Transitions Case study

School: The Buckingham School
Transition Lead: Caroline Collie, Head of Y7 and Matt Wardle, Deputy Head.
2016 was Caroline’s first year leading the transitions process but Matt and Caroline work together

The aim of the transition process at The Buckingham School is to build trust and develop confidence through familiarity with both staff and facilities. The visits, transition days and parents meetings aim to provide knowledge and engenders belonging – the sport and team building key to this.

Key focus of their process is relationships with primaries schools. They have been building links with feeder schools across subjects; IT, English, PE, MFL. Staff use their gained time to work with Y6s in the primaries and this feeds into transitions and improves secondary readiness in that last half term.

Secondary readiness is another key focus; they want the transition process to encourage independence, organisation, self-motivation and ensure children understand the change in expectations between primary and secondary school.

Initial open evenings are held but also coffee mornings for prospective parents during the school day, giving them the opportunity to see the school in action. These have had really good interest, with high numbers of parents coming. Selected students have the privilege of showing them round.

After allocation the transition process proper begins with visits to all feeder schools during May. They have approx. 16 feeder schools, with numbers ranging from c.40 to 1/2/3s

Caroline takes current Y7s back to their old primary school. This is very popular so Y7s apply and then are selected on grounds of behaviour, attitude, achievement etc. During the visit Buckingham staff give pupils an overview and then the Y7s take smaller groups and talk about different aspects of the school e.g. uniform, timetable etc.

The work of the School Sports Partnership means that Caroline is already a familiar face to many of the children and the children are already familiar with the school.

Enhanced transitions
They have established extended transitions programme for pupils identified as vulnerable; this means they spend full day in school on a Wednesday for 8 weeks during Y6. Primaries are asked to highlight possible pupils.

They have the ‘STEP’ room available for these students; this is the base for support staff and place students can resort to if necessary. They also have Nurture groups working in Y7.

Transitions Day
They run two days, and have done for some time.
Day 1 begins with a welcome assembly covering expectations and form groups are announced, then the day is timetabled so they can get to know staff. Timings arranged so they don’t see busiest times in school, e.g. break and lunch.
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A Parents meeting is held on evening of first day: welcome assembly, reflect on first day and then information about school and ethos. Also an older student speaks to parents to explain Student Voice. The aim is to keep it informal and friendly; they show photos of children taken during the day on the screen.

At this event there is also a marketplace for external agencies e.g. uniform supply, stationers, and non-teaching staff such as school councillor, school nurse etc.

On Day 2 students have timetabled lessons in the morning and then in the afternoon they do team building and sports activities and finish with a barbecue. All students are given a PE Goody bag that contains pens, handouts, book marks, information. Many children really value these and lots continue to use the PE bag as they go through the school.

After Y6 transition day they hold two Y5 coffee mornings, just the same as they have for Y6s but for Y5 parents. They have run these for two years and have seen numbers doubled. These events are key is ensuring parents and all external agencies are part of the process and good communications are initiated and maintained through the transition process and on through the school.

Summer
The summer school has been running for 2 years and this has been really effective as a positive way for children to get to know each and the staff. Participating students are all invitees, based on the disadvantage and or vulnerabilities identified by primaries. They have set summer work but are planning to move from set pieces to a challenge as this means no marking burden for staff. However they are looking for something that is targeted and purposeful.

September
Four weeks into Y7 a meet the tutor evening is held to enable them to touch base with parents. They also do a student survey using survey monkey four weeks in, although they look at results collectively they can also identify individuals if there are concerns. They use the Whole Education Path Survey and feel it gives real insight into the whole year group and the individuals http://www.wholeeducation.org/

Y10s are appointed as Peer mentors, 4 to a form for first half term. Interested students apply and are appointed in Y9. This also helpful for new staff too. It is a really positive initiative for older students as they have role and responsibility.

Historically they have put newly appointed form tutors with Y7, as they are all in the same boat but also they try wherever possible to keep the same tutors and forms together going up the school to sustain relationships.

Manageability for staff
Time constraints are a factor; but they want to explore the potential for IT
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For them the number of feeders is an issue; especially as so many have small numbers. It means visits etc. take longer.
More information they get from primaries and the earlier they receive it the better.

Books and sharing work
In 2016 the English department encouraged primary schools to send each child with a piece of best work that would act as a reference point for both teachers and students. But this may not be adopted as part of the transition process as Matt and Caroline sceptical that its value outweighed the time spent in organising it.

Feedback from students and staff and parents
The catchment is a tightly-knit community; many families already have links to the school. Reflection from parents and pupils always feedback into process
Sports partnership offers opportunities to link back and see Y6 teachers

Development plans
It is an established process and they are always trying to improve it. One aim is to investigate how IT could be used effectively in the process.

Secondary readiness is going to be the focus 2017. They want to get primaries on side to do more in the after SATs period.

They are particularly keen to reach the vulnerable pupils and those with behaviour issues get them on programme in last half term.

They have bought in the Success Maker programme

This year they have banded in forms on junior MFL so there is a French side and Spanish side; this enables pupils to continue the language they studied in primary school.