

Considering Findings and ‘Key Implications’

This chapter begins by identifying the overall aim of the primary to secondary schooling transition study, together with a number of the research questions⁸⁸ that were established for the project. After briefly discussing a ‘definition’ of transition within the context of the present study, findings presented in previous chapters about Emily and all participating students are synthesised in order to address the specified research questions and, ultimately, the aim of the study.

The discussion then moves on to briefly consider evidence from the study in relation to the wider educational issues of students’ attitudes to subjects and ongoing engagement in their learning.

The chapter concludes with a brief review of major results and indicates some ‘key implications’ suggested by the study findings.

Identifying the Research Questions

The overall aim of the research was to...

...identify the variables that seem to facilitate or hinder a smooth transition for students between the two school sectors in terms of their:

- overall learning and achievement;
- social development or adjustment; and
- attitudes towards school, learning and achieving well.

The particular questions were:

- ‘What views do individual students have about their own transition from primary to secondary schooling, before it occurs and in the 18 months following, particularly the first six months?’
- ‘What are students’ predictions about their own learning and social development prior to, and after, the primary to secondary schooling transition?’
- ‘What are students’ expectations of secondary school and to what extent are they realised?’

- ‘What are the social impacts of the primary to secondary schooling transition on individual students and groups of students?’
- ‘How do students view their own learning prior to, and following, transition to secondary school?’
- ‘What do they see as the most significant impacts on their learning and achievement?’
- ‘What are the particular positive aspects of the primary to secondary schooling transition for students in general?’
- Are there negative aspects of the primary to secondary schooling transition for students overall, and if so, what are they and how do they impact?’
- ‘What specific student characteristics — such as prior learning, behaviour, attitudes, and life experiences — most often arise to explain differences in experiences and/or views expressed by students in relation to transition?’

Defining ‘Transition’ within the Context of this Study

Anecdotal and other evidence suggests that the Year 8 to Year 9 transition is frequently regarded as a particular ‘event’.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (Ninth edition, 1995) defines ‘transition’ as: *n.* 1. a passing or change from one place, state, condition, etc, to another (*an age of transition; a transition from plain to hills*).

This definition implies both a sense of ‘evolution’ — of change that occurs over time or space — and, to a lesser extent, perhaps, a more immediate or definitive change or event.

⁸⁸ Further research questions, together with other information collected throughout the study, are dealt with in the two other reports on the transition study. The first of these reports takes an in-depth look at students’ achievement over the course of the study. And the second includes suggestions from study participants — teachers, principals, parents and students — on what may improve the immediate transition experience for *all* students and maximise their learning experiences, opportunities, and outcomes thereafter. (See p.6 for additional information about these reports.)

While the short-term sense of this definition may more often be applied to the Year 8–9 transition, importantly, the findings of the present study indicate that it should more appropriately be considered as an ongoing *process*⁸⁹ that takes an often difficult-to-determine length of time.

It is suggested, therefore, that a concept of transition as encompassing both event *and* process be kept in mind when considering the findings presented in this chapter.

Addressing the Research Questions

As part of the process of achieving the aim of the transition study we have brought together various sets of data from the study to provide as comprehensive a response as possible to the identified research questions.

For coherency, data relating to each of the research questions identified above are discussed under a

number of broad headings, which are as follows:

- ‘Student views and experiences of the transition to secondary school’;
- ‘The social impacts of the primary to secondary schooling transition’;
- ‘Student views of their own learning and what most impacted on their achievement’;
- ‘Positive aspects of the transition for students’;
- ‘Negative aspects of the transition for students’; and
- ‘The importance of individual student characteristics in relation to the transition’.

In most instances, the data most strongly linked to just one research question is discussed under each heading or section; however, in two of the sections, two or three research questions apply and the relevant data are discussed together. Each section is preceded by a number of summary points.

⁸⁹ We felt that the need to distinguish between ‘transition as event’ and ‘transition as process’ — the latter emphasising that students are required to make ongoing adjustments over quite some time — clearly emerged from the data for this study. The idea for labelling these two distinct aspects of a transition in this way came from research carried out by a team of British researchers — Sanders, White, Burge, Sharp, Eames, McEune and Grayson — who were looking at the effectiveness of the transition for children moving from early childhood education to school. One of the recommendations from their report, ‘*A Study of the Transition from the Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1*, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), UK, March 2005, was that ‘Schools’ staff should view transition as a process rather than an event’.

A similar approach is espoused in Sue Dockett and Bob Perry’s research: they talk about the importance of making a distinction between ‘orientation’ and ‘transition’ when developing programmes to ease children’s transition from early childhood to primary school education. They define ‘orientation programmes’ as ‘those run prior to commencement of school for the purposes of introducing the child and family to the school and vice versa. Orientation programs ensure that enrolment is appropriate, and the child is familiar (to some degree) with the school and staff. ... In contrast, transition programs are ongoing, operating over a longer time and including a wider range of experiences for parents and children. Transition programs recognise that the move to school will involve different strategies for different students. Transition programs involve a range of stakeholders and may continue for a term, or even throughout the first year.’ (p.15). More about this can be found in Dockett and Perry’s report *Beginning School Together: Sharing Strengths*, Australian Early Childhood Association Inc, 2002.

Student Views and Experiences of the Transition to Secondary School

This section discusses some of the fears and hopes that students had about secondary school in the weeks preceding their arrival there, plus students' feedback about what it was like for them, in and out of the classroom, as they progressed through Year 9 and on into Year 10.

Research questions

What views do individual students have about their own transition from primary to secondary schooling, before it occurs and in the 18 months following, particularly the first six months?

and

What are students' predictions about their own learning and social development prior to, and after, the primary to secondary schooling transition?

and

What are students' expectations of secondary school and to what extent are they realised?

Summary Points

The following points have been organised into four groupings to correspond with the four phases of the study. The first phase was prior to the transition, when the students were still in Year 8, the second and third phases were early and late in the students' first year at secondary school, while the fourth phase occurred when the students were several weeks into Year 10.

In Year 8, prior to transition, in general students...

- ...anticipated that finding their way around in a much bigger school⁹⁰, with lots more people, would be problematic.
- ...thought learning would be more difficult (for them) at secondary school and that there would be a lot more, and harder, homework.
- ...felt teachers would be stricter and that there would be more rules.
- ...were often sad and anxious at the thought of being separated from existing friends and had fears about their ability to make new friends at secondary school and 'fit in'.
- ...feared bullying, especially from older students.
- ...thought learning would be more interesting and exciting at secondary school and that there would be more or wider learning opportunities.

- ...thought there would be more, and more exciting, extra-curricular opportunities, particularly in sports and the performing arts.

Soon after transition, in their first term at secondary school, students'...

- ...felt they had settled into their new school quite quickly in terms of the shorter-term, more 'superficial' aspects of the transition.
- ...in most cases had made new friends.
- ...often missed having their school friends from the previous year in classes with them, or even at the same school.
- ...frequently mentioned that friends being 'there for them', and parents and family showing that they were interested in their progress and well-being at school, had helped them settle at secondary school.
- ...also found that some of the strategies put in place by their new school to help them settle in had been helpful; in particular, they were very positive about the help and support provided by senior student peer supporters.
- ...were sometimes able to recall information and advice provided by their Year 8 teachers that had helped them adjust to secondary school.

⁹⁰ **Important Note:** According to the Ministry of Education report *Education Statistics of New Zealand for 2006*, around 26 percent of students making the transition from Year 8 to Year 9 in New Zealand schools each year do so within the *same* school — that is, they attend a composite/area school or Year 7–15 secondary school, which cater for both primary and secondary level students. Because the transition for all of the students in the present study involved a *change* of school, it is not possible to comment in this report on the extent to which experiences of the primary to secondary schooling transition for students who did not change schools may have been the same or different. However, the present study does reflect the situation for the large majority of students (just under three-quarters), for whom the transition meant a change of schools.

- ...were relieved that bullying was not commonplace as they had feared and that older students were not generally unfriendly.
- ...mostly found the increased diversity amongst the student and teacher population exciting.
- ...quite often found it challenging building relationships with a number of new teachers at the same time as getting to know new classmates.
- ...felt less 'known' by their teachers, which gave a greater sense of freedom for some students but was difficult for others, in that they missed the more personal teacher contact they had been used to.
- ...were mostly very positive about their new teachers, finding them more approachable and helpful and less 'strict' than they had anticipated or been led to believe when in Year 8.
- ...expressed diverse opinions about the difficulty level of their schoolwork: from more (too) difficult compared to primary/intermediate school, to easier (less challenging).
- ...generally felt that the amount of homework had significantly increased compared to primary/intermediate school, which impacted on their leisure time, and that while the homework itself wasn't necessarily more difficult, it was challenging juggling multiple deadlines.
- ...were able to identify subjects, topics or projects that they found interesting, exciting (because the content was 'new'), and enjoyable to learn about or undertake.
- ...were particularly positive about having option subjects.
- ...enjoyed features of secondary school that were, to them, novel, such as the school canteen, especially as it gave them a feeling of being more grown up and independent.
- ...felt less at ease during break times than they were used to being: less sure about their position when it came to claiming places to play games, for example, often feeling they needed to defer to older students.

Towards the end of Year 9, almost a year since the transition event, students...

- ...were less likely than they had been at the end of Year 8 or early in Year 9 to say they 'definitely' enjoyed school.
- ...mostly preferred the 'way things were' at secondary school rather than the idea of a return to primary/intermediate school, despite expressing lower overall levels of 'enjoyment of school'.
- ...had established which teachers they related to best or preferred to have teaching them and were able to clearly articulate their reasons (as they had in Year 8 when asked about the qualities they most favoured in their teachers).
- ...were more critical than they had been earlier in the year or when in Year 8 about aspects of teaching and learning.
- ...showed that while they generally found at least some subjects or topics worthwhile and interesting, were now more likely to say they were having to learn too many things that were boring or irrelevant to them.
- ...mostly felt that their option subjects had lived up to earlier expectations and were interesting and enjoyable; however, in some cases students were disappointed to find that rather than 'light relief' by being fun and interesting and personally meaningful (eg, te reo Māori), their option subjects were instead 'boring', alienating, too difficult, or far more work than expected.
- ...tended to have more established friendships after ups and downs and 'trial and error' alliances earlier in Year 9.
- ...had often, but not always, become involved in extra-curricular activities that they enjoyed and that made them feel more part of and involved in the wider life of the school.
- ...felt there was less 'comfort' offered by the physical environment at secondary school (finding it particularly unpleasant being locked out of classrooms in lunch breaks during winter months, for example), and considered the environment

to be generally less attractive (eg. more litter in the grounds, less colourful or well set out) than at primary/intermediate school.

- ...looked back over their first year at secondary school and realised that some aspects of it had been more difficult for them than they had appreciated earlier in the year.
- ...were, despite a few anxieties, much more relaxed about the idea of the transition from Year 9 to Year 10 than they had been about the Year 8 to Year 9 transition, chiefly because they were well familiar with their secondary school by now and understood 'how things worked'.

Beyond the Year 8–9 transition: towards the end of their first term in Year 10, students'...

- ...found, for the most part, that beginning Year 10 was much less stressful than it had been to embark on their first year at secondary school.
- ...were more likely than they had been near the end of Year 9 to say they 'definitely' enjoyed school.
- ...were enjoying at least some of what they were learning in class and developing a greater sense of continuing to build their knowledge/skill base.
- ...were often enjoying — and gaining confidence from — opportunities to take up new extra-curricular activities at school or build on ones from the previous year.
- ...appreciated (where applicable) opportunities to take part in programmes or activities designed to boost student self-confidence or foster certain skills that had been specially arranged for them by the deans or other staff within the school, in consultation with parents/family.
- ...discovered that while they were well familiar with 'how things worked' at their secondary school, there were nevertheless still challenges or adjustments to be faced: new teachers, losing some of their Year 9 classmates or friends, encountering different or more difficult work, having to balance extra-curricular activities with the demands of schoolwork, feeling that NCEA was something they already needed to think about, and having greater expectations placed on them at school and, in some cases, simultaneously by

their parents/families, who expected them to take on extra responsibilities 'now that they were older'.

- ...continued to find that aspects of their work did not engage them and that the classroom environment was not always conducive to effective teaching and learning.

Discussion

While just over a third of students in the study were primarily 'excited' when they were in Year 8 about the prospect of moving on to secondary school, most were largely anxious or afraid, even though they could identify some things about secondary school they expected would be good: of their more specific fears, they most often worried about the possibility of being bullied. But for most students it was to a great extent simply that they were 'fearful of the unknown' — the feeling of not knowing what to expect or what would be expected of them. Their parents also frequently expressed anxieties about how their children would cope with the transition, as did some teachers.

However, some weeks after the transition, despite their earlier fears, most students in the study, including Emily and Luke, considered that they had 'settled' quite quickly — within two to three weeks — into their new school, feeling they had coped well with learning the layout of the school, travelling between classes, understanding the timetable and systems and rules, and adjusting to the fact of multiple teachers.

It is worthwhile here to bear in mind the possibility that the beginning of their first year at secondary school may in some ways be a 'honeymoon' period for students, with the excitement of the new, and, perhaps, teachers giving new Year 9 students more support and attention. This may account in part for why students became comparatively more critical about many aspects of their school life towards the end of Year 9, when 'real life had set in': less leniency by teachers over rules broken and homework undone, a more down-to-business approach in class to getting through what students needed to learn and work on, and consequently less time for the more fun, and often social, activities that students had mentioned enjoying earlier in the year.

Other factors influencing students' less positive views as Year 9 progressed may have been the novelty wearing off, and students, and students and teachers, becoming more familiar to one another, which while clearly a good thing in terms of allowing for more established and well-informed relationships or interactions, also gives greater scope in some cases for tensions to escalate.

In addition, the level of input specifically intended to support new Year 9 students provided by deans, senior student supporters, and others tended to reduce quite considerably as the year progressed, when it would very likely have been advantageous for students if this support had been maintained at the same level throughout the students' first year at secondary school. Undoubtedly, however, this would have considerable implications for the overall workload and commitments of the deans, peer supporters, and others involved in working with transitioning students.

So although the majority of students felt they had coped well with many of the more immediate aspects of the transition and found much that was positive and enjoyable about their first year at secondary school, other data from the study suggest that the overall picture was less straightforward and that there were many aspects of this transition point and the period that followed that students took considerably longer to get used to.

Further to this point, it was evident that when they looked back over Year 9, many students had found it much harder than they'd necessarily realised at the time. Some of the challenges they mentioned were:

- 'letting go' of their previous school and teachers, and the younger students there whom they had often mentored or helped or just liked being with;
- getting used to the more numerous, diverse, complex social interactions, with both students and teachers, to be found at secondary school, especially as for most students the school was much larger than their previous school;
- adjusting to different pedagogies and to taking tests;
- becoming used to changes in the physical environment of the school;
- coping with the presence of large numbers of older, bigger, more senior students and with how it felt to be the youngest in the school again, including being teased or called names by older students as part of junior students' 'rites of passage';
- realising the need to develop effective organisational skills but finding this difficult, especially when having to balance competing homework and test deadlines and other commitments;
- adjusting to longer days and often more travel;
- dealing with the changed nature of lunch breaks — being hungry because lunchtimes were later than at primary school, and missing having an established space of their own in which to play games or 'hang out', which they had taken for granted at primary school;
- carrying their books or heavy bags around with them all day;
- being much more fatigued by the end of the school day than they had been previously; and
- the various expectations that different teachers had of them in terms of both study and behaviour.

While it could be exciting, some students also found it unsettling to discover that they could test boundaries in a way that they perhaps hadn't experienced before: that is, when they realised that no *one* teacher was able to keep an eye on them throughout the school day, as at primary school, and that for awhile at least they could 'get away with' a bit more. And for some, there was simply the challenge of adjusting to change generally.

Emily's explanations for sometimes feeling less positive about school following transition provide a more personalised account of the difficulties that students could experience. She cited: misunderstandings with some teachers; not being comfortable about approaching staff she didn't yet know very well with problems; when she felt work

in class was not stimulating or personally relevant, and was 'not fun'; unpleasant encounters with other students; and when she had difficulties balancing homework and other schoolwork-related activities with extra-curricular responsibilities and interests. Over the course of the study, relatively speaking, any difficulties that Emily had with school most often occurred, or at least were most often mentioned, in the second half of Year 9, and not in the first weeks following the Year 8–9 transition.

But by the time students were in Year 10, despite ongoing challenges for students, most were finding their second year at secondary school more straightforward (less stressful), in that they knew the ropes, were familiar with the routines and, in a broad sense, knew what was expected of them as a secondary school student. Also, many were pleased to no longer be the youngest in the school.

Emily, for example, was able to build positively on her mostly successful experiences in Year 9, and by the end of her first term in Year 10 was on the whole feeling very comfortable about being a Year 10 student. As well as saying she was used to everything at school now — the 'way things were done' — she was enjoying new challenges and responsibilities,

and learning new things. In addition, Emily was expressing greater confidence about her abilities in her subjects, in her extra-curricular activities, and in her social interactions. She also commented that she enjoyed 'being older' generally.

Alongside the evidence that most students found aspects of secondary school enjoyable and generally managed well the challenges or difficulties posed by the transition process, it was evident that a small number of students, rather than assimilating into their secondary school, became increasingly distanced from some or most aspects of school life, despite saying they had 'settled' quite quickly when they first arrived.

This was variously due to: ongoing difficulties in handling class work; not 'believing' in the need for homework and resenting having to do it; wanting to be elsewhere (for example, the student who had a strong desire to begin his career as a mechanic, and was impatient with everything at school); less than successful interactions with teachers and other students; not finding a comfortable or workable niche at school; and non school-specific factors such as personal/family problems.

The Social Impacts of the Primary to Secondary Schooling Transition

As social factors are inextricably linked with student learning and achievement at school, as well as being important in their own right, we ensured that our investigation of the primary to secondary schooling transition included a strong focus on its social impact.

Research question

What are the social impacts of the primary to secondary schooling transition on individual students and groups of students?

Summary Points

- Before and after transition, 'friends' were almost always mentioned by students as a key reason for enjoying school, and as a 'best liked' aspect of school.
- When reflecting on the purposes of school and why it was important to attend, students in part described school as where you learn how to 'get on with people' so you can do well in later life.
- Being separated from their Year 8 friends in class was difficult for a large number of participating students when they entered Year 9.
- Despite this, most students made new friends quite quickly following transition.
- A minority of students continued, throughout Year 9, to significantly miss being with their 'old' friends.
- Friends were frequently mentioned by students as crucial to helping them settle into secondary school.
- Following transition, students often maintained friendships with long-term primary school friends as well as, in most cases, making additional friendships.
- For some students, especially those who had been 'excited' at the prospect of moving on to secondary school, the larger student population at their new school was of great appeal, with more people to meet, and greater diversity in potential friends in terms of previous school attended, ethnicity and background.
- For other students, the increased numbers and diversity were more worrying or challenging and took time to get used to and begin to make the most of.
- New 'friendships' made soon after the transition did not necessarily last, and students often became involved in a considerable process of trial and error, sometimes painful, especially with 'romantic attachments' much more part of the mix.
- Our data show that for the students in this study, bullying (of themselves) reportedly decreased at secondary school; however, other information from students, such as comments that they saw it 'happening to others', suggested that incidences of bullying, or at least 'hassling', occurred quite frequently, apparently increasing once students reached Year 10.
- According to teachers, and the students themselves, there was little indication, following transition, that students were now more likely to mix with people who got into trouble at school or who would pressure them to 'do stupid things'.
- However, other data showed that students, especially post-transition, felt strongly that distractions in class caused by other students, and often their own tendency to join in, at times seriously impacted on their ability to learn and achieve in class.
- Some students wished that teachers would intervene more in situations in class where other students' behaviour obstructed their learning; it was also evident that there were students who would have liked teachers to 'rescue them from themselves' — that is, where they knew they talked too much or were generally inattentive, making it more difficult to keep up in class, but were 'unable' to stop these behaviours on their own.
- When rating aspects of their friendships at school at each phase of the study, students were less likely over time to say that their friends enjoyed learning new things at school, and more likely to say they wagged school. But they were also less

likely after transition to say that they 'wished they had different friends at school', perhaps because, in some cases at least, they had more scope to meet like-minded people than in a smaller primary school.

- In Year 8, students quite often mentioned enjoying the ways in which they interacted with younger students, including mentoring and generally looking out for them: in contrast, at secondary school in Years 9 and 10, most students tended to mix on a day-to-day basis almost exclusively with other students in their year group, although they really enjoyed positive contact with older students at school when it came their way.
- While the students felt when they were in Year 9 that the nature of their contact with more senior students in the school was generally fine, it also appeared that they were somewhat in awe of older students, particularly soon after their arrival at secondary school, tending to keep out of what they perceived to be 'senior student areas' of the school. They also waited to be formally introduced by their, or their friends', older siblings or cousins, or by the Year 12 or 13 peer supporters, rather than approach older students of their own accord.
- The Year 8 to Year 9 transition represents some quite marked changes for many students in relation to teachers: not only do they have more teachers to relate to over the course of a school day, but the nature of their interactions with teachers also undergoes changes, with the greater compartmentalising of the secondary school day compared to primary school, for instance, and the greater numbers of students overall that secondary teachers work with.
- Being less 'known' by their teachers at secondary school was hard at first for some students, particularly for those who had had a close relationship with their previous teachers.
- However, it was also evident that as Year 9 progressed many students established very good relationships with many of their teachers and were as likely to say these teachers cared about them as they had been to say this about their primary/intermediate school teachers.

- For some students, having several teachers a day was a very positive aspect of being at secondary school: it gave more variety and interest but also freed them from a situation (in the case of a few) where they had been all day in a classroom with a teacher they did not relate to well.
- However, as Year 9 progressed, students showed an increased tendency to compare and contrast their experiences of teachers, including specifying their reactions to the ways in which different teachers conducted teaching and learning in class.

Discussion

Relating to other students

For most students in the study, friendships at school were a strong influence on how they viewed and experienced school. This was very evident before and after transition.

Emily was no exception, with the most significant of all her friends being *school* friends: references to her social interactions featured largely in Emily's reasons for saying she enjoyed school at the different points of the study and eagerness to see her friends each day also accounted for her being reluctant to miss a day of school.

Emily had the occasional clash with other students in her first year at secondary school, and handling the fallout through to a successful resolution proved to be a difficult learning curve for her.

But overall it was very evident that the social opportunities afforded by school — including those opened up by participation in extra-curricular activities before and after transition — held very strong appeal for such a highly people-orientated person as Emily.

Fears about their ability to make friends and fit in when they arrived at secondary school were key concerns for students contemplating the transition. But a number of weeks after beginning secondary school, like Emily, all students advised that they had at least one 'friend' at school, even the one student who had had 'no friends' at primary school, and most continued to have contact with non-school

friends. Note, however, that for a small number of students, other data suggest the likelihood that the term ‘friend’ was more optimistic than reality, and that their stated friends were more accurately simply acquaintances or fellow classmates whom they would *like* to become friends.

The students’ friends at school were most often a mix of friends from primary school and new friends; in some cases, though, students either stayed exclusively with former friends or had made all new friends/acquaintances. While in general students now reported having a smaller pool of ‘good’ friends at school than they had had in Year 8, there were already more than a tenth of the students who claimed to have “*heaps*” of friends in their new school. Students had mainly met new friends through being in the same form or other classes, or through their participation in school sports or other extra-curricular activities.

Following transition, students often found that they had few, if any, of their former friends in the same classes as themselves. Their views about this situation were divided, however, emphasising one aspect of the challenge for schools in attempting to achieve the best class placements for individual students. While more than half of students were either glad to have some of their previous year’s friends or classmates in their Year 9 classes, or were sad that they had not, just over a tenth of students preferred *not* to have previous friends with them, primarily because they tended to distract one another from their learning in class. Thus in cases like this, the transition represented an opportunity to ‘escape’ from troublesome social interactions which they weren’t able to handle effectively.

And a little less than a third of students didn’t mind either way, because they had made new friends, felt that the absence of previous friends freed them up to form other friendships, or just simply were not bothered.

Towards the end of Year 9, all students declared that they had at least one friend at school, the great majority saying they had between three and ‘five or more friends’. Mostly, friends were other Year 9 students, although just under a fifth of students had older friends, usually siblings, cousins or family

friends. These latter students mentioned that the presence of relatives or family friends (often from the same neighbourhood) at school was an important factor early on in how comfortable they felt about being at the school.

In Year 10 some students had to ‘re-group’ a little in terms of their particular friendship groups in response to class and other changes within the school, and because of student movement in and out of the school. Current friends were a mix of old and new for three-quarters of the students in Year 10; however, around two-thirds of the students further indicated that their friends were *mostly* friends from school the previous year (and often earlier than that) and/or siblings, cousins, family or neighbourhood friends, suggesting that, for many, friendships had consolidated by Year 10, in contrast to the ‘disruptions’ to social networks in the early part of Year 9 in particular.

Almost all students continued to maintain friendships with people who did not attend their school, although school friendships tended to predominate.

As well as social impacts of the transition in relation to students’ friendships, there are also social impacts in terms of classroom dynamics. The most notable of these was the previously mentioned one of disruptions in class due to various student behaviours, which in turn had an effect on teaching and learning and on students’ attitudes to and experiences of their learning.

In addition, a comparison of students’ ratings at the end of Year 8 and the end of Year 9 revealed differences in how they felt they were able to interact with other students in class before and after transition — for instance, they were less likely as time went on to say that they helped each other during lessons, less likely to say they discussed work with one another, and less likely to say they laughed while they worked/learned.

Relating to teachers

The nature of students’ relationships with teachers impacted on their expressed attitudes towards some subjects, as well as colouring their views about school generally.

Feedback from Emily, from Luke, and from the students overall, revealed a great deal of consistency in what students most and least liked to see in teachers, with a sense of humour and ability to make learning interesting and fun being top of the list of the most desirable characteristics, together with teachers showing they enjoyed and understood teenagers. At the other end of the spectrum, a teacher 'growling a lot' was the most frequently mentioned 'least liked' behaviour.

Students further valued it when teachers 'knew them as an individual' and acknowledged their particular characteristics and needs: recognising, for example, that they were good at something or had special qualities — such as a positive attitude to life, a strong work ethic, an ability to relate well to others, the maturity to take on responsibilities — or sometimes had difficulties learning and needed practical help with these as well as understanding.

However, other of our data revealed that, once at secondary school, students rated teachers as less likely than their teachers in Year 8 to ask for their opinions or to listen to their ideas and felt that, overall, teachers were a little less likely than teachers at their primary schools to make sure that everyone understood the work.

Other relationships

Although not school-related per se, another consideration, perhaps, regarding students transitioning to secondary schooling, is that students' relationships with parents and family are often undergoing changes at the same time. For example, a number of students referred to the

higher expectations or greater responsibilities being placed on them by families, because they were now perceived by them as much more grown up. For some students, this was an added burden: at a time when they continued to need their parents/family to provide support and show an interest in how they were getting on at school, they were finding that this was tending to reduce. Also, although students continued to value parental/family support and interest, this coincided quite often with communication patterns that were less open and relaxed than they had previously been, making it seem, perhaps, that they no longer valued such input.

In summary, then, it was evident that the social aspects of the transition required a considerable adjustment for many students, in that they needed to accommodate the different personalities, expectations, and teaching methods or approaches of their new teachers, get along with many other previously unknown students, balance established friendships with new ones, and, at times, adjust to some changes in family relationships and expectations.

The process of establishing new friendships or consolidating others tended to be a significant rival, too, for the students' schoolwork, in terms of their time, energy and attention.

And while all students stated that they had at least one 'friend' at secondary school, some friendships were at times counter-productive, for example, the students who missed out on extra-curricular activities they would have enjoyed because their friends did not want to take part.

Student Views of their own Learning and what Most Impacted on their Achievement

Students' learning and achievement are the core business of schools and fundamental to any investigation of how students experience aspects of their schooling, including a significant transition such as the one from primary to secondary schooling.

Specific questions put to students about aspects of their learning included what they felt helped them learn best, when and why they found learning more difficult, what led to their liking for or dislike of particular subjects, and how they found conditions for learning in class. Common themes emerged in the students' responses to these questions.

Research questions

How do students view their own learning ... prior to, and following transition to secondary school?
and
 What do they see as the most significant impacts on their learning and achievement?

Summary Points

Conditions for learning; what helped them learn best

- At the four phases of the study, students felt that the following factors helped them *learn best*:
 - their own efforts: when they worked hard, paid attention and listened well;
 - good teaching;
 - a positive relationship with the teacher (see previous page for more detail about this);
 - when what they were learning was interesting, new, relevant, fun;
 - parents/whānau who helped and encouraged them;
 - a learning environment without lots of distractions;
 - having a love of learning and/or a good attitude to learning and to the work involved;
 - receiving help and support from friends and/or mixing with like-minded friends;
 - knowing how to find or look up information in the library or on the Internet;
 - knowing they had the ability to handle the work; and
 - being physically prepared (not tired or hungry).
- Reflecting on when they found learning *more difficult*, students, especially post-transition, very frequently mentioned the classroom environment as a problem: high noise levels, with disruptive classmates generally, or particular friends distracting them with inappropriate talking or other behaviours, often resulting in angry teachers and interrupted teaching and learning.
- Students, including Emily, also often acknowledged that they made learning harder for themselves by talking too much or being inattentive.
- Other difficulties included:
 - finding some subject matter too difficult or not understanding what the teacher was saying;
 - finding the subject or topic uninteresting or irrelevant;
 - feeling there was not enough time given to master new material;
 - being too tired;
 - feeling unhappy or worried about home or family circumstances, bullying or other relationship difficulties or distractions;
 - health issues;
 - being in a bad mood, or conversely, excited about something so that they couldn't settle or concentrate; and
 - having a physical difficulty, such as with handwriting.

Subject preferences

- Almost all students specified at least one ‘best liked’ subject at each phase of the study.
- Nomination of best liked subjects was not always constant, however.
- Students’ fluctuating views about subjects were influenced by their feelings about topics currently being studied, who was teaching the subject or topic, how it was being taught, and recent feedback received about their progress in that subject.
- Students tended to most like a subject when:
 - the subject material was presented in fun and interesting ways, and there was variety or flexibility in approach, including group work, and taking into account students’ ideas or other input;
 - they were learning new things and ‘moving on’;
 - they could see the relevance of what they were learning to themselves/real life;
 - lessons included practical approaches and not just theory;
 - they felt they were good at it;
 - they could see they were making progress — considerably helped by receiving effective feedback;
 - lessons involved physical activity: being able to move around while they learned, or learn outside the classroom;
 - material was appropriately targeted for them: whether that be sufficiently challenging or, alternatively, straightforward or ‘not too difficult’; and
 - they were able to actively contribute to their own learning, including carrying out their own research, and choosing a topic of personal interest within the broad framework of the assignment they had been given.
- Explaining why they enjoyed particular subjects more than others, students frequently used the words ‘fun’, ‘exciting’, ‘interesting’ and ‘new’.
- They often mentioned relationship factors too:
 - getting on well with the other students in the class which impacted on how well they worked and learned together; and
 - liking and respecting their teacher, including finding that the teacher explained well and generally helped or facilitated their learning.
- There were also students who simply stated that they liked a subject because the content area was of particular interest or value to them in their lives generally.
- And a small number of students — usually those who said they liked all or almost all of their subjects ‘best’ — stated that they ‘just liked learning’.
- Students’ explanations early and late in Year 9, and again in Year 10, for ‘least liking’ some subjects, were, not surprisingly perhaps, very often similar to their explanations for when they found learning more difficult.
- Irrespective of the subjects nominated⁹¹, students’ reasons for ‘least liking’ them included:
 - relationship difficulties with teachers;
 - finding the material they were to learn was not at the appropriate level for them or was too much the same as material covered previously;
 - finding the subject matter boring or not feeling it was relevant;
 - finding the teaching approaches demotivating, unchallenging, and generally not helpful for learning: too much ‘copying work’, for example; and
 - a classroom environment that was not conducive to learning: too many disruptions, and too much tension, such as when students were being reprimanded by teachers.
- And dislike for a subject sometimes developed when expectations did not match reality. In Emily’s case, for instance, whereas she had expected art to be a relaxed, fun subject, she found instead that it often involved hard, serious study, and a classroom environment which required students to restrict their talking. Similarly, Emily had anticipated that science would involve many interesting experiments at secondary school, but the reality she found quite different, for reasons she did not understand, and which she felt had not been explained.

Teacher impact

- As outlined earlier in this chapter, students identified teachers as an important influence on when they learned best; conversely, they sometimes considered that their teachers contributed to occasions when they experienced difficulties with their learning.

⁹¹ All but a few students nominated one or more subjects that they ‘least liked’ at the three phases of the study following transition.

- In general, before and after transition, students found teachers to be approachable.
- Many found too that while teachers post-transition often did not have as much time available to spend with them as perhaps their primary school teachers had, they were generally very helpful when requested to assist with schoolwork.
- However students also emphasised that there were times when they would like teachers to clarify work goals and be clearer about what they expected of students in class and when undertaking homework or other assignments. This view was particularly expressed when the students were still adjusting to all that was new or different at secondary school.

Discussion

Students' views about foremost impacts on their learning were the same in kind before and after transition, except that students tended to become more critical about aspects of teaching and learning at school as they proceeded through Year 9 and beyond.

For example, asked to rate aspects of learning in their classes overall, towards the end of Year 9 students were generally much less likely than they had been in Year 8 to record that they did interesting or fun activities in class, or that they tried new or different things. And there was an overall increase in the proportion of students who indicated that they had to 'learn about too many boring things'.

Of course, this tendency to become more critical is undoubtedly part and parcel of growing up. However, an increasing ability to become more (constructively) critical is essentially a good thing, and it is important to carefully analyse student feedback to see where certain conditions for learning may need to be improved or changed in order for students to experience greater satisfaction and achieve better outcomes.

Students identified a considerable range of factors that they felt impacted in important ways on their learning and achievement and attitudes to subjects before and after the transition.

But in all their responses to do with learning at school, the same messages predominated: that they found it easiest to learn and gained greatest satisfaction when they found the material, and the ways in which they were learning it, interesting, relevant or personally meaningful, and enjoyable.

However, for Emily, and other students in the study, liking or enjoying a subject did not always necessarily mean doing well in it — that is, compared to performance in other subjects. As an illustration, while Emily's enjoyment of maths increased at secondary school, her achievement in this subject did not. But unlike some other students in the study, for Emily, feeling she was good at a subject did seem to correspond closely to a particular liking for the subject, for example, performing arts.

The students most at risk in terms of disengagement from learning and school generally were the ones least likely to nominate a range of subjects or topics they enjoyed, least likely to find much of what they were learning of interest or relevance to them personally, and/or most likely to say that they were experiencing difficulties with a significant proportion of their schoolwork. One of the last-mentioned students was fearful about secondary school because he felt he had not gained sufficient mastery over primary school material to equip him well enough for the transition. He was again apprehensive about moving to Year 10, anticipating that the work would be 'even harder' than in Year 9, which he hadn't coped with well as it was.



More about students' achievement in subject areas is contained in our further report *Students' Achievement as they Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling*.

Positive Aspects of the Transition for Students

Anecdotal evidence suggests how difficult the primary to secondary schooling transition can be for students; however, our data showed that there were many positive effects for students.

Research question

What are the particular positive aspects of the primary to secondary schooling transition for students in general?

Summary Points

According to students in the study, in general, the transition to secondary schooling led to a range of desirable experiences, situations or outcomes, including:

- increased social opportunities;
- the positive interactions they had with teachers, including form teachers and Years 9 and 10 deans;
- positive interactions with senior student peer supporters;
- having a number of teachers and defined subject areas, and being able to move around the school to different classrooms;
- learning new things;
- being able to undertake special projects, especially where they had a choice of topics and scope to do their own research (as many had experienced at primary/intermediate school and particularly enjoyed);
- having option subjects;
- when they earned positive feedback (eg, letters of commendation sent to their homes) for their work and progress at school;
- being able to broaden their horizons in a more challenging environment compared to the smaller, more ‘confined’ primary school environment they felt they had grown out of;
- increased opportunities for extra-curricular involvement;

- being able to make a ‘new start’ — for example, being in a different class or school from disruptive friends, or having a range of teachers rather than just one that they hadn’t related to well;
- feeling, at times, that there were fewer restrictions on them than at primary school, or that they were now part of a more grown-up environment;
- feeling more grown up generally;
- school trips and special out-of-class activities (also frequently mentioned by the students as a favourite part of their primary/intermediate experiences); and
- a greater sense of ‘learning or preparing for the future’.

Discussion

While most students did not mention all of the factors listed above, many students identified a range of positives for them personally. And there were no students who were unable to identify any features they liked about secondary school in their first weeks and subsequent months there (up to and including their first term in Year 10). However, there was nevertheless a small group of students for whom the ‘positives’ were overshadowed by more negative elements on a number of levels, increasing the likelihood, if their views and experiences did not change, that they would not properly benefit from their time at school.

Negative Aspects of the Transition for Students

The question of whether there are negative aspects of the primary to secondary schooling transition for students overall is a difficult one to answer in many respects, not least because of the different conclusions that may be arrived at depending on whether the transition is being regarded as a short-term ‘event’, or as an ongoing ‘process’ (see discussion regarding a definition of transition at the beginning of this chapter).

Another reason that this research question is not a straightforward one to answer is because there are various key elements in a student’s transition, namely, in broad terms: their ‘overall learning and achievement’; their ‘social development or adjustment’; and their ‘attitudes towards school, learning and achieving well’.

It became clear from our data that the balance between these elements can be quite different for individual students, and that it would therefore seldom be a simple matter to say that either students’ overall, or given students, had made a ‘successful’ or ‘unsuccessful’ (‘negative’) transition in the light of all elements.

With regard to the transition as an *event* — which is here taken to refer to the more immediate aspects of the transition, such as students negotiating their way round in a new school, getting used to changing classes and having a different teacher for most subjects — the answer to this research question is largely ‘no’, as almost all students in our study reported that they quite quickly accommodated these previously (in most cases) unfamiliar aspects of school life and frequently enjoyed the initial excitement of the new.

In contrast, considering transition as a before, during, and after ‘process’ means a less clear-cut situation, with the ‘answer’ to this research question more a case of ‘yes’ in some respects and ‘no’ in others. However, despite the complexity, some summary points are offered as follows.

Research question

Are there negative aspects of the primary to secondary schooling transition for students overall, and if so, what are they and how do they impact?

Summary Points

- Firstly, it is of note that, when in Year 8, the majority of our students were more fearful than excited about moving on to secondary school, which suggests that many of them carried this fear over a quite considerable period, before they had the opportunity in most cases to discover that their fears were (largely) unfounded. This fear persisted, pre-transition, despite attempts by many of their teachers, and others, to prepare the students well for the transition.
- The fear that students had emphasises that this transition was frequently seen as much more than simply the next step in a natural progression through their schooling; instead it was clearly perceived as a move to something that was quite new and strange, not only by the students but by their parents and, often, their teachers as well.
- For some students, at least, fear about the Year 8 to Year 9 transition was inadvertently fuelled by usually well-meaning attempts by others — teachers, parents, older students or siblings — to help them understand what they would find at secondary school. Several students mentioned, for instance, that older siblings had alarmed them by telling them how hard the work would be, how much extra homework they would get, and that some of the people they would encounter would be difficult or ‘aggressive’.

- Although their early fears were mostly unfounded and most students felt they had coped with the transition *event* itself quite quickly and well, average student achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics⁹², but particularly in mathematics⁹³, showed a decline when they were tested some weeks after the transition.
- Most students' achievement scores had increased by the end of Year 9, usually to a level exceeding their Year 8 performance. However, although, overall, students recovered from the achievement drop that was evident some weeks after their move to Year 9, a small but important proportion of students either showed a decline in achievement scores or did not exhibit a clear increase compared to their pre-transition scores one year earlier.⁹⁴
- Students' mathematics scores in particular showed a further drop following the Year 9 to Year 10 transition: the drop was at a lower level but signals a further 'transition effect'.⁹⁵
- Added to the achievement trends is evidence from the study that students were not always well placed in terms of starting/continuing levels of study so that at the commencement of their secondary school career, some found the work too easy or not challenging enough, while others found it too difficult. This tended to impact negatively on these students' early experiences in their new school and on their developing attitudes to secondary level teaching and learning.⁹⁶
- Some students showed good or very good progress in their learning and academic achievement over the course of the study while others did not; however, it cannot necessarily be said that these latter students did not make a 'positive transition' because quite often they had made good gains in terms of social development or adjustment, had positive attitudes towards school, and sometimes, too, good attitudes towards learning and achieving well, even though their achievement scores did not necessarily reflect this.
- Conversely, there were students with the ability and prior learning to maintain very good or better levels of achievement and make significant progress, but who became progressively less positive about school and what they were learning, less positive about extra-curricular activities, and sometimes less socially successful (getting off-side with teachers, choosing less desirable friends), potentially putting them in as much, if not more, danger of dropping out of school prematurely as students significantly struggling with their schoolwork.
- As well as the fluctuations in achievement for students overall, there was a general decline in positive attitudes to subjects over the course of the study, and evidence of increasing levels of disengagement from aspects of their learning at school. While it is unlikely that these negative outcomes could be attributed to transition as an *event*, it is perhaps possible to attribute at least some of this decline to the range of deeper-level changes that students encounter after a significant transition point, and that take time to assimilate during the transition *process*.
- But, offsetting the broad, negative trends outlined above, at the end of Year 9 the majority of students stated a preference for secondary, rather than primary or intermediate, school.

Discussion

Broadly speaking, the transition was not 'negative' *per se* for students in the study *overall*, but it certainly was a marker of an important time of adjustment for many students.

⁹² Students undertook asTTle (Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning) tests in reading, writing and mathematics at each phase of the study. An extensive look at the achievement of students in the study is contained in our report *Students' Achievement as they Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling* (see p.6 for details.)

⁹³ Evidence from other research studies, for example, the report on the IEA Third International Mathematics and Science Study *Mathematics and Science Achievement in New Zealand: Summing up New Zealand's participation in three cycles of TIMSS at Year 9* (Megan Chamberlain, Research Division, Ministry of Education, Wellington, New Zealand, 2007) indicates that many students in New Zealand schools are largely in a 'holding pattern' for maths between Year 5 and Year 9 — that is, they do not show as much movement across curriculum levels as might be expected during this period, for whatever reason, which perhaps is why students' mathematics scores suffered the greatest decline following transition, emphasising the rather 'vulnerable' state of their maths mastery.

⁹⁴ As discussed in the report *Students' Achievement as they Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling*, the proportion of students consistently achieving in the bottom quartile in one or more of reading, writing and mathematics across all phases of the study was typically between at least eight and 11 percent of the total group of participating students.

⁹⁵ Also discussed in the achievement report, as referred to in the previous footnote, is acknowledgement that while these achievement results occurred post-transition, it is not possible to conclusively attribute them to the transition *per se*, as other possible explanations for the data exist, such as 'summer learning loss', also referred to in work by New Zealand researcher Cedric Croft as 'holiday fade'. It is quite possible however that a 'transition effect' and 'summer learning loss' operate in tandem.

⁹⁶ Other data from the study, primarily from interviews with teachers and principals, identified the issue of how to ensure effective transfer of information about students between schools. Related information from these participants centred on the factors that can influence schools' ability to place students accurately so that their progress through the curriculum levels, before, during and after transition, is smoother. These topics are taken up in the report, *Easing the Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling: A Resource Document*.

Students undergo a number of transitions throughout their education, including year-to-year transitions as they move through the system, which have the potential to throw students off-balance to a greater or lesser degree. Our data showed, for instance, that while considerably less than they were for the Year 8 to Year 9 transition, there were some discernible ‘transition effects’ before and soon after students moved on to Year 10.

The Year 8 to Year 9 transition, then, like the one from early childhood education to school, does seem to represent a more than usually significant transition for many students, including as it does a change of schools for the majority of students⁹⁷, and not just a move within the same school. There are also other often considerable changes for students inherent in this transition, including differences in the ways that primary, intermediate, and secondary schools organise the school-day and the school timetable, and other aspects referred to earlier.

Emily, for example, reflecting at the end of Year 9 on her first year at secondary school, came to the realisation that she had been more unsettled by the change than she had understood earlier in the year. The effort required in getting used to all her different subjects, learn what was required of her to make good progress, and cope with extra homework, as well as handle a whole new set of social demands, had been more than enough for her to manage. As a result, she had less energy for the extra-curricular activities that she loved and which had featured largely in her life in Year 8, and had chosen to defer her involvement in such activities until Year 10 when she felt she’d be in a better position to take part again (which proved to be the case).

And for a minority⁹⁸ of students, the transition — both the event and the process — was difficult. As an example, some of these students tended to miss out on what would very likely have been particularly valuable social and other opportunities (eg, being in a school production, or joining a sports team) because, unlike other students, they did not ‘know’ how to join up, and did not have the confidence or social maturity to find out. Such students were in danger of ‘getting lost’ without the level of monitoring or overseeing that they had often received at primary school.

Other more vulnerable students included: those with a history of difficulty with their studies when they arrived at secondary school and who mostly continued to find class work too challenging; those who were particularly upset by disruption to their friendships from previous years and/or continued to look back with longing to primary school until late into their first year at secondary school; and those who did not find it easy to develop successful relationships with other students or interact well with teachers or other adults.

The majority of students, however, seemed to cope well with most of the ups and downs involved in a significant change in circumstances and, despite the data that revealed an overall decline in students’ attitudes to subjects and to how engaged they felt in their learning at school, most students at the end of Year 9 showed that a return to ‘how things were at primary school’ was not an idea to be entertained. Even though a major reason for this was that students now saw themselves as too grown up for primary/intermediate school, it suggests too that they did not generally regard secondary school as a place to ‘get away from’, despite difficulties or issues they may have been experiencing.

This finding, together with other data from the study, also highlights that students often tended to form their overall attitude to school from a particular perspective or value system, that was essentially different from, say, that of their teachers or parents. Most students showed ‘agreement’ with teachers and parents in that they made frequent references to subjects or topics they enjoyed learning about, recognised, in theory at least, the importance of schoolwork for their future, and expressed a desire for good teaching and learning opportunities to equip them with the skills and knowledge they needed. However, for many students, it seemed that ‘*enjoyment*’ of school was more heavily influenced by friendships, liking their teachers, and other social opportunities and experiences, than it was by what they learned in class.

An important challenge therefore seems to that of how to turn students’ desire, and need, for satisfying social interactions (at school) to best advantage in terms of maximising teaching and learning opportunities and ensuring better achievement and other outcomes for students.

⁹⁷ See footnote 90 earlier in this chapter regarding students who do *not* have a change of school when they make the Year 8 to Year 9 transition.

⁹⁸ Refer footnote 105 for a brief explanation of what we mean by ‘minority’ in the context of this study’s findings.

The Importance of Individual Student Characteristics in Relation to the Transition

The wealth of data collected for this study from and about students emphasises that on the one hand, despite the diversity represented in the group as a whole, there were many common themes in students' experiences, views, and perceptions regarding their learning and achievement and about social aspects of their schooling. On the other hand, the data equally emphasise the importance of individual student characteristics for understanding the importance of different factors for particular students — for example, where one student may have required more input and support for their learning and achievement to make a successful transition, another may have needed more support around social relationships and involvement.

Research question

What specific student characteristics — such as prior learning, behaviour, attitudes, and life experiences — most often arise to explain differences in experiences and/or views expressed by students in relation to transition?

Summary Points

As an initial step towards addressing the inherent complexity of this question, the following statements provide a summary of characteristics that combined to shape the way in which Emily experienced the immediate effects of the transition and how she adjusted to and viewed her new/changing situation over the following year.

- Emily had a close relationship with her family. She described them as being very supportive in all aspects of her life, including her education.
 - For the most part, Emily and her parents talked freely, with Emily regularly telling her mother in particular what happened to her at school — everyday things, as well as triumphs and problems, and about her friends.
 - The data revealed Emily to be a young person with a range of interests and pursuits, and as someone who enjoyed spending time in the company of an increasingly diverse range of others, often 'just talking'. Her busy social life meant that Emily spent comparatively little time watching television or using the computer for leisure purposes.
 - Her family had high expectations of and for Emily and rules and boundaries she was required to abide by. At all phases of the study, Emily appeared to generally respect those guidelines.
- And Emily was fortunate in that the modest home chores and responsibilities required of her did not interfere with her ability to complete school-related tasks or take part in sports and other leisure-time activities.
- With the exception of one or two hiccoughs, overall her friendships were a positive force in Emily's life.
 - Despite Emily's tendency to become distracted and talk to friends in class, this was offset by her strong sense of future goals and broader horizons; as well, a particularly positive aspect of her talkativeness was that she was well practised in putting her thoughts, feelings and ideas into words, a skill that some other students in the study found difficult.
 - Emily's parents were aware of who she was mixing with and helped her maintain a positive balance in her life.
 - Emily had a very good understanding of the purpose of school and a strong sense of the importance of learning and achieving well for her future. She was motivated both by strong extrinsic (eg, wanting to do well in NCEA) and intrinsic factors (eg, the enjoyment she derived from learning new things). She was also generally very positive about and receptive to learning and

studying, and about interacting with others in order to maximise learning opportunities and outcomes.

- Emily's overall optimism, her enquiring mind, and motivation levels evident in Year 8 appeared to have been maintained throughout the transition to Year 9 and on into Year 10. She also felt that her teachers were likely to say positive things about her, both in terms of her personality and her progress at school.
- Emily had enough self-awareness to realise that her love of talking at inappropriate times could get in the way of her learning: however, although she was not yet at the point of being able, or wishing, to stop, her fundamental interest in learning and her overall capability as a learner largely offset what might otherwise have been a real impediment to her learning.
- Before and after transition, Emily's experience of and attitudes towards school were mostly very positive. Although friends, social opportunities and extra-curricular activities predominated in Emily's reasons for feeling generally good about school, she also talked about how much she enjoyed learning new things, being challenged in her learning, and seeing how what she was learning (eg. in the performing arts) linked to her current interests and future goals.
- Emily mostly had very positive views about her teachers: she talked about liking her teachers, especially when they showed they enjoyed and understood teenagers, but also that she respected them for the way in which they helped her to learn. In turn, Emily was well regarded by the teachers who provided feedback about her.
- As a Year 8 student Emily was 'scared' at the prospect of moving to secondary school. However, she was also excited: in particular, she emphasised that she was ready to move out into the wider world, an attitude that stood her in good stead for making a relatively smooth transition.
- Emily was reported by her teachers before and after transition to be achieving and progressing well in her studies, and to have sound skills in reading, writing and mathematics when she arrived at secondary school.

- Emily had very good school attendance, a strong work ethic, and, on the basis of her positive attitudes and behaviour in relation to homework, a realisation that learning does not begin and end at the school gates.

Discussion

Emily's characteristics are not intended to be a blueprint for a 'student most likely to make a successful transition from primary to secondary schooling', but they do constitute a helpful starting point, especially as, in most respects, Emily did handle both short- and longer-term aspects of the transition very well: it was evident that Emily was gaining confidence over time both in her studies and personally and that by the end of her first term in Year 10 she was thriving on the greater diversity of a bigger school. She was also developing leadership qualities and receiving recognition for these in that she was elected by her class to be a deputy student representative on student council.

Other factors that seemed to be important in Emily's generally very positive transition include the evidence that she was a keen, motivated learner, and that she was able to find a special niche for herself at secondary school in performing arts activities. In addition, she had positive experiences with teachers and was especially pleased when she saw that they 'knew who she was'.

Individual characteristics in terms of their impact on students' views and experiences in relation to transition as an *event* did not seem to be very discriminating: that is, the majority of students, despite their earlier fears and irrespective of their particular backgrounds or characteristics, felt that they had settled quite quickly into secondary school⁹⁹; similarly, a wide range of students said they liked at least some aspects of school before and after transition. However, probing more deeply, individual characteristics became much more important when considering ongoing student achievement at school, many of the views that students expressed, their behaviours, and desire and ability to become involved in the wider life of the school.

⁹⁹ This is not to say, however, that there were not certain, important influences on how well students settled: for instance, it did seem that students who had had the opportunity to gain prior experience of their new school (eg. through attending technology or other classes there while still at primary/intermediate school, and/or knew people there already) were at an advantage compared to some other students. And of course there were a range of specific strategies put in place by the schools designed to help students settle, such as the availability of senior student peer supporters to provide support, advice and guidance.

Students who expressed most positive attitudes to school and learning as the study proceeded tended to be those who had satisfying friendships, interests outside of school, a sense of future goals or aspirations, an open mind, a liking for change or an ability to handle it well, a general enthusiasm for life, willingness to try new things, and freedom from significant problems in their home life.

By contrast, students with the least positive attitudes to school and learning, and/or who had experienced a more difficult transition, were most often those who had difficulties with their learning, *together with* social or other difficulties. They sometimes expressed a desire to leave school as soon as possible. (Difficulties with studies alone did not necessarily mean that a student expressed negative attitudes to school, because some students to whom this applied were socially successful, with a consequent positive impact on their overall views of school.)

Social or other difficulties encompassed unsuccessful relationships, including in a few cases, experiences of bullying over time, social immaturity, or difficult home or personal circumstances.

Furthermore, students least likely to have participated in extra-curricular activities at school often appeared to be in greatest need of this sort of involvement to help them become well assimilated into the school environment. But they missed out because 'finding out' how to become involved, within the required timelines, seemed to be beyond them: they were too anxious or withdrawn, or feeling too negative to put themselves forward. Or, alternatively, they were too influenced by certain friends who didn't want to participate.

Less confident or adventurous Year 9 students often faced another particular difficulty in that they were more likely than their peers to be in awe of older students, with the result that their lunch-time activities became more confined and they felt less at ease about being at school.

Students who continued to say they would prefer to be back at primary school until well into Year 9 were also less likely than other students to have handled the transition well, taking longer to adjust to the overall changes. These students continued to miss teachers and the general environment of their

former school, preferring the greater consistency and security of one teacher, one class.

Other students in the study who were least likely to be doing well at school post-transition were those for whom there appeared to be low levels of interest or input from home regarding their progress at school, and those who spent a lot of leisure time (above the average) watching TV, or in some cases, using the computer, to the detriment of other interests or activities, including reading.

Sometimes, too, there appeared to be a 'poor fit' between the student and the school. For example, one of the girls did not like all the 'rough, older boys' at the secondary school and very probably would have been much better suited to an all girls school, but this was not an option available to her. Also, there were a small number of students from high decile primary or intermediate schools who had wanted to attend an equivalent secondary school, along with their friends, but because of zoning, had had to attend a lower decile school, causing them to feel particularly negative on entry to the school. Although some of these particular students adjusted well after a time, others did not, and continued to be unhappy or dissatisfied until in some cases they managed to achieve the desired transfer for the beginning of Year 10 (which partially accounted for the reduction in the number of participating students in Phase 4 of the study).

Underlining that predicting which students are likely to make a more, or less, positive transition is not straightforward, there were students who had a perhaps unexpectedly positive transition. For example, a student who had been unable to find like-minded students to mix with at primary school and was somewhat of a loner, found that the move to secondary school, with its much larger student population, wider extra-curricular opportunities, and option subjects available, resulted in him discovering compatible companions. It also meant that his special aptitude and abilities in the performing arts were now able to be showcased in a way they hadn't been before. As a result he blossomed, from the positive attention and recognition received from other students and through being able to use and extend his particular abilities.

In a similar vein, there were also students who, while academically and socially successful at primary or intermediate school, *did not* settle as well as expected at secondary school: sometimes because other events had arisen in their lives to distract them from school concerns, and sometimes because of situations such as finding that being socially successful in a relatively small primary school does not necessarily transfer to being socially successful at secondary school, where there is added 'competition'.

But overall there did seem to be some broad 'predictors' in terms of how well students with particular characteristics coped with aspects of the transition. For example, those with sound academic skills on entry to secondary school were likely to cope best with their schoolwork throughout the transition (although this did not mean that they necessarily developed positive attitudes to their learning, especially if they felt unchallenged or bored by the work they were assigned). Also, more socially able students were better able to handle the increased diversity of the student and teacher populations at secondary school and take better advantage of the extra-curricular opportunities opening up, thereby becoming more successfully

immersed in the wider life of the school. And of course, there were some more fortunate students who demonstrated strengths both socially and academically, and/or were generally positive and optimistic in their outlook.

Other favourable factors for a smooth transition included students making the move to secondary school in the company of existing friends, providing these friends were a *positive* influence, and having a supportive and interested family.

And students who understood the concept of developing *strategies or tools* that would enable them to learn and research what they needed to know in order to achieve life goals, and realised that those tools were inherent in much of what they were learning in class, appeared to be at a distinct advantage. Especially as they often also seemed to be students who could appreciate learning for its own sake, including topics that did not, at face value, have a direct link to everyday life or to what they might want to do in the future. By contrast, other students tended to be more critical, dissatisfied, or 'bored' when they had to learn things they couldn't see the practical significance of.

i Our third report, *Easing the Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling: A Resource Document*, incorporates more on the topic of individual student characteristics, with an emphasis on those least likely to transition well, and including teacher and parental views on the qualities that may play an important part in how students experience and view the transition before and after. Also, individual student characteristics in relation to achievement are discussed in the first report in the series, *Students' Achievement as they Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling*.

Issues Arising from the Study Findings

We found that most students in the study understood the reason for and value of school. Most expressed a preference for going to school rather than staying at home. And many found a lot to enjoy at school — before and after the transition — both socially and in their learning in class and for the range of other opportunities afforded them through school. Most students even rated homework as ‘very important’ at each phase of the study (although this did not necessarily mean that they always felt keen to undertake it).

However, another key finding to emerge was the evidence of a steady decline in positive attitudes to subjects and a simultaneous drop in the extent to which students overall engaged in their learning, suggesting that many do not always get the best out of their learning time at school. Even Emily, a generally positive, motivated student, talked about being bored and disengaged from aspects of her schooling. And while disengagement may be inevitable, or natural, at times for almost everybody, there were indications that the extent to which this occurred for some students at least was too great.

Decline in Positive Attitudes towards Subjects

Analysis of the aSTtle attitude data collected at each of the four phases of the study showed that while students had quite positive views about reading, writing and maths in Year 8, their attitudes towards these subjects generally became less positive during Year 9 and again in Year 10. This decrease was particularly obvious in mathematics.

Other studies, both national and international, reveal similar trends of a decline in students’ attitudes towards particular subjects. For example, results from the longitudinal *Competent Children, Competent Learners*¹⁰⁰ study show a drop in students’ attitudes towards reading and writing between primary and secondary school. And information collected from the *National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP)*¹⁰¹ illustrates how students’ enjoyment of reading in their own time decreases as they progress through the school system.

Additionally, national aSTtle data¹⁰² and further NEMP findings show that students’ attitudes towards maths decreased from year to year. This is of particular interest and concern given that in the present study students’ achievement scores in mathematics showed a considerable dip following the Year 8 to Year 9 transition¹⁰³, and again, albeit to a lesser extent, following the Year 9–10 transition, especially when compared with the pattern of students’ scores for reading and writing. This suggests, in common with other national and international studies, that mathematics learning and achievement is more particularly, and adversely, affected at times of change than other areas of learning.

Student Engagement

It became clear from their feedback over the course of the study that keeping all students engaged in their learning at school can be problematic, and increasingly so over time.

As previously discussed, students had criticisms about some aspects of their *school-based* learning; these criticisms double as explanations of when and why they tended to disengage from learning in class. A brief recap of the most frequent criticisms/reasons for disengagement are given below, along with *students’* suggestions on what would help them remain engaged in their learning.

Issue: They found it difficult to learn and stay focused when they were unable to see the *relevance* of a lot of what they were learning.

The students were not necessarily criticising curriculum *content* per se, although sometimes they were, but more emphasising that they were not being presented with convincing reasons or an understandable or recognisable context for what they were learning.

Student suggestions:

Receive clear explanations or demonstrations of why subjects or topics are relevant to them and how they link to everyday life; learn new concepts by means of ‘real life’ examples, or experiences.

¹⁰⁰ The website address for this study is: <http://educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/publications/homepages/competentchildren/index.html>

¹⁰¹ For further information about NEMP go to: <http://educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/research/nemp.html>

¹⁰² Further information on national aSTtle data is available on www.asttle.org.nz.

¹⁰³ Refer footnote 95 earlier in this chapter for a note about ‘transition effect’ vs. ‘summer learning loss’.

As an illustration, some students mentioned an assignment on 'careers' that they had especially enjoyed because it helped bring to life the concepts they were learning. The task was to carry out their own research to discover what it would take to become an engineer (say) — the course of study and qualifications that would be required, and desirable personal characteristics or qualities — and to then consider the life-style that would be possible for an engineer in terms of salary earned, and so on.

Issue: They found there was frequently too much writing and copying work to do at secondary school, and too many lessons generally that were not interesting or fun.¹⁰⁴ As well, they found it demotivating when their expectations or hopes about a subject, topic, or activity did not match reality: that is, when they thought there would be interesting content and approaches to learning, and this did not occur (in their view).

Often, the writing and copying work was just considered 'boring' because it did not promote or allow a sense of involvement with what they were learning, but some students — especially boys — also found it physically difficult, making it a challenge to write everything down in time and not 'get left behind' in classes.

Student suggestions:

Ensure more variety in approaches to teaching and learning; and

Incorporate 'fun' when learning, through increased use of humour in class, for example.

Issue: They found the classroom environment was not always conducive to learning.

Students' comments about classroom environment fell into two main categories: (a) that noisy, disruptive classroom environments interfered with their learning, especially for quieter, less assertive students and those already struggling to learn unfamiliar or more difficult material; and (b) that tension, strife or unpleasantness within the classroom did not create a positive atmosphere for learning.

Student suggestions:

More relevant or enjoyable lessons to reduce the incidence of off-task, disruptive student behaviours;

More emphasis on student input into lessons to increase engagement and interest;

Teachers showing that they like and are interested in students;

Teachers intervening to reduce disruptive behaviours without penalising others in the class; and

Students taking responsibility for their own learning and behaviour by addressing their tendency to talk too much and to listen and stay on-task too little.

Issue: They found the difficulty level of their class-work was often either too high or too low.

Student suggestions:

The students themselves did not offer direct suggestions about this issue; they simply identified it as a reason they tended to develop a dislike for a subject or said that it contributed to when they found their learning particularly difficult or particularly unsatisfying. It was clear, though, that students desired 'lessons that were more targeted to their needs and abilities, and existing levels of achievement'.

Issue: It was difficult at times adjusting to the larger, more complex environment of a secondary school, and getting to grips with all the different expectations, making it harder to feel settled and positive in class.

Student suggestions:

Students indicated (for example) that they would like more opportunities for one-to-one instruction time with teachers, especially on the occasions when they were struggling with concepts or tasks.

In addition, they emphasised that it was important to them to be recognised as an individual, with specific strengths and needs, and that they needed to more often receive feedback that was timely, constructive, meaningful, accurate, in order to progress their learning and achievement.

They also liked it when teachers showed they were enthusiastic about the subject they were teaching.

¹⁰⁴ The knowledge environment, and, often, life-style, for today's students is heavily influenced by a media/technology-saturated world, with its inherently 'short attention bytes' approach. This undoubtedly impacted on the preferences that at least some students in the study expressed about approaches to teaching and learning, and thus is likely to be an important consideration when addressing the issue of student engagement.

Reviewing Main Findings

- Before and after transition, most students found a lot to enjoy and value at school.
- While most students felt they ‘settled’ quite quickly into their new secondary school, the months following proved to be a challenging time for students in many respects, both socially and in relation to what and how they were learning.
- Students’ attitudes to school, learning and achieving well were heavily influenced by their relationships with teachers and other students at school, their experiences of teaching, learning and achievement within the classroom, and by the level of interest, support and encouragement for their schoolwork provided by parents/family.
- Our data indicated that school transition strategies did help to ease the transition for students in the study. Primary, intermediate and secondary schools each played an important role.
- Although most students generally handled many aspects of the transition process well, this was not true for a minority of students,^{105,106} who struggled with a combination of learning, social, and/or personal difficulties during this period.
- Despite the aSTLe data which showed good overall achievement gains for most students over the course of the study, our data also showed that students showed increased disengagement from their learning over time, and increased negativity towards their subjects in general.

Some ‘Key Implications’ Suggested by the Study Findings

The transition

- School transition strategies are important: preparing Year 8 students well and accurately for the immediate impacts of the transition helps give transitioning students a sound basis on which to build, and reduces the fears they often have about the move to secondary school.
- Similarly, once the students arrive at secondary school, it is equally important that schools ensure that students feel welcome and receive assistance so that they can quickly become familiar with what is required of them in their new setting and begin their secondary schooling with a positive outlook.
- As part of the integration process, and because of the importance of social factors for students’ adjustment and well-being, an important strategy to consider is that of actively assisting, *where appropriate*, students to become and stay involved in extra-curricular activities at school that they would personally enjoy, thus helping them to feel more part of the school.
- It is equally important to know about and give recognition to transitioning students’ prior learning and achievement in order to ensure optimal starting points for the new phase of their studies at school.
- Achieving the best ‘placement’ for students and best meet their ongoing needs within the framework set for the overall class also requires knowing as much as possible about the individual student.
- This has implications for the sorts of information about students that is passed between primary and secondary schools and for how and when that information is used.

¹⁰⁵ It is not possible to provide a precise figure here for the number of students who made up this minority, because it changed according to which particular variables or ‘measures’ were being focused on — that is, whether they were to do with the students’ achievement, social interactions, attitudes towards subjects and teaching and learning in general, home circumstances, and so on, or to various combinations of these. However, as noted earlier in footnote 94, as a guide, there were at least 8–11 percent of participating students whose achievement levels over the course of the study gave cause for concern. Furthermore, when asked to describe what it was like to teach or generally deal with individual students in the study, participating teachers used the descriptors ‘difficult’ and ‘worrying’ for between 10 and 13 percent of the students (see ‘All Students’ data in Chapter Eight). They also considered (p.87) that around one-fifth of students showed ‘poor concentration when working’.

¹⁰⁶ We do not, and cannot, claim to be able to generalise to all students in New Zealand at this stage of their schooling, on the basis of this study’s findings (although participating students do represent a diverse range of characteristics and circumstances, and exhibit similar patterns of responses on various variables compared to students in other studies, for example, the national aSTLe data set). Nevertheless, if one was to speculate that in any given 100 or so students there is likely to be at least some individuals — say, at a conservative estimate, two or three — who experience significant learning or other difficulties at school throughout the primary to secondary schooling transition process, this could mean a very considerable number of students overall about whom we would need to have concerns.

- Evidence that some new Year 9 students were finding their work in certain subjects too difficult while other students were not finding it challenging enough is a particularly compelling reason for very good communication between the sectors regarding students.¹⁰⁷
- Achieving the best possible class placement for students is complex, taking into account as it must not only students' learning needs, but also how specific students will relate to their classmates and/or particular teachers, and how workable the overall dynamics of a given class turns out to be with its particular mix of students and teacher(s).
- That some students were identified as struggling with a combination of learning, social and other difficulties suggests the importance of maintaining post-transition support for students throughout Year 9, especially for the more vulnerable students. An added impetus for this is the finding that the biggest 'danger period' for students, in terms of an increased tendency to be more negative about school, their relationships with teachers, and teaching and learning in general, seemed to be in the second half of Year 9, rather than in the first few weeks following the transition.
- Where students have difficult personal or home circumstances, it is especially important that the school environment, in all senses of the word, is as good as it can be to encourage all students, and especially those most 'at risk', to want to learn and achieve well and believe that they can.
- Data from the study¹⁰⁸ showed that participating schools and teachers, particularly Year 8 teachers and Year 9 deans, put considerable thought, time, and energy into easing the transition for students. However, those involved with transitioning students often acknowledged that they would like to 'do more' for students at this time. 'Doing more', however, has significant implications in terms of human and other resources within schools.

Student Disengagement

- For some students, at least, heightened, ongoing levels of disengagement can lead to the very real possibility that they will drop out of school with few or no qualifications, and develop a negative attitude to schooling and learning generally.
- Some of the students at particular 'risk' of poor outcomes are those who disengage from school quite early on and arrive at secondary school with established patterns of low achievement and/or social or behavioural difficulties. *Competent Learners @ 16* (the most recently completed phase of the longitudinal *Competent Children, Competent Learners* study referred to earlier), for example, noted that students who became disengaged from school tended to do so before the age of 12 years, with their lack of engagement escalating in adolescence and secondary school.¹⁰⁹
- Other students more likely to become disengaged are those who do not feel challenged enough at school and lose interest; as well, there are students who could usually be expected to do well because of prior achievement and overall ability but who do not, because of problems that arise in their personal or home circumstances.
- It is important to take into account as early as possible input from the students themselves when addressing student disengagement.
- Students indicated that rather than it being assumed, they often needed very *deliberate* or specific guidance or demonstrations to help them see how what they were learning was applicable to their lives and how certain knowledge and skills acquired in one context could be transferred to other contexts.
- Student feedback suggested too that an important area of ongoing focus should be on how to encourage or enable students to take more responsibility for their own learning, and (have the opportunity to) more often actively contribute to improving conditions for their own learning and achievement, thereby complementing the roles of teachers, parents, and others. Such a focus might include:

¹⁰⁷ As discussed in our further report, *Easing the Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling: A Resource Document*, participating teachers and principals felt that structured, frequent and collegial communication between primary, intermediate and secondary schools was critical: to enable more accurate, workable, 'starting levels', based on prior learning and achievement, to be established for new Year 9 students; and, to facilitate improved pastoral care for students with difficult personal or home circumstances.

¹⁰⁸ Most of the relevant data are presented and discussed in our third report, referred to in the previous footnote.

¹⁰⁹ The present study did not track students through to the end of Year 10. However, in light of the findings from the *Competent Children, Competent Learners* study about the deleterious and cumulative effects of disengagement over time, it would be valuable to investigate whether students in Year 10 became more negative about teaching and learning and school in general in the latter half of the school year, as was the pattern for students in this study when they were in Year 9.

- teaching or motivating students to: develop good organisational and other self-help skills, such as an ability to seek out information that they need; listen more; and engage in less off-task talking and other disruptive behaviours in class;
- helping students understand that not *everything* they need to learn can be ‘fun’, and that qualities such as perseverance and an open, enquiring mind, are necessary if they are to gain satisfaction from their learning and reach certain goals for their future; and
- helping students to articulate what they mean by ‘boring’: students regularly use this term when they are dissatisfied with aspects of teaching and learning at school but find it difficult to be more specific. It would be helpful, for themselves and for teachers, if they were better able to unpack and communicate their thinking when they say ‘boring’, and also offer constructive ideas on what would make learning contexts less dry for them.

Concluding Comments

That most students in the study generally coped well with the overall transition from primary to secondary schooling is due in considerable part to the work put in by schools and many teachers. Students indicated that it had been helpful when their Year 8 teachers had encouraged them to make the most of the new opportunities that would be available to them at secondary school. Similarly, some of the particular steps and initiatives that their secondary schools, deans, and teachers put in place did facilitate the transition process: peer support schemes were particularly well received by students new to Year 9.

In addition, when there was good communication between students and their families, and between their families and the school, this did seem to be an important factor in how positive students felt about being at school, and in particular, how well they coped with the transition.

All students are likely to benefit from schools, teachers, and parents/families providing appropriate support and encouragement to ease the transition, but such input is particularly important for students

for whom the transition period proves to be a more than usually difficult time.

In contrast to the finding that most students handled many aspects of the Year 8 to Year 9 transition well, and could identify many positives about school before and after transition, aspects of the primary to secondary schooling transition are nevertheless cause for reflection.

Our report, *Students’ Achievement as they Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling*, shows that while asTTle results revealed good achievement gains for most students over the course of the study, the learning and achievement of students in the lowest achievement quartile was of concern, as were some aspects of students’ learning and achievement overall, but in mathematics in particular.

There was the considerable evidence too of an increasing trend for students to express less positive attitudes to their subjects over time and an increased tendency to disengage from aspects of their learning at school. Significant impacts on students’ enjoyment of and engagement in learning at different stages included curriculum and pedagogy, relationships with teachers and other students, and student self-efficacy.

And a repeated theme in students’ responses about learning in class was the deleterious impact on their learning caused by the disruptive behaviours of other students. This has a number of important implications, most of which have already been raised. In particular, it has implications for how and what students are taught in order to keep them engaged in their learning and reduce the likelihood of off-task behaviours, it has implications for how effectively students’ behaviour is managed by teachers and by the school overall, and of course it has implications for the students’ themselves in terms of willingness and ability to act responsibly, not only in the interests of their own learning and development but for the well-being of their classmates. As well, there are questions to ask about when, how, and to what extent schools may need input and support from parents, families, the wider community, and from policy-makers and others, to ensure classroom environments that are more conducive to learning for everybody.

Whether students' overall decline in positive attitudes to their subjects and lowered levels of engagement in their learning post transition occurred *because* of the transition or simply *followed* transition is a moot point. In truth, it was probably due to both. To a 'transition effect' in terms of students having to adjust to different teaching and learning approaches, including some that they found disappointing, and finding work either too difficult or not challenging enough. Or, conversely, to the 'age and stage' of the students: that is, a period during which they encounter a rapid or marked increase in social distractions and challenges, and when they themselves become increasingly likely to challenge things they may previously not have questioned.

But whatever the explanation, the most critical consideration is that these outcomes were occurring and are confirmed by similar findings reported in other national and international studies.

These findings emphasise too that taking into account students' views and experiences about their learning, especially in terms of their take on the *relevance* of what they are learning, and their preferred ways of learning, is of considerable importance if negative consequences for students

in our schools are to be avoided. It would be particularly valuable in further research endeavours to investigate how feedback of this kind from students could be used most effectively, including identifying the factors that would either facilitate or work against its use, and, assessing, in a systematic way, the outcomes for students, in terms of their achievement, attitudes, motivation and well-being, in classes and schools where use of such feedback was seen to be regularly occurring.

Finally, many findings presented in this report will not come as a surprise to those most closely associated with the young people in our schools. But at the same time, being closely involved in a situation can make it difficult to encompass all of the aspects that make up the bigger picture. It is hoped, therefore, that the compilation in this document of Emily's and all participating students' experiences of and views about school, learning and achievement, together with information about themselves and their families, shortly before and at three points following their move from primary to secondary schooling, has helped to highlight the many strengths to celebrate and build on of our schools, teachers, students, and families. And, as well, that it has helped to identify in a constructive way where there are issues to be addressed.

