Moving on

The role of ICT in pupils' transition

Becta
ICT Advice

LEAs have an important role to play in supporting schools as their pupils transfer from one phase of education to another. Transferring between phases often causes pupils to stagnate – or even regress – in terms of educational achievement, and many schools and LEAs are adopting strategies to tackle this. ICT has a role to play here, not only in providing an administrative tool but also, as a transferable skill, in providing pupils with a means for collaborative working, personal development and continuity of learning.

The strategies used to assist pupils' transition vary widely, and this document is based on features of good practice that were identified by two LEA officers who visited a number of LEAs to examine the transfer process. Unitary, urban and county authorities were visited and discussions held with LEA officers, schools and pupils to find out what strategies were being used and what lessons could be learned for others. The strategies observed fell into five broad areas, which work towards the goal of personalised learning:.

- Managerial support – *mainly designed to ease the administration of transfer*. This included meetings between heads and teachers, staff visits between feeder and secondary schools, the transfer of pupil level data and parents' meetings to impart information.

- Social and personal familiarisation– *designed to ease any stress or anxiety that pupils might have*. Induction days, when the pupils from all the feeder schools came together to spend a whole day in their new forms in the secondary school, proved particularly successful.

- Curriculum coherence and continuity – *designed for receiving schools to send their teachers to teach lessons in the feeder schools*. Some schools had set up joint activities or projects spanning the final term in the feeder school and the first term in the new school.

- Pedagogy – d*eveloping joint programmes to develop pupils' skills*. Here pupils were taught certain skills, such as working collaboratively in groups, or raising and answering challenging questions.

- Personalised learning strategies – *activities designed to provide pupils with strategies for managing their learning*. This could involve, amongst other things, setting up extended independent or personalised induction programmes during the first term in the new school.

It was found that, to achieve best practice, strategies are needed that address all these areas. All LEAs tackle some of them, (managerial support, for example), but few have developed an overview that recognises that personalised learning is an outcome of a strategic development. The case studies that follow illustrate how a key area was addressed, what activities were undertaken and what impact this had on pupils, teachers and the LEA. Alongside each project description is a checklist showing how, in spite of co-ordinated efforts by the LEAs and schools, the goal of personalised learning is a challenging target to achieve.

Managerial support — Providing information for parents and pupils, and sharing information between schools and teachers

Social and personal familiarisation — Providing information, taster sessions and school visits to familiarise pupils with the new school before they move

Curriculum coherence — Sharing knowledge and teaching skills between primary and secondary schools to foster continuity and progression

Pedagogy — Promoting collaboration, thinking skills, problem solving and independent learning

Personalised learning strategies — Providing personalised support for development and growth

The project

A key activity engaged in by most schools when pupils transfer from one phase to another is managerial and administrative support of the transfer of pupil data.

To achieve a smooth transfer, there needs to be an acceptance by the next education phase that assessment of pupils against National Curriculum levels is sound. In ICT, for example, the 'numbers' need to represent a level that encompasses:

- a range of skills, knowledge and learning experiences
- contextualised application of these skills and knowledge
- true ICT capability.

To achieve this, both phases need to be secure in their knowledge of the characteristics of a level if they are to 'make and accept' judgements in terms of pupils' levels of achievement. Both phases also need to bear in mind the purpose of this activity, so that learning in both phases is complementary.

LEA action

In one LEA, the outcome of using a mediated self-assessment matrix indicated that both assessment and the process of making assessments was weak. Helping schools to make secure assessments against National Curriculum levels therefore became a key priority. Initially the LEA held courses and assessment workshops for ICT subject leaders. The objectives were to ensure that firstly, ICT subject leaders understood the ICT requirements within National Curriculum levels and that teachers could then use this knowledge to develop realistic and secure assessments of their own pupils. As a result of the process, the LEA developed a table identifying level descriptors that teachers could relate to when making judgements.

While this resource began to provide some security in the levels assessed, there was still the problem of acceptance by those who receive this data. Most professionals in a particular education phase focus their professional awareness and development within that phase. If their awareness of prior learning is not secure, then 'numbers' are purely markers of levels of activity, not informative guides that support and shape what will happen next. As a result, in the next phase, children often have to engage in activities that are 'checking judgements' made by other professionals rather than moving a child's learning forward.

To address this issue, the LEA decided to focus the next phase of action on the 'makers and receivers' of judgements, the Year 6 and Year 7 teachers. The key intention was to establish trust in judgements by enabling both groups to formulate a joint understanding of the key characteristics of levels of achievement. Through a joint training day, managed by the LEA, teachers from both groups used the standardised samples of work available on the QCA 'NCaction' site to share opinions about the levels and judgements made. The descriptors of the tasks gave both groups a 'consultative sample' in order to develop their knowledge of ICT experiences, skills development, capability and processes behind levels. Awareness across the key areas of teaching styles, learning opportunities, access to resources, ICT curriculum and contextualisation of work were also developed. As the work was not 'personal' to either group, an objective consensus was made.

Impact and outcomes

- The 'makers' of level judgements are aware of learning yet to take place, whilst 'acceptors' are aware of pupils' prior learning.

- Pupil data has real value as it now relates to levels of engagement across the key ICT elements.

- Year 6 teachers feel that making judgements about their pupils will support plans for both extended learning and curriculum continuity. The 'numbers' become a passport to the next phase and enable curriculum coherence.

- Year 7 teachers will be able to group pupils according to need and achieve curriculum continuity.

- The first half term can be focused on transition of pupils' prior learning into new learning experiences. Pupils feel that their new teachers are aware of their capabilities and that these are being developed.

- Teachers across both phases have a greater awareness of learning and teaching styles and are able to include characteristics of the 'previous or next phase' in their teaching, thus promoting collaboration, the development of thinking skills and independent learning.

How are teachers supported so they can make secure judgements about pupils' work?

What role do pupils play in the assessment process?

How does the LEA help teachers to use assessment data to plan for the next steps in pupils' learning?

Personalised learning strategies

Pedagogy

Curriculum coherence

Social and personal familiarisation

Managerial support
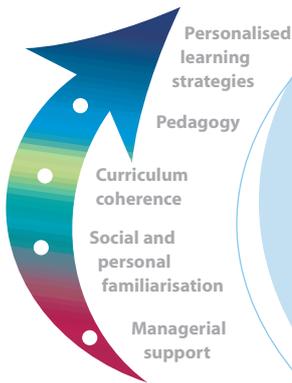
The project

Teaching and learning styles in ICT lessons vary widely and there can be a mismatch between some (even most) pupils that delays progress.

To address this, a 'cluster' of four primary schools in a unitary authority worked with their linked secondary school to develop a bridging unit. The pupils were taught learning skills, worked collaboratively and raised and answered challenging questions about the quality of their work.

A notable feature of this collaboration is the importance attached to the transfer phase by the secondary school. Technical support was available to the primary schools through a service agreement and regular visits to the primary school are made by the secondary ICT co-ordinator.

This collaborative approach is aimed at:

- increasing pupils' ability to retain what they have learnt
- promoting curriculum continuity and, importantly, continuity in the teaching strategies and styles that pupils experience when they transfer to the secondary school
- increasing pupils' independence in their use of ICT and providing them with opportunities to demonstrate higher levels of attainment.

LEA action

The LEA organised and led the training for the cluster's Year 6 and KS3 ICT teachers. A unit from the KS3 ICT Strategy (Communication, text and graphics) was used for the initial training and was followed by a joint planning session for the cluster. The schools agreed to adopt 7.1 as a bridging unit and adapted the context to a presentation on road safety.

A key feature of this unit is the approach to assessing pupils' ICT learning by 'capturing' their understanding of what they have learnt from the work they have undertaken. In Year 6, pupils are taught to evaluate their work against the lesson's objectives. They then discuss their evaluations with other pupils and can reject the comments of others provided they can justify their position. A crucial element of the process involves a short discussion with the teacher, who records the outcomes of the discussion and presentation of evidence. Pupils are required to demonstrate that they can repeat what they have learnt and this process continues in Year 7 and is eventually applied to all their KS3 ICT work.

The process of transferring the outcomes of the teachers' assessment and pupils' evaluation of their work is achieved through relatively simple, reliable and straightforward technology – using a recordable CD. The primary schools have access to a CD writer and technicians provided by the secondary school help with the process of recording pupils' work on the CD. The contents of the CD are then transferred to the secondary school's computer network. Pupils move their work into their own storage area on the network during the first lesson at the secondary school.

Impact and outcomes

Although this initiative is in the early stages of development, the schools and LEA have identified several benefits:

- The adoption of unit 7.1 provides a common teaching approach across the cluster's primary schools. This in turn tends to 'standardise' the range of Year 6 pupils' ICT experiences so that it is more manageable when they transfer to the secondary school. It also provides a common platform for evaluation and peer-to-peer discussion that can be used at the conclusion of the unit and then continued with the other KS3 ICT Strategy sample teaching units.

- Initial evidence from the peer-to-peer evaluation work is showing that when able pupils work with average or lower attainers, both make substantial gains.

- Transferring pupils' work via a CD and placing it on the secondary school's network helps to build pupils' confidence in the transfer process. It also demonstrates very clearly that their earlier work is valued and is used as the starting point in the new school.

- By using their previous work and continuing with the teaching strategy of 'evaluation and discussion' in their lessons, pupils receive a more coherent and continuous experience. They have a clearer understanding of what will be expected of them at the start of the lesson and are therefore more likely to commit themselves to achieving it.

What support will be provided for teachers when broadband internet connections are made available to schools and used to facilitate the transfer process?

How can Year 6 pupils' work from other subjects be valued in similar ways by the secondary school?

How will the process of 'evaluation and discussion' of pupils' work be developed and applied to other teaching units in KS3?

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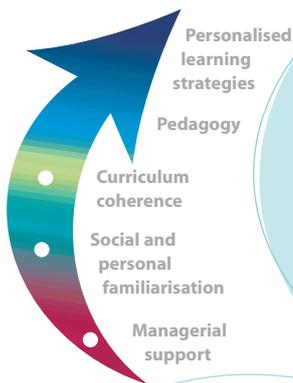
The project

All children approaching transfer from one education phase to another suffer from feelings of anxiety: they are moving from a secure environment to one where there are a lot of unknowns. Induction visits are often used to familiarise pupils with the new school – but these can be counter-productive. In one LEA, awareness of the effect of insecurity, anxiety and stress on a child's learning led the ICT education team to investigate activities that could make transfer a positive process. They started by asking themselves:

• Do induction days reduce anxious feelings about transfer to a new school?

• Do the people that the children meet on these days help reduce anxiety or add to it?

• Would class forums help anxious pupils to 'open up'?

• Should secondary schools seek to adopt some of the characteristics of the past teaching and learning environment to ease pupils' transfer?

How can LEAs set up secure environments for children while keeping access viable for all?

How can schools address the issue of inclusion to the e-community?

How can chat rooms be monitored in order that pupils, parents and teachers feel it is a valuable community?

LEA action

As a result of their investigations, two key activities evolved, based on developing electronic communities across schools. During the planning stage, schools shared teaching strategies that enabled the other phase to understand the context within which they work. They then set up 'E-buddies', a closed chat-line network operating between a secondary school and its four feeder primaries. Its key aim is to give children in the primary schools the opportunity to post questions about the secondary school they will soon be attending. Children and staff in Year 7 can then answer these questions, their purpose being to allay fears, develop a caring community and enable curriculum continuity.

The children in the primary school are able to access the e-community during breakfast clubs and lunchtimes. In the secondary phase, access is restricted to English lessons when pupils get the experience of talking to children they do not know, writing supportive and informed responses and posting topics to act as incentives for children to join the community and have their voice heard. Some children with particular interests have found an E-buddy 'with a like mind' rather than feeling that their interest isolates them.

Staff have set specific projects to get the children involved in shared activities, including designing the E-buddy logo and suggesting ways of coping with school tests.

In the planning phase, pupils in both communities had training in using the chat room and security parameters were set. The network is managed by a consultant within the advisory team. The ICT consultant moderates all messages before they go on the open forum. Children have passwords to the site and email addresses are class based. As the E-buddy forum is able to be viewed on the Web, all children were told they should not mention places, times and other personal information that could make them vulnerable.

Impact and outcomes

• Children across the primary schools are involved in shared projects and become part of a new community, enabling the receiving school to continue a programme of study.

• Children feel safe using E-buddies and solve problems together.

• Resources can be posted on the site for all to access.

• Children voiced anxieties and fears that they would not normally air through the normal channels and teachers developed strategies to deal with them.

• Children can access the online community at home or school.

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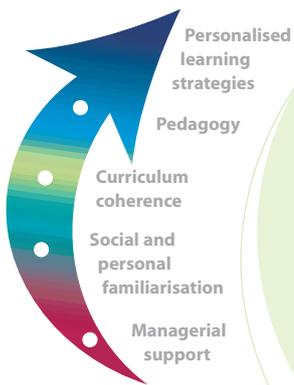
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Variation in the ICT experience pupils have on transfer, together with doubts that secondary schools may feel about primary schools' assessment of ICT attainment, combines to form a barrier to curriculum continuity and common agreement on attainment levels.

Some schools located in a large county LEA have, with support from the authority, created joint ICT projects that seek to ensure curriculum coherence and continuity and help teachers reach a common understanding of the levels of pupils' ICT attainment at the end of Year 6.

The LEA has provided schools with broadband connections to facilitate the transfer process. This approach is helping to overcome the organisational difficulties encountered in an area with a significant turnover of teachers, a high turnover of pupils in some towns and low expectations of primary pupils' ICT capability. The aims were to identify:

- ways in which broadband connections and dedicated web pages can support progression and help to ensure coherence between a large number of primary schools and their partner secondary school

- how the LEA can facilitate the sharing of subject knowledge and assessment practice between the schools

- how pupils and teachers benefit from this use of broadband technology.

LEA action

The LEA invited primary headteachers with their Year 6 teachers and secondary ICT co-ordinators to a meeting to discuss the transfer process. From this meeting the LEA facilitated a project-planning meeting between a pilot group of 16 primary schools and the three secondary schools to which their pupils transfer. The project provides the secondary ICT co-ordinators with opportunities to visit their partner primary schools and they organise further meetings at their discretion. It will also provide a snapshot of the pupils' ICT capability and assessment data that can be used by the secondary schools to plan their teaching programme for Year 7. The teachers have collaborated to create ICT activities for bridging Year 6 to Year 7 that are based on the KS3 ICT Strategy sample teaching unit 7.1.

As part of the strategy, the LEA has set up an e-folio on the Virtual Learning Environment of its website and here pupils store their best work, chosen together with their teachers. The work is uploaded using portal tools made available, initially, to the teachers. This work builds over time into a bank of evidence that the pupils can share with others as they wish. Teachers use the e-folio pages to carry out the transfer of pupils' work and assessments. Training for teachers has been provided by the LEA in the use of e-folio, which can be accessed from anywhere. The e-folio is configured so that it will travel with pupils as they progress through secondary school and perhaps beyond. There is evidence of a growing use by parents of this VLE as another way for keeping up to date with their children's progress and achievements at school.

The assessment of pupils' ICT work up to the end of Year 6 can be carried out by teachers through the use of ICT projects that have been created by schools working in conjunction with the LEA. Teachers choose from six projects

that have assigned levels of attainment in a similar way to the QCA exemplar teaching units. The activities are challenging and encourage collaborative working, problem solving and higher level thinking skills. Teachers also use the VLE to share examples of pupils' work and establish a common understanding of the levels of attainment.

Impact and outcomes

- Agreement on using the KS3 ICT Strategy sample teaching unit provided schools with a 'ready made' series of lessons and an opportunity for primary schools to teach more challenging work.

- This 'showcase' of pupils' work enables teachers to engage pupils in discussions about the quality of their work and how they could improve this performance.

- Parental access to this showcase provides an innovative way for them to be involved in their children's education and has the potential to make a significant contribution to sustaining pupils' self-esteem.

- As teachers' use of the LEA's broadband website develops, the LEA will promote its use for facilitating a 'buddy system' so children in Year 6 can be linked with pupils in the secondary schools to which they are likely to transfer. Pupils from the secondary school will be able to share examples of their work with Year 6 children and contribute to the process of building their confidence.

How does the creation of an e-folio help pupils to develop their ICT capability? What changes of teaching style are most likely to support pupils in developing their e-folio?

What benefits might come from parents accessing their children's e-folio?

How can the LEA continue to support schools using online services that are easily accessed, reliable and consistent?

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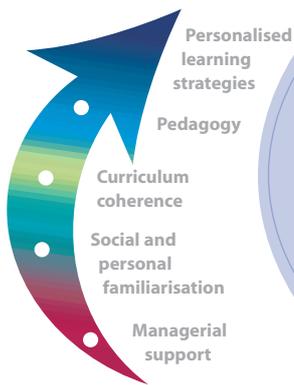
The project

When children transfer to another education phase, if the work they have covered in the previous school is not given value or built upon, they often feel they are 'starting all over again' and their new school is uninterested in what they have achieved before.

Some schools now believe that allowing children to continue aspects of their work in the next phase has benefits to both the social and academic well-being of the children. For the teachers of both phases there is an opportunity to share a child's learning journey. Transition projects are the vehicle that can support some form of curriculum coherence and continuity as they provide the opportunity for teachers to discuss the work the children will do across both phases and share expectations and problems. For children they provide some security in knowing what they will do next as well as opportunities to show their capability. The focus of this project was therefore to enable children to display their true ICT capability.

LEA action

There was a realisation by the LEA of the need to keep children engaged in worthwhile projects after the SATs. The launch of the KS3 ICT strategy provided a focus in standards and content for the work that the children might begin and then continue. It was decided to develop a series of activities based around the theme of a 'chocolate bar' that would generate samples of work that could then support the development of units 7.1 and 7.3. The primary tasks would incorporate all the ICT areas of focus in order that children could show their capabilities.

The transition project was trialled through a secondary school and its three feeder primary schools. Two Inset days were held so that teachers from both phases could work through the units together, to experience the work that the children would carry out, and amend the proposal if necessary. It was also an opportunity for the teachers to develop their own ICT capability and engage with the software and resources. It was agreed that the key aspects of work would be setting the scene by investigating chocolate bars, researching and developing their own ideas, and designing the chocolate bar wrapper and a 'jingle'. At the end of the Inset the teachers in the primary phase felt that the chocolate bar project had wide cross-curricular application in this period when children need to be kept engaged. As the tasks were open ended, they would also support children across the range of capability.

In the summer term the ICT consultant then worked with the Year 7 ICT teacher to assess how the children's work could be incorporated into the Key Stage 3 Strategy units 7.1 and 7.3. A PowerPoint presentation on the theme of a chocolate bar was created to act as a stimulus for the children's own work. Both units were re-scripted to support the integration of the children's work while keeping the key principles of the Strategy. At the end of the summer term, the children's electronic and paper-based samples were transferred to the secondary school. The electronic work samples were placed on the secondary school's network.

What roles should the LEA and its schools play in order to facilitate teachers working together?

How does the LEA achieve a common agreement from its primary and secondary schools to carry out this project?

How will the transfer of the children's work files be organised and managed?

Who designs the tasks within the project?

Impact and outcomes

- Children were motivated to carry out the tasks in the knowledge that they would be crucial to their work in the secondary school.

- Teachers from both education phases worked together towards a common goal; they had the opportunity to discuss issues, evolve common solutions and agree appropriate teaching strategies.

- Year 7 teachers developed their understanding of the work that children are capable of in the primary phase and the software that they use; they also engaged in discussions on how pupils' past work could be incorporated in new work.

- In its second year, the transition project theme of chocolate bars was used as the central theme for the annual transition day in the secondary school.

The benefits of smoother transfer

- **Improvement in standards** – the children were able to demonstrate higher standards as a result of the collaborative teaching and planning that took place between the primary and secondary phases.

- **Curriculum coherence and continuity** – teachers in the secondary phase took steps to avoid re-introducing pupils to the knowledge, skills and understanding they had already developed during their primary education.

- **Effect on teaching and learning styles** – teachers from both phases of education visited their partner schools, observed lessons being taught and then discussed the approaches used. This enabled both schools to adapt their teaching styles so that pupils were able to settle into the new school more quickly.

- **Pedagogic continuity** – the teaching methods used in the receiving school were influenced by those in the primary phase, because the partner schools discussed and shared teaching approaches. This enabled the pupils to feel more secure rather than having to adapt to different teaching styles and learning strategies.

- **Confidence and knowledge of expectations** – the teachers' confidence in assessment and expected outcomes were much improved as a result of the collaborative approach used.

- **Understanding of issues and commitment by schools to the support process** – the senior managers within the participating schools were committed to the transfer process and supported it by providing appropriate resources.

- **Cross-phase CPD** – in sharing their teaching practices, teachers from both phases benefited by sharing expectations and moderating work produced by the pupils. The discussions that ensued during the moderation process enabled teachers from both phases to value and better understand pupils' achievement.

Impact and outcomes

The collaborative approaches employed to develop the transfer project stimulated a climate change and a breakdown of the stereotypical views of education by both phases.

Secondary schools were able to group pupils according to need and plan for progression, curricular coherence and more efficient management of learning. The benefits for the pupils included:

- Greater independence – the pupils were more confident in using ICT tools within the learning process.

- There was less regression in learning between Year 6 and Year 7.

- More support was made available for pupils so they were more confident in using the software in their new school.

- Pupils' motivation was sustained because the work done in one phase was seen to be critical to work in the next. Additionally, the work was seen as more interesting and challenging by the pupils because it was valued by the receiving teacher.

- Pupils became more discriminating users of technology and questioned approaches and outcomes.