

Highlight Findings

- The primary to secondary schooling (Year 8–9) transition is not the ‘disaster’ that is often feared.
- Most students quite quickly adapted to the more immediate changes inherent in a move from primary to secondary school, such as finding their way around in a new school, moving classes, and becoming familiar with different rules and routines.
- Also, by the end of their first year at secondary school:
 - overall, Year 9 students reported many positive experiences at school;
 - in the majority of cases, students’ test results — we used Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning, known as aTTle — revealed sound or good achievement gains, despite the significant dip in mathematics scores and a levelling off in reading and writing recorded shortly after the transition;
 - few students expressed a desire to ‘go back to how things were’ at primary or intermediate school.
- But, at the same time, the Year 8 to Year 9 transition does represent a time of significant, deeper-level change for students that is generally ‘unsettling’.
- It became evident too over the course of the study that while the Year 8 to Year 9 transition seemed to be commonly thought of as a particular ‘event’, it should more appropriately be regarded as a ‘process’, requiring students to make ongoing adjustments over quite some time.
- Other important findings include that for an important minority of students, the Year 8 to Year 9 transition is a particularly challenging time, academically and/or socially, and exacerbated in

some cases by emotional issues or difficult home circumstances. Without appropriate support, at least some of these students are likely to be at particular risk of dropping out of the education system, and of achieving few or no qualifications.

- And for students overall, while they reported many positive or enjoyable aspects of their schooling experiences ‘post-transition’, just as they did prior to the transition, there is a need for concern about the evidence which showed that students became less positive about their subjects at school over time, and less engaged in aspects of teaching and learning at school, supporting the findings of other national and international studies.
- Feedback from students at all phases of the study provided important insights about what may help keep students engaged in their schooling, suggesting amongst other things a greater need for a student perspective to be taken into account, and at an early stage.

The account of Emily’s experiences before, during and at two points following the Year 8 to Year 9 transition event, given in this report, illustrates much of ‘how it was’ for the majority of students in the study who made a good overall transition. But the ups and downs she experienced also provide important insights into the difficulties that students in general can encounter during their schooling and suggest what may need to be taken into account in order to solve those difficulties.

The data relating to all participating students throughout the report show the basis from which we derived the main themes and ‘key implications’ of the study findings that are presented.