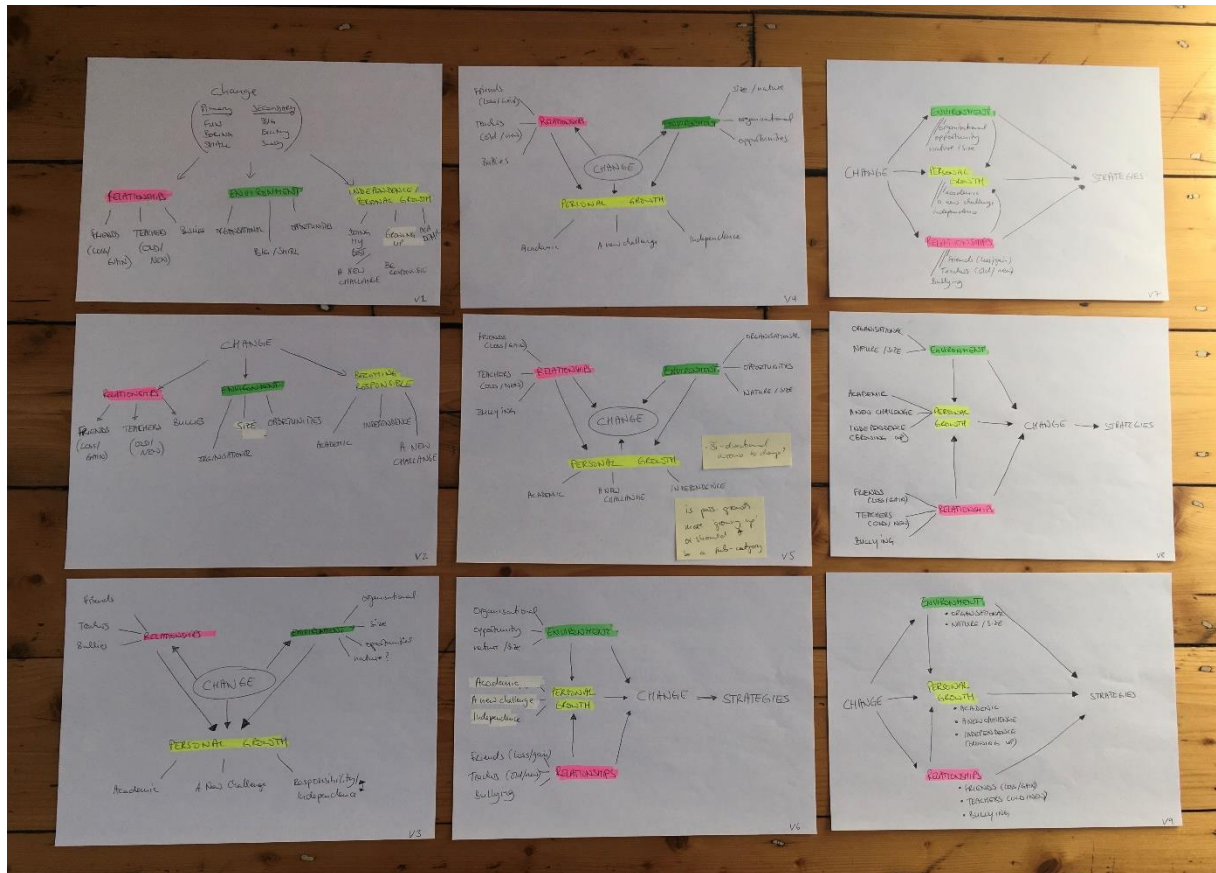
## Appendix 16: Early thematic map (Phase 3 in TA)

Thematic map development; an example of an early version

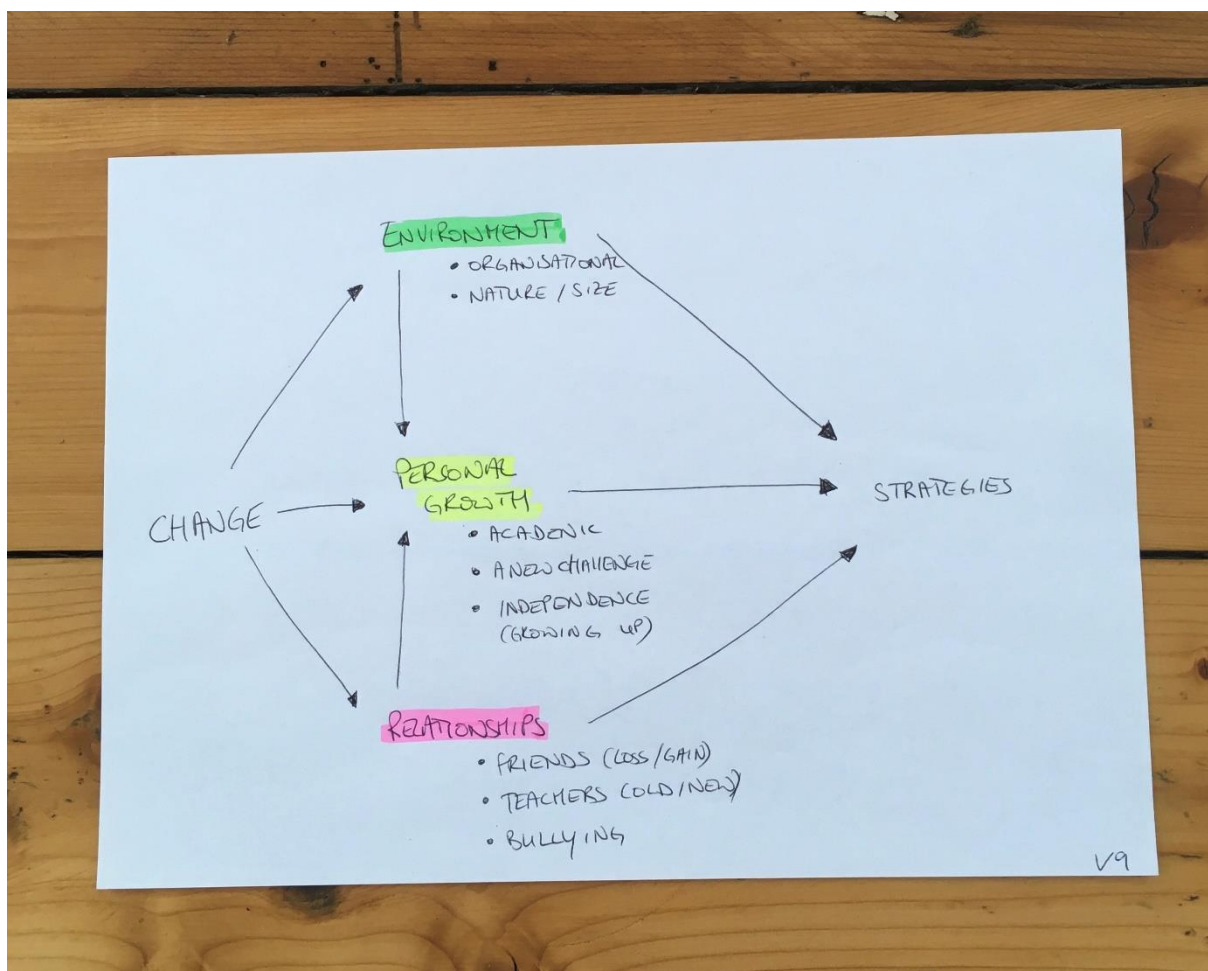


## Appendix 17: Variations of thematic maps (Phase 4 in TA)

### Variations of the Thematic map, versions 1-9



## Appendix 18: The final thematic map (Phase 5 in TA)



## Appendix 19: Examples of data excluded from analysis

### Data excluded from final analysis

I get headaches easily	Chocolate milk
I want...	Me
I get travel sick	???
I want to...books	My rabbits
Unescapable (note: no context)	



## Appendix 20: Participants' demographic information

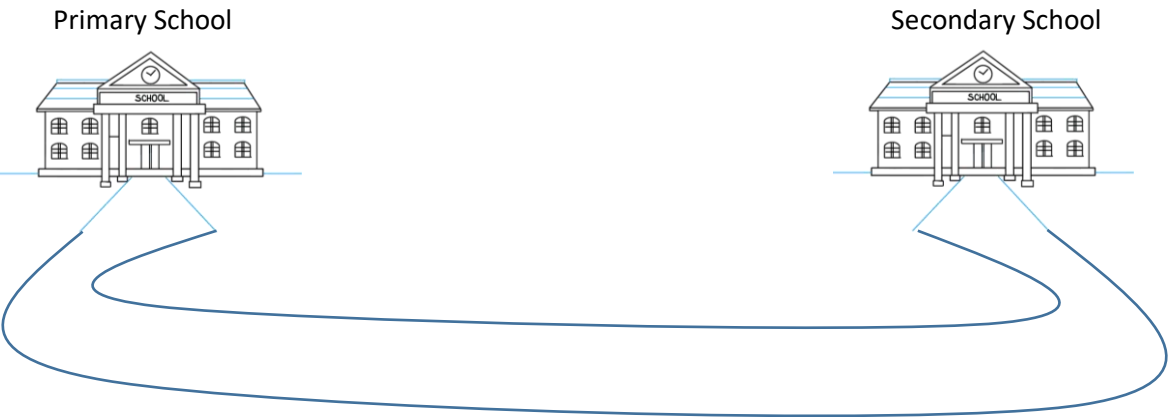
<b>Nr</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>SEND</b>	<b>FSM</b>	<b>EAL</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
1	M	N	N	N	White British
2	F	N	N	N	White British
3	M	Y	Y	N	White British
4	M	Y	N	N	White British
5	M	N	N	N	White British
6	F	N	N	N	White British
7	M	Y	N	N	White British
8	F	Y	N	N	White British
9	M	N	N	N	White British
10	M	N	N	N	White British
11	M	N	N	N	White British
12	F	N	N	N	White British
13	M	N	N	N	White British
14	M	N	N	N	White British
15	F	Y	N	N	White British
16	F	N	N	N	White British
17	F	Y	N	N	White British
18	F	Y	N	N	White British
19	M	N	N	N	White British
20	F	N	N	N	White British
21	F	N	N	N	White British
22	M	N	N	N	White British
23	F	N	N	N	White British
24	F	N	N	N	White British
25	F	N	N	N	White British
26	F	Y	N	N	White British
27	F	Y	N	N	White British
28	M	N	N	N	White British
29	F	N	N	N	White British
30	F	N	N	N	White British
31	F	N	Y	N	White British
32	F	N	N	N	White British
33	M	N	N	N	White British
34	F	N	N	N	White British

**Appendix 21:** Overview of school groups and their demographics

<b>Nr</b>	<b>School size</b>	<b>Year group size</b>	<b>Nr of pupils taking part in research</b>
<b>1</b>	34	3	3
<b>2</b>	67	5	3
<b>3</b>	34	4	3
<b>4</b>	54	2	2
<b>5</b>	58	9	7
<b>6</b>	38	8	8
<b>7</b>	25	6	6
<b>8</b>	41	5	2

**Appendix 22:** Sample action plan: planning for transitions

Name:



What	What strategies might help?	Who can help? How? (Actions)	What can I do? (Actions)