Part III

Chapter 3: The Year 8–9 Transition

This chapter focuses specifically on the Year 8 to Year 9 transition — that is, when students undergo the shift from primary to secondary schooling.73 The data presented from and about Emily and the other students in the study provide valuable insights about the ways in which students experience this transition point, and the sorts of things teachers and schools do, or could do, to ease students through it.

But these data are of even greater value when considered in conjunction with other findings of the study, such as the information presented in previous chapters about student learning and social engagement before and after transition, and the student achievement data as presented in Chapter Thirteen.

The importance of any links between these various sets of data are discussed in Chapter Fourteen, when addressing the research questions established for our transition study, as well as in the other two reports in the series.74

The particular content of this chapter includes discussion of choice of secondary school, student feelings about moving on to secondary school and what they anticipated would be the best and not so good things about secondary school. As well, there is discussion about the preparation students received for the transition, how long it took to settle in their new school and the main influences on this, how students were experiencing secondary school early and late in their first year there, and how they felt secondary school compared with school the previous year.

Previous Experience of Moving to a New School

The transition research literature75 talks about the impact on students of changing schools, or even of undergoing year to year class changes within the same school. This ‘impact’ is frequently referred to in terms of negative effects, such as stress for the student, disruption to social networks, and interruptions to academic progress.

By asking students in Phase 1 how often, or if, they had changed schools in the past, we wanted to gauge the extent of students’ experience of this sort of transition and how they had found that experience.76

It happened that Emily had attended the same primary school since the day she began school.

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73 Within the context of this study, the Year 8 to Year 9 transition involved a change of schools for all participating students. The experiences of students in composite/area schools, who remain in the same school as they transition from primary to secondary schooling, are not represented in the present study. (Refer footnote 90 in Chapter Fourteen for details about the numbers of students in New Zealand schools who make the transition within the same school compared to the number who do not.)

74 Details of these reports are provided on p.6.

75 For example, see p.12 of this report for details about the literature review by McGee et al (2003).

76 While it might be predicted that frequently, or even occasionally, changing schools will be at least unsettling for a student, an opposite, but related, situation is that a transition such as the one from Year 8 to Year 9 could be particularly difficult for a student who has received all of their primary schooling at the one school. And especially if that school has been a very small and/or geographically isolated one. However, data from the present study are not able to directly address the latter situation, that is, what it is like for students moving from a small, rural school to a much bigger secondary school in a town or city.
The large majority (81%) of participating students were enrolled in full primary schools at the beginning of the study, while the remainder attended intermediate schools.

In Phase 1, 44 percent of our then Year 8 students who were attending a full primary school said that they had been going to the same school since they began their primary education. A further 32 percent had had one change of school, while the remaining students — just under a quarter — had experienced between two and seven moves (the latter students mostly going back and forth between the same two schools).

We also asked the students attending intermediate schools in Phase 1 how long they had been at their present school. Most of these students had attended the same intermediate throughout Years 7 and 8, although five students had spent only one year or less there.

Students to whom it applied were further asked how moving schools had felt. While for some students the move had been a recent experience (a matter of weeks or less), for most of the students it was at least a year or more behind them, often several years.

However, the comments students made are very similar to the feelings they expressed when anticipating the transition to secondary school, and their experiences once they arrived at secondary school. That is, a chief fear for students before arriving at a new school was that they would miss their old friends and have difficulty making new ones, that people wouldn't be ‘nice to them’, they wouldn’t know their way around or how everything worked, and so on.

And, as was the case for the students when contemplating the move to secondary school (see later in this chapter), rather than anticipating only problems about going to a different school, some students felt that their new school might well offer advantages over their present school.

Most students commented too that, looking back, despite some adjustments, they had settled into their new school quite quickly, especially in cases where the school had assigned them a ‘buddy’ to give them support in their early days there.

It is of interest to note that when students talked about moves between primary schools they seldom mentioned worries about their schoolwork, concentrating more on social aspects of school. The students in intermediate schools, however, as well as expressing remembered anxieties about friendships, also referred to worries about coping with schoolwork and homework, and to the size of the school: the same sorts of responses students made when talking about the transition to secondary school.

A sample of the students’ comments follows.

**Primary students**

- “At first I didn’t want to ’cause I was sad leaving all my friends at my old school behind. But I settled in quite quickly.”
- “[Changing schools] makes me nervous and shy but I settle in quite quickly.”
- “Excited, and a friend came here too. But I made new friends instantly on the first day.”
- “I felt nervous, scared, frightened and I didn’t feel like going to another school.”
- “Was nervous: I played them [kids at this school] in rugby when I was at my last school and I thought they’d hate me [because we won] but they like me.”
- “I was really annoyed [having to move schools] because [my last school] was rich and flash and we had all kinds of things there. When I got here it didn’t feel that it had that much stuff. Here the people are more friendly but they swear a lot.”

*continued…*
All Students

Previous experience of changing schools – continued

- “Lonely. Didn’t know anybody. School gave me a buddy on the first day to help me.”
- “Felt shy. Didn’t know anyone. Difficult to get to know the teachers.”
- “Nervous, don’t know anyone. Sometimes I repeat work done at other schools.”
- “People couldn’t pronounce my name, didn’t know any people, made new friends after a couple of days. Difficult getting to know new teacher.”
- “Scary. Meeting new friends and people all over again.”
- “Wasn’t that bad because I knew one girl there.”
- “Wasn’t scary because I was used to moving because I’d done it once before.”
- “Very nerve-wracking, unsure, didn’t know anyone at this school.”
- “Scary and it was very difficult coming to this school because people tease you and other people bully others and tease them.”

Intermediate students

- “Scared out of my wits: thought work was going to be hard, that I was going to be dumb. It’s probably what 200 people thought when I [we] first came here.”
- “Scary. Meeting new people was hard, this school was much bigger than my small primary school. The size of the school, and the students scared me a lot.”
- “Scary. Thought the work was going to be harder, and someone might come and bully me.”
- “When I was at [my primary school] I wasn’t getting as good an education as I could so I was scared about the work. And I didn’t really want to come because my friends wouldn’t be here, but it was OK. It’s more like a college, more people. We don’t change classes but we have to stick to timetables.”
- “Scary, I didn’t know many people. But good things were the new environment, new facilities and experiences.”
- “Actually kind of frustrating because of all the homework (but got used to it). I felt nervous, hard to get along with new people in my class. Good things were I had a nice teacher and people were kind enough to show me around.”
- “Was nervous about making friends and what teacher I’d get — whether she’d be a kind teacher.”
- “I liked it. When I came here I had lots of friends here already and it’s a good school.”
- “Nervous. Meeting new people, new school and because my friends were going to a different school — I wanted to go with them.”
- “Just been here seven months [since he and his family came from India]. Felt scared but the students behaved well with me. Teachers told me everything I need to do.”

Choice of Secondary School

A smooth transition to secondary schooling can be affected by the extent to which students feel positively about the school they are to attend, and feel they have at least some choice about the school selected. Although Emily said in Phase 1 that the secondary school she was to attend was a ‘parents only’, rather than a joint, decision, she did not express any concerns about this.

Her view on why she had been enrolled in the particular secondary school was simply that it was the local school for students who lived in the area (and therefore not really a matter of choice) and also because it was the closest school to where she lived.

Emily’s parents responded similarly; that the secondary school Emily was to go to served the local community and that it was not a matter of choosing as such. They did however add that the school had been their second choice but did not offer an explanation.
All Students

Choice of secondary school

By the time we interviewed them in Phase 1, all students in the study had recently been enrolled in a secondary school. We asked them who had chosen the secondary school they were to attend and what the main reasons for choosing it had been.

Just over half (52%) of students advised that they and their parents had made the decision together.

For a further 29 percent it had been a ‘parents only’ choice, while, in contrast, 17 percent of students felt that they alone had decided. The few remaining students answered that it had not been a question of ‘choice’ because the school they were to attend was the only one available in their school zoning area.

The most frequent sorts of responses given to the question regarding main reasons for choice of secondary school were: that the school was the closest to home and/or it was the local school; friends were going there; older siblings were currently there or had attended the school in the past (as had, in some cases, their parents); the school had a good reputation; and it offered a good subject choice (curriculum) and/or range of extra-curricular activities (particularly sports).

Of note is that for at least 12 percent of students in the study, ‘selection’ of the secondary school they were to attend was because they could not get into their first (or second or even third) choice of school, usually because they lived out of zone for the preferred schools.

It was also evident that for several of the students who couldn’t get into their school of choice that this meant they entered secondary school with greater feelings of negativity than would otherwise have been the case.

Mainly, they had wanted to attend a different school because their friends were going there, but some had wanted to attend other schools because they felt they would be better catered for in terms of their academic and/or performing arts (eg, music) or other needs.

And a few were also unhappy because they had wanted to go to a higher decile secondary school, to ‘match’ the primary/intermediate school they were currently in, especially as most of their friends had been successful in enrolling in such a school.

But with the exception of the last-mentioned students, most of those who had been unsuccessful in their (or their parents’) first choice of secondary school did not seem to be too concerned about it:

- “I wanted to go to [another] school ‘cause most of my friends are going there. But my parents didn’t want me to ‘cause it’s too far. But I feel all right about going to [this school] now.”
- “I would like to go to [a school in town] probably because you can learn more out there because you would meet different people. Because my friends sometimes want you to do something you don’t want to do. Also I wanted to go to [a different school nearer home] but parents said it has one of the lowest passing rates so they chose [the one I’m going to] — but that’s fine with me.”

Preparation for the Move to Secondary School

In their review of the literature on the primary to secondary transition, McGee et al (ibid) refer to research which focuses on the importance of primary and intermediate schools ensuring that students are well prepared for secondary school, and that secondary schools have initiatives in place to help their new Year 9 students settle and adjust well to secondary schooling. While this particular report focuses primarily on a student perspective of what schools and teachers did to help students through the transition, comment on the transition from the point of view of teachers and principals is provided in our report Easing the Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling: A Resource Document.
At the beginning of the study, when the students were almost at the end of their primary schooling, we asked them if ‘anything been done at school to help you learn things about the secondary school you will be going to next year’. Emily’s response was that: “My teachers have talked to us about what to expect next year: behaviour things, what work will be expected, consequences of behaviours.” Emily had also been to an interview with her parents at her intended secondary school, which she found “OK”. As well, her parents had talked to her about moving on to secondary school. Overall, Emily felt that the information she had received from her teachers and parents and through attending the interview had been “helpful”, and that there was nothing more she ‘would like done to help [her] get ready for the move to secondary school’, or, at least, nothing more that she could think of at the time.

### All Students

**What their schools did to prepare them for secondary school**

Asked in Year 8 if ‘anything [had] been done at [or through] school to help you learn things about the secondary school you will be going to next year?’ the large majority said that there had. The remaining eight (7%) students either responded ‘no, nothing has been done’ or answered that they were ‘not sure/can’t think of anything’.

The students who felt that they had received some preparation for secondary school most often mentioned that:

- the principal of the secondary school they were enrolled in had come to their primary/intermediate school and given a talk to the Year 8 students, followed by question time;
- they had gone with their parents to a meeting or special evening at the secondary school to hear what it was like there;
- they and their parents had attended an ‘enrolment interview’ with the principal at secondary school (*Interview with the principal at the [secondary school] — it was fun*);
- their Year 8 teachers had been talking to them about what they might expect when they reached secondary school;
- they had received an information pack from the secondary school.

And a number of students felt they were familiar with the secondary school because they had visited the school quite regularly for a particular reason, such as to attend rehearsals for a school production which was to be staged there.

Other ways the students had learned about their intended secondary school included:

- their school having arranged for Year 8 students to go on an orientation visit to the secondary school during school-time;
- senior students from the secondary school coming to talk to them and give a ‘student perspective’ of life at secondary school (*They were interesting and useful because they told us how they felt on their first day at the new school*);
- Year 9 deans visiting their Year 8 classes to answer questions and administer ‘pre-entry tests’.

Some students mentioned too that their Year 8 teachers had been giving them work that was ‘more like secondary school’ or had implemented other strategies to help Year 8 students familiarise themselves with anticipated ‘ways of doing things’ at secondary school:

- "The work we are doing in class, it’s more like next year’s [work]."
- "We get given extension form 3/form 4 [Year 9/Year 10] work: a taste of what we will be getting at college. And little tests to see what our average is on ‘older students’ work’. The teachers help to see if we can cope."
- "Getting a bit more maths homework to help us prepare for next year.”

continued…
A further question to students who felt they had received some preparation for moving on to secondary school was whether they had found the information received, or the meetings or activities they had participated in, interesting and/or useful.

Most students answered positively, although there were around 10 percent who felt that what they had received was either not useful (mainly because they couldn’t remember what they had been told): “He [teacher] gave us some tips but I can’t remember what they are” or not interesting, for example: “Not very interesting. They were only explaining that we’d have the same activities as we have at this school.”

Some comments from students who did find the preparation helpful follow. (It is interesting to note that the advice they received quite often included a focus on ‘what would happen’ if they didn’t work hard and behave well at secondary school.)

− “Teachers have talked to us about next year. There will be a point system. If we don’t hand in homework we’ll get a detention and things like that. Principal from [the secondary school] came to talk. It was helpful. We heard what it will be like, what the classrooms are like, what subjects, what will happen on the first day.”
− “Prepared you — [for example], about deadlines for handing in work and that we will have to be moving around classes.”
− “Quite helpful. [When I went to the open night] it looked like a fun school. The teachers [here] have talked to us: they told us how we will have to be on time, about changing teachers, [etc].”
− “Teachers at this school have talked to us about what we’ll be doing there, what subjects to choose from and where to go with problems. And people have come in [here] — the principal from [the secondary school] — and told us about the subjects and sports. Some of it was useful. Gave an idea of what it might be like.”
− “Yep [been helpful]. My teacher has talked about behaviour things — consequences of behaviour — and what work will be expected. Had an interview at [the secondary school] with my parents; it was OK.”
− “[My teacher], he says it will be a lot harder and if you want to muck around the teachers won’t take it [ie, put up with it], they’ll just give you a detention.”
− “[What my teachers here have told me has helped me] because if we have a problem at secondary school we can just go back in time and think of the things we have been taught by the teachers [here].”
− “Useful. Principal told us reasons, ‘don’t be afraid, it’s just like going to intermediate but with people that are older than you’. I half believed it, half didn’t.”
− “Useful. Learned from the principal that if you be naughty you’ll get into trouble and get suspension. Also [learned] that the school was caring.”
− “Was helpful. They [the principal and senior students] brought videos of how it’s going to be like there. Doing PE every day. That will be a new change. And they have class periods. I haven’t learned about that yet. I had an interview [at the secondary school too]. I was a fair bit nervous. They gave me my letter of acceptance right there.”
− “[Teachers here] have taught us how to write notes very fast. How to cope at secondary school. The work you will be expected to do. Like 500-word essays.”
− “My teacher has talked to us a bit. She says it’s a good school. I liked the principal’s talk. Learned about options we can take. I’m going to take art and graphics next year. And I like languages.”
All Students

What they remembered of the advice provided by Year 8 teachers to prepare them for the transition

When we asked the students in Phase 2 if they could think back to when their teacher(s) had talked to them about coming to secondary school, and remember anything that had particularly helped them to settle into Year 9, a few students could think of things but claimed it hadn’t been of help: “Was told to ‘be a good boy and don’t get into trouble’. Hasn’t really helped me.” And several others answered that they couldn’t think of anything: “Can’t remember”; “Nothing I can think of.”

But most students could recall advice, suggestions or practical tips that had been of some help to them.

Their comments fell into several main categories. These were:

• Reassurance;
  – “Telling us that the work would be similar, that maths and English would be much the same.”
  – “They told me that [the secondary school] is a really good school. My teacher said it’s such a good school. It helped me feel positive about coming here.”
  – “That you’d meet new friends and that it is important to try and be friendly.”
  – “It’s just the same as primary. You are going with your friends, and sometimes I will visit you.”
  – “We were told the work would be harder and that we’d need to change work habits so that we can get through high school.”

• ‘Shock tactics’: that is, being told ‘for their own good’ that they needed to work hard now, learn to be organised, and so on, because their secondary school teachers would be less lenient, the work would be harder, homework would be more prolific, and there would be punishments, such as detentions or suspension, for inappropriate behaviours;
  – “Better be ready for heaps of work!”
  – “That we wouldn’t get away with talking in class.”
  – “She told us to pay more attention in class because the stuff will be harder to learn.”
  – “Told us to be more organised — in schoolwork, homework. Told us the teachers [at secondary school] wouldn’t give us as much slack as [we were used to].”
  – “We were told the work would be harder and that we’d need to change work habits so that we can get through high school.”
  – “He warned us and said we weren’t going to be given everything on a silver platter. He said if you want something you’re going to have to do it/get it yourself.”

• Positive encouragement to make the most of the new or wider opportunities that would be available to them at secondary school;
  – “That it’s good to get into extra-curricular activities, make more friends by doing this.”
  – “Just do well in school, try to get yourself involved in things.”

• Practical tips and facts to refer to or ‘fall back on’;
  – “They told us that you have to get used to the kids first — so you won’t be alone — and then the teachers, ‘cause you only have the teachers once a day and the kids are with you all day long. That advice helped me.”
  – “Choosing the right friends — so they don’t hold back my learning.”
  – “[Told to] ‘do heaps of reading’.

continued…
All Students

What they remembered of the advice provided by Year 8 teachers to prepare them for the transition – continued

− “We developed ‘key learning’ books in maths last year (containing important concepts to remember). Our teachers said it would help us this year. For example, being able to look back in our books and see how to multiply and turn numbers into fractions. It has helped me this year — for example, the rhymes we wrote down to help us remember things.”
− “[To] be good, don’t annoy teachers and do your homework — make [doing] it a habit. Prepared me better for this year.”
− “She gave us more homework so we would be prepared for next year.”

• General best wishes for the future.
− “Hold your head high and reach for the stars.”
− “To try my hardest, jump at the opportunities and do well in everything I do.”

Whether anyone else had ‘told’ them about secondary school prior to going there

Students were also asked if anyone (outside of school) had talked to them about going on to secondary school, including telling them specific things about the school, the work, and so on.

A large majority of students (83%) answered ‘yes’, specifying that most often the people concerned were either older siblings and/or parents. Some students also mentioned that they had received some preparation as a result of their parents taking them to an interview with the principal of their intended school.

Students variously found the talks they had had:

• reassuring (hearing about the positive aspects of the school, including the wide range of opportunities available);
• unsettling (eg, when siblings scared them about the hard work they would encounter);
• interesting but not necessarily helpful (eg, when their parents talked about their own days at the school); and
• insufficient — for example, students indicated wanting more facts about the nature and difficulty of the work they would encounter, how much homework they would receive, what would be expected of them, and what their teachers would be like, and, particularly significantly, some wanted more help with their reading, writing, spelling and maths so they felt better prepared for secondary school).

And, rather worryingly, there were also almost 15 percent of students who felt that no-one outside of school had talked with them at all to help them prepare for the transition.
All Students

**How they felt about moving on to secondary school**

In their last term at primary/intermediate school, just over one-third of the students felt “excited”, “happy”, or in a few cases “enthusiastic”, “confident” or “good” when they thought about going to secondary school. The students most often said that they were ready for and looking forward to new challenges, to learning new subjects, and meeting new people — both students and teachers. Some students’ positive attitude, however, seemed to relate more to feeling reassured because they already had friends or relations at the school or had had the chance to become familiar with some aspects of their new school. Some, too, simply stated that they were ready to move on in their life, and that they were looking forward to adulthood.

A considerably larger group (55%) of students described themselves as “nervous”, “scared” or “sad” in anticipation of the move to secondary school. Some of these students put it even more strongly: for example, one stated that “I dread it” while another said “I’m very nervous — it’s a huge step”.

Students who were worried about secondary school frequently expressed concerns about “bigger kids” and the possibility — or even, in the view of some students, the likelihood — of being bullied, whether or not they would make new friends or “fit in”, and having to cope with what they expected to be considerably harder, and more, work.

Other fears included getting lost in a much bigger, unfamiliar school, getting into trouble for being late for class, and having to cope with multiple and “much stricter” teachers.

− “Probably will get lost. It is a big school. Then I won’t get to class on time and I’ll get into trouble. My parents will get a letter saying ‘how come he can’t get to class on time’. Kids at the school, I’ll feel different, I won’t be the biggest. The teachers might be strict too.”

Some students too were very sad at the thought of leaving their old school behind, especially those who had attended the same school throughout their schooling. They were unhappy about no longer seeing teachers with whom they had established a particular rapport and anticipated missing younger friends in the school. A few were just clearly apprehensive about the thought of ‘change’.

Although some of the students’ fears were potentially major — being able to cope well with change, and establish positive, new relationships, for example — other concerns, such as fear of getting lost and being late for class, are likely to be only very short-term transition problems for most students. A number of students, while anxious, had some awareness of this. One student observed:

− “I’m worrying ‘what if I don’t know what I’m supposed to do or say’. But I’m beginning to calm down. I now realise that people I already know are there. And I’ve also heard that [the school] is getting really good entertainment and music and drama reviews. I reckon when I get there I’ll be OK.”

And another, pragmatic, student simply stated:

− “It’s part of life — nothing much you can do about it.”

Remaining students (10%) said they were feeling both “nervous and excited” or “happy and sad” about their move to secondary school. Despite some concerns about how they would cope with things that were different from their primary schooling experience, they were looking forward to new challenges and experiences.
Feelings about Secondary School before Transition

When we asked the then Year 8 students if they could think of one word to describe how they felt about going to secondary school, Emily’s word was ‘scared’.

Emily advised that her own teacher, as well as other teachers of Year 8 students in the school, had talked to the class about what to expect at secondary school. But regardless of the preparation she had received, Emily still felt apprehensive…

"…because I don’t know what is expected of me. I just don’t want to go ’cause I want to stay here — ’cause everything’s given to you here."

So although Emily had indicated earlier that the information provided by her primary school teachers on what it would be like in Year 9 was helpful and sufficient77, and despite the range of data that reveal Emily as a social girl with very positive attitudes to school and education generally, she still felt very uncertain about the prospect of the unknown: part of the ‘normal human condition’ perhaps.

Emily’s perception of ‘how secondary school would be different from school this year’ was that:

“There’ll be different classes. Here you know everyone in the school, [there], you won’t know most people. I will feel scared about getting a hiding from older kids; I feel safe at primary. And you feel comfortable with teachers at primary, ’cause you know them.”

It was this sort of response from Emily and other of our students that led us to include a question in Phase 2 about relationships with older students once they arrived at secondary school — see later in this chapter.

Perceptions of the Best and Not So Good Things about Secondary School Prior to Transition

Best Things

To further gauge Year 8 students’ feelings about moving to secondary school, we asked what they thought would ‘be the best things about going to secondary school’. Emily stated:

"[It will be a] new challenge and experience. Knowing you are becoming older and becoming an adult and not a kid anymore."

This response reflects Emily’s basically optimistic side: despite some natural concerns about the changes she would face as a result of the Year 8–Year 9 transition, she recognised the positive aspects of taking new steps and moving forward.

Not So Good Things

To the question ‘What do you think will be the not so good things about going to secondary school?’ Emily again referred to her fear of possible aggression from other students:

"Maybe getting a hiding from bigger kids."

Anticipated Best and Not So Good Things about Secondary School: Parent Perspective

Emily’s parents felt that the best thing about secondary school for Emily would be “to further her education”.

And in relation to the ‘hardest — or not so good — things’ for Emily about going to secondary school they simply stated “we do not envision any problems”.

Teacher and Parent Predictions of How Well Emily would Cope with the Move to Secondary School

In Phase 1, Emily’s parents and Year 8 teacher were asked how well they thought Emily would cope with the transition to secondary school.

Emily’s Year 8 teacher expected that Emily would cope ‘extremely well’:

“Emily is a confident student who adapts well to new environments and situations. She relates well to students and teachers (is highly social!).”

Similarly, while Emily’s parents felt Emily was “Excited, nervous” about the prospect of secondary school, they also considered their daughter would cope ‘extremely well’ with the transition:

“Emily is a very confident and responsible student so she should not have any problems.”

Emily felt scared at the prospect of secondary school.

Her greatest fear was that she’d be bullied.

She was looking forward to being treated more like an adult.

Both teacher and parents expected Emily to cope well with this transition.

77 It is of note here that while Emily recognised at an objective level the value of what her teachers in Year 8 were doing to prepare them for Year 9, at an emotional level she seemed to find it hard to relate to at the time. But once at secondary school, and looking back on how she and her classmates had been prepared for the transition, she was able to be much more appreciative of it (see page 205).
Luke on the Year 8 to Year 9 Transition

Luke had wanted to attend a different secondary school, in the area where his father lived. But because the school had a considerable waiting list and took only a limited number of students from out-of-zone, he effectively had no choice but to attend the local school.

Although disappointed about not obtaining his first choice of school, this was mainly because of the link with his father and not because he did not like the idea of the school he was to attend. A reassuring aspect for him of going to his local school was that several of his primary school friends were also going there.

Nevertheless when Luke was in Year 8 he was “scared” at the thought of going to secondary school: “It’s way bigger than this school. Won’t be used to it.”

He did say, however, that his teacher had talked to them about what to expect the next year and had been introducing them to work in class that would be more like the work they could expect in Year 9. In addition, Luke had been on a tour of the secondary school and had attended an open night at the school with his parents.

Luke went on to say that he would like to have known more about how much homework he’d be getting at secondary school and how hard it (the homework) would be.

He anticipated that the ways in which secondary school would be different from primary school would be that…

“. . . the work will be harder and the population of kids [will be different] — lots of older ones.”

In Luke’s opinion, the best things about secondary school would be:

“Meeting new friends, playing against other colleges in sport.”

And when asked about what might be the ‘not so good things’ about going to secondary school, Luke replied: “Not really anything.”
All Students

Predictions about the best and not so good things about secondary school

The ‘best things’
There were three main themes in what our then Year 8 students anticipated would be the ‘best things’ about secondary school. These were that:

• secondary school would provide opportunities to take up new challenges and opportunities;
• they would be able to meet and make friends with a much wider, and diverse circle of young people; and
• they would have a greater choice of subjects and be able to learn new and different things.

The possibility of greater sporting opportunities, especially being able to play in school teams against other schools, were also very important to a considerable number of students, as were the expected music and drama options for a number of other students.

And some students simply referred to secondary school as a symbol of greater freedom, in the sense that they were becoming young adults and were ready to take on more responsibilities.

The ‘not so good things’
Although a few students stated that they did not think there would be any ‘not so good things’ about going to secondary school — “Nothing bad really, it just depends on yourself, what you do”; “Nothing, I'll probably enjoy everything” — the majority of students mentioned at least one worry or concern.

They were most likely to state that they might experience problems with ‘relationships’: would they be able to make new friends? and the ‘right sort of friends’?; how would they get on without their present friends who were going to different schools?; would they get on with their new teachers?; would they ‘fit in’?; how would they cope with being the youngest in the school again, without their former responsibilities and privileges?; how would they feel being part of a much bigger school population?

There was also considerable anxiety about being bullied by the ‘big kids’, and whether they could manage what they anticipated would be harder work, with a lot more homework.

Again, there was frequent reference to worries about negotiating a larger, unfamiliar school, moving between classes without getting lost and being late, managing their books and other equipment, and getting used to wearing a uniform.
Parent and Teacher Perspectives on Luke’s Transition to Secondary School

Luke’s mother felt that the best thing about secondary school for Luke would be that he…
“…would be forced to improve his self-organisation, that he would be able to do new subjects such as Māori and performing arts, take part in a greater range of extra-curricular activities, and generally have more opportunities to try new things.”

And in relation to anticipated ‘hardest’ things for Luke about secondary school, she stated that it would be…
“…being organised!”

Asked how well she thought Luke would cope with the move to secondary school, Luke’s mother considered he ‘[would] cope reasonably well in most respects/some ups and downs’.

She noted that although Luke was…
“…a wee bit nervous, [the transition] is still quite a way off [for him] and he doesn’t seem too worried yet, and also he knows other people who are going there, and is reasonably confident about trying new things.”

However, she added that she herself was more nervous about the transition than her son at that point, referring again to her concerns about his organisational skills:
“[I’m] really worried [about Luke’s transition]: will he get to the bus on time, will he remember which class, will he lose his bus pass! And he’ll be a ‘small fish in a big pond’.”

Luke’s Year 8 teacher predicted that Luke would cope with the transition ‘extremely well’:
“He has excellent social skills, he loves being involved in positive activities, and is resistant to peer pressure.”

She also wrote:
“He has excellent leadership qualities. His lack of application in written activities may hold him back academically but shouldn’t affect his attitude and transition.”
To complement the students’ perspective, we asked parents and teachers prior to the transition how well they thought individual students in the study would handle the progression to secondary schooling; in Phase 2 of the study we also asked them how well they considered students had coped during their first term in Year 9.

The data in the table below reveal that, pre-transition, parents were somewhat cautious in their assessment of how well their child would cope at secondary school, with less than half (47%) indicating that they would cope either ‘extremely well’ or ‘well’. However, after their children had been at secondary school for a number of weeks, 87 percent of parents felt that their children were actually doing very well, suggesting that their earlier fears were often unfounded.

Teachers’ responses showed a similar trend overall with just under 60 percent of Year 8 teachers predicting their students would handle the transition ‘extremely well’ or ‘well’, and more than three-quarters of the teachers post-transition reporting that the students were coping extremely well or well in their first term at secondary school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating of how student would cope/was coping</th>
<th>Teacher feedback in Phase 1 (N=110 students)</th>
<th>Teacher feedback in Phase 2 (N=99 students)</th>
<th>Parent feedback in Phase 1 (N=60 students)</th>
<th>Parent feedback in Phase 2 (N=55 students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely well</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK/reasonably well</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very well</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very well at all</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure/unable to comment</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most participating teachers commented on several students.

Experiences of Secondary School on Arrival

Hardest Things to Get Used to

Reflecting on the ‘sorts of things she found hardest to get used to’ when she began at her new secondary school, Emily considered they had been:

“Being separated from all my friends. Getting used to having different teachers. Not knowing anyone. All the expectations — about uniform, etc. And having to find my way around the school: but it actually seems quite small now.”

How Long it Took to Feel Settled

By the time we interviewed students in Phase 2, around nine weeks into their first year at secondary school, Emily said she felt ‘settled’ at school. She estimated that it had taken her ‘about one month’ to feel this way and that it came about…

“…when I started making friends and when teachers knew who I was. I was still hanging on to [my primary school] until then.”
Referring on what they had found hardest when they arrived at secondary school, students first and foremost — just over three-quarters — mentioned the (short-term) problems of learning to find their way around in a generally much bigger school and not get lost or turn up late to class, and getting to grips with the timetable and general structure of the school day:

- "Going to different classes, just walking around finding classes. Kept getting lost. Took me about a week to get used to it."
- "Different routines: starting at an earlier time, having lunch at a later time."
- "Getting used to the six-day timetable, getting to the right classes on time. Worried about being late."
- "Form time — confusing about where you have to be."
- "Size of the school. It seemed huge at first but now it’s kind of small."
- "Just the way things are done at college compared to primary: changing rooms and having a lot of different teachers, carrying bag around."
- "Times of interval and lunch — later than used to from primary school."

Almost half of students also mentioned finding it difficult (tiring, burdensome) having to carry what they needed for classes around with them all day:

- "Having to carry all my stuff around."
- "Bags get too heavy."
- "Carrying my bags and folders around is awkward."

Other more ‘weighty’ difficulties mentioned by 40 percent or more of students were:

- adjusting to having several teachers — more specifically, students referred to difficulties learning all their teachers’ names, understanding the different expectations of their various teachers, and getting used to not knowing or being known by teachers as they had been at primary/intermediate school;
  - "Getting to know all the teachers [has been hard]."
  - "All the different expectations and the amount of work in all the classes."
  - "Getting to know teachers and people in class all at once."

- having to cope with what seemed to be a lot more homework, and homework from different teachers at the same time;
  - "The amount of homework — got it as soon as we started school."
  - "Teachers need to coordinate assignments better."
  - "Having all the homework from different teachers, learning to organise it, for example, when one project is due the next day and then getting homework from another teacher as well."
  - "Too many assignments all at once."

- being separated from friends and/or having to get to know a lot of previously unknown students.
  - "Leaving all my friends from primary school."
  - "Learning names of other students."
  - "Making new friends. Finding a friend at lunchtime."
  - "Being around different people in class."
  - "Being separated from all my friends. Getting used to having different teachers. Not knowing anyone."

*continued...*
Other difficulties or adjustments experienced included:

- getting used to differences in the student population at secondary school compared to primary school;
  - “Nobody is the same as they were last year, seem all grown up, so it is not as fun anymore — people are boring, too serious.”
  - “At times, mixing with ethnic groups: they tease us.”
  - “It’s hard to get used to wearing a skirt — have to be careful how we sit and stand, because of all the bigger, older boys around.”
  - “Getting to know older kids.”
  - “Hard to get used to all the different people.”
  - “Worried about getting bullied — not happened though.”

- being among the youngest in the school, with consequent loss of status, instead of part of the most senior group;
  - “Being the smallest in the school compared with last year.”
  - “Going from a senior to a junior student.”
  - “Being a new kid.”

- having to get up earlier in the morning and/or travel further to get to school;
  - “Have to get up much earlier now, ’cause have to get the bus to school. It gets tiring.”

- wearing uniform;
  - “The uniform — don’t like wearing it.”
  - “It’s easier to sort out what to wear now but I hate to wear the clothes [uniform].”

- less hospitable physical environment;
  - “On rainy days, no covered place to eat: not enough spaces to keep warm and dry for so many kids.”
  - “Crowded corridors — trying to get around students to get to class.”
  - “Not doing anything at lunchtime — [compared to last year], now we do nothing ’cause nothing to do.”

- certain rules, regulations, and ‘consequences’, such as detention;
  - “Detentions — didn’t have them at primary school, had consequences but no detentions.”
  - “Bit strict compared to last year.”

- generally just getting used to change, including new ways of doing things and having to be organised accordingly.
  - “Didn’t know what stuff to bring.”
  - “Remembering the right books. Organising myself.”
  - “Other people in the school: was very nervous of all the new people. Was nervous about all the homework. The timetable — getting organised. And drumming the map of the school into my head.”
  - “Too many class tests.”
  - “Another girl having the same name as me [which I’m not used to] — got mixed up in classes.”
  - “Keeping my gear together, the stuff you need for school — books, etc. I’ve got a locker now.”
  - “It’s hard organising all the things you have to do as a secondary school student.”
All Students

**How long it took to feel settled at secondary school**

Despite all but one student in the study saying that there were a number of aspects associated with being a new student at secondary school that they found difficult, our data somewhat unexpectedly also indicated that the great majority (81%) of students felt they ‘settled’ into secondary school quite soon after their arrival — within two weeks, with most of the remaining students saying they ‘settled’ after one to two months. Four percent of students felt they were not yet settled when we interviewed them near the end of their first term in Year 9. The reasons these students gave for not feeling settled were:

- “Finding work hard; would prefer to be back with my teacher [from last year].”
- “Still getting used to space [much larger size of school, etc].”
- “Probably because of my class, it’s not mixing well. Sometimes I get left out”
- “If we had some students of the same culture in our class it would help a lot.”

Although the results on how long it took to settle portray a very positive situation for almost all students quite quickly after their transition to secondary schooling, other data collected over the course of the study suggest that this finding requires some unpacking.

It is likely that students interpreted the question on how ‘settled’ they felt quite narrowly, and that if the question had been asked in another way, their answers would have been different. For example, for some students in the study, ‘being settled’ quite possibly referred primarily to the more superficial aspects of their new schooling experiences — becoming familiar with the layout of the school, and so on, rather than to more significant matters such as feeling confident enough to find out about extracurricular activities and join in, getting used to different teacher expectations, and learning how to get on with a wider range of students.

Our student, Emily, for instance, who said she had ‘settled’ quite quickly at secondary school, had “heaps” of friends, was enjoying the work and the opportunities available, and considered herself to be coping well with her studies, nevertheless stated, when asked in Phase 3 if she missed the responsibilities and leadership roles she had had at primary school, that she was pleased she did not currently have to deal with these because: “It’s been a real ‘topsy turvy’ year — just getting used to everything.”

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**Interacting with Older Students at Secondary School**

Analysis of data from Phase 1 of the study revealed that many of our participating students mentioned ‘older students’ as one of their main fears about going to secondary school, particularly in terms of potential bullying. Because of this finding, we asked students in Phase 2 if they had ‘had any contact with older students in the school so far that year’. Emily’s answer to this was ‘yes, but not very much’. She elaborated:

“Only in school activities which would involve older students — [eg] ‘Stage Challenge’ and peer support.”

Emily’s contact with more senior students was usually just “Saying hi” to those who used to attend the same primary school as herself. Other than that, her contact was mainly through peer support activities78, through special activities at school involving students in all year levels, and just coming across them in the school grounds and school canteen.

We also asked students to rate the nature of the contact they had mostly had with older students in the school, not counting brothers and sisters, cousins or friends. Emily rated this contact as ‘very good/great’:

“They [older students] don’t do anything negative to me — but I thought I wouldn’t get friendly vibes from them before I came here.”

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78 Part of the school’s strategy to ease the transition for their new Year 9 students was to assign two or three senior students to each Year 9 form class in the capacity of peer supporters. These students were there to show new students around the school, answer questions, listen, and from time to time take the class for fun, getting-to-know-you activities.
Chapter 11

All Students

Views about ‘older students’ at secondary school

In Year 9, most students in the study did not ‘socialise’ per se with older students at secondary school. However, many had some quite frequent contact with older students, which they rated as generally ‘good’.

In particular, our Year 9 students mentioned positive interactions with senior student peer supporters, who had been appointed by the school to ‘look out for’ the new Year 9 students. Students typically described their contact with the peer supporters in the following ways:

− “Peer supporters — we do fun games with them, really like that.”
− “Talk to peer supporters sometimes when I need them. They introduced me to other people.”
− “When peer supporters come to our science studies classes, they do activities with us and make it [learning the subject] more fun.”
− “Peer supporters: if you need help you can count on them.”

Other ‘older students’ that our students most often came in contact with were siblings or other relatives (their own or their friends’), and their friends, and students whom they’d known from their previous schools:

− “Older students remembered me from my old school.”
− “Some are old friends from [my previous] school.”

Quite often, students with older siblings, cousins, or family friends at the school relied on them to some extent to help them with problems — “They help me if I have a problem around school” — and to introduce them to certain ‘key people’, thus making it more straightforward for them when it came to taking up various out-of-class opportunities at school.

Some students also advised that they’d had positive contact with older students at school through sports and other extra-curricular activities they’d become involved in, and, at a more superficial level, just by encountering them around the school grounds at break times.

While there were indications that some students felt fearful or in awe of older students — “Try not to [have contact with them]. Some of them are not very nice: older boys beat people up and throw their lunches away and throw rocks at girls (but we don’t want to be tattle tales)” — most students were pleased when they had friendly encounters with older students because it helped them feel more at ease and settled at the school.
All Students

What their secondary school did to help them settle following the transition

Students most often mentioned one or more of: the powhiri/welcoming assembly; the help they had received from senior student peer supporters; and orientation day, in response to the question in Phase 2, “Has the school done anything special this year to help you settle in and belong?” The focus of all activities mentioned was on students getting to grips with practicalities such as the layout of the school, getting acquainted with other students, and meeting some of their teachers. No mention was made of any activities specifically concerning preparation for class work.

Although a few students ‘couldn’t really remember’, and a few others felt that the powhiri and/or orientation day activities had been ‘boring’ or not necessarily helpful (eg, “It was good but I still didn’t know my way around. Was interesting but you can’t really show them around the school and then expect them to know everything — have to find it yourself”), comments were mostly very positive about what their school had done to help them settle in, particularly (as also discussed in the previous ‘All Students’ section) in relation to the peer supporters. For example:

- “We had fun activities to do on the first day — ball games (etc): ‘get-to-know-you’ games. The peer supporters were there to help you if you didn’t feel good, to say friendly things to you.”
- “Only Year 9s and some Year 13s [the peer supporters] on the first day, so you didn’t get thrown into a school with 900 students.”
- “It was good having no big kids there the first day (first day of term was for Year 9 students only).”
- “We did an orientation sheet where we had to go and find certain things. We had to find certain rooms, a good way to learn your way around.”
- “The principal said something good to us [at the orientation day], made me feel good.”
- “Just everyone being there, the teachers welcoming you.”
- “[Orientation day] made me feel that there was no need to hide from going to school.”
- “Got to meet people from the Māori group [at the orientation] which was good.”
- “Older students and teachers talking to us and introducing people, made us feel welcome.”
- “The peer supporters showing us around the school on orientation day for Year 9 students, and the activities they did with us helped us get to know one another.”
- “The peer supporters helped us get to know our classmates really well.”
- “The peer supporters are really helpful for the Year 9s. Can ask them if you don’t know something.”
- “The powhiri was good: the kapa haka group, the different dances from different cultures. The peer supporters showing us around helped a bit.”
- “Powhiri: the seventh formers performed Māori dances and dances from the Pacific Islands. Was good.”
- “The powhiri, it was funny, good performances.”
- “The kapa haka encourages me to do well in school.”

‘Other things’ included:

- “Teachers took it easy during the first week or so, didn’t feel we were overloaded. Didn’t do any work on the first day, just walked around and got used to places.”
- “The activities we did in groups about a week after we began [here]. We had a competition between houses. It was fun and we got to know people. I got put in with all my family.”
- “We had a big sports day, the third day at school. The whole school was involved, helped us get used to having all the kids around.”
Teacher Views on How Well Emily Settled at School after Transition

In Phase 2, Year 9 form teachers rated how well they felt participating students had settled now that they had been at secondary school for some weeks. Emily’s teacher judged her to have settled ‘very’ or ‘extremely well’, which complements the prediction by her Year 8 teacher and parents that she would cope well with the transition.

What the School Did to Help New Students Settle In

A particular objective of the study was to look at strategies schools put in place to help their new Year 9 students settle into secondary schooling. The question ‘Has the school done anything special this year to help you settle in and feel you belong?’ was intended to gauge student awareness, or perceptions, of any such strategies. Emily’s answer to the question was:

“Yes, the peer supporters. They’re really helpful and they’re not teachers — they talk like your friends. [And the school] picked the right peer supporters for each class [ie, the senior student peer supporters were well matched well with the class they were assigned to]. And having a powhiri in the first week [was good]. That’s about it; the rest is up to us because they put us as young adults now. [The expectation is] ‘you’re not a baby, you’re Year 9 and have to be responsible’.”

Orientation day

Unless students had already volunteered the information when replying to the preceding question, they were also asked if there had been ‘an orientation day’ for Year 9 students when they first arrived at their new school. Although possibly not entirely sure what this meant, Emily said that there had been, and that it had, for example, involved older students “showing us around [and] telling us what the coloured lines meant [ie, out of bounds areas for students]”.

Asked if the orientation activities had helped her feel welcome in the school, Emily thought that…

“…it sort of helped — [it was] all a bit much [overwhelming].”

Other Things that Helped the Settling in Process

To a question in Phase 2 concerning ‘any other things that have helped you settle in so far this year’, Emily reflected:

“My friends and my Mum and Dad and teachers from last year — ’cause they tried to prepare us and it was a big help.79 They talked to us about the higher expectations and moving around and meeting different people, and having to approach teachers ourselves, and not rely on them [secondary teachers] being there for us [because of it being a much bigger school with lots more students].”

Emily went on to say that she had been “worried about fights [among students]” before coming to secondary school, but finding that she had not had to contend with that after all had really helped her to settle in.

79 It is of interest here to note the observations made in footnote 77 on p.195.
As a follow up to the question ‘Has the school done anything special this year to help you settle in and belong?’ (see previous ‘All Students’ section), we asked students in Phase 2 if there were ‘any other things that have helped you settle in so far this year’. While the large majority of students could identify at least one ‘other thing’ that had been or continued to be helpful for them, seven students responded that ‘there was nothing in particular that they could think of that had helped’.

By far the most frequent response to this question (by two-thirds of students) was that ‘friends’ had been very important in helping them to settle into their new school. Students often mentioned feeling much better once they had ‘made new friends’ and/or that they were glad that friends from their previous school were at the school, especially when they were also in the same class(es).

− “Main thing is having my friends from last year here, but making new friends is starting to feel good.”
− “Having students of same culture at the school [to be friends with].”
− “Having friends in my class [but] I like school [this year] anyway — it’s new, different and funner [more fun] so that has helped me settle in as well.”
− “Getting to know new friends: once I made friends it was easy to settle in.”
− “It was good knowing someone straight away when I arrived — friend from last year.”

Other things that had helped students settle in were:

- help and support from parents, family;
  − “Parents making me feel confident.”
  − “My Mum and Dad have helped me a lot — talked to me about what to expect.”
  − “My older sister helped me. She showed me around. Told me who’s who and who not to mess with and where not to go (that there were gangs in some places in the school).”

- having older siblings, cousins, or family friends already at the school;
  − “My cousins and [an older] friend already here at the school.”
  − “Having my brother here (he’s in Year 11) helped a lot.”
  − “People from church who go here.”

- the peer supporters; senior students being friendly;
  − “The senior students being friendly (it is good finding they are friendly) and also the peer supports, they’ve helped us a lot. They’re good to talk to.”
  − “Some of the older kids talk to you.”
  − “The peer supporters, they’re friendly: a friendly face to talk to. They helped us a lot too — tell us where things are.”
  − “The peer supporters/senior students, they’re good fun. They talk in a fun way. They helped us find our way around the school. Having my friends here also helped me.”

continued…
All Students

Other things (besides what the school did) that helped them settle in during their first weeks at secondary school – continued

• the preparation provided by teachers the previous year;
  – “My teachers from last year, 'cause they tried to prepare us and it was a big help. They talked to us about the higher expectations and moving around [classes] and meeting different people, and that we would have to approach teachers ourselves and not to rely on them being there for us.”
  – “Told things about this school last year, so we were prepared when we got here.”

• a particular teacher or teachers in general;
  – “My form teacher has helped, and the Year 9 deans.”
  – “Some teachers being friendly.”
  – “My mates and my art teacher, form teacher, and science teacher — fun and cool teachers.”
  – “The teacher aide (who works with another student in my class). She’s great to talk to.”
  – “Just being welcomed by friendly teachers. I don’t like seeing bad faces on my teachers. Most of them I find good.”
  – “The teachers made me feel comfortable at the start of the year.”
  – “Form teacher helps by saying where everything is, and what the peer supporters are, takes us around the school so we can know it better. Explains the rules, what to do and what not to do.”

• feeling they were doing well in their schoolwork, including receiving positive feedback about their progress;
  – “Understanding the work.”
  – “Teachers telling me I’m doing well.”

• taking part in sports, cultural groups, or other extra-curricular activities;
  – “Taking part in sport, that’s how most people know me. Having my brother and cousins here. My form teacher. Doing well (but sometimes other people muck it up, stop you from doing work, get distracted easily. Not so much fun then).”
  – “The Samoan group.”
  – “Being in Kapa Haka.”
  – “Being in a sports team, playing sports is good for making friends. You meet more people by playing with them.”

• being familiar with the school through previous visits there.

Later in Year 9, we asked a closely related question to the one asked in Phase 2, to see if students’ responses would be different or much the same. The particular question in Phase 3 was: ‘What sorts of things have most helped you settle in/enjoy school this year?’

In general, the same range of factors raised earlier in the year were repeated, with having ‘friends around them’ continuing to be mentioned most frequently as a major impact on how well settled they felt at secondary school. However, no student now responded that ‘there was nothing in particular that they could think of that had helped’.
All Students

Views on whether the school needed to do more to help students feel settled

When asked in Phase 2 if there was ‘anything (more) you would like the school to do now to help you feel more settled or comfortable or to get on better’, very few students chose, or were able, to make suggestions. The great majority answered, in the context of this question, that they ‘didn’t need any more help at that stage’ as the teachers and others had explained procedures and systems well. Of the six or so students who did make suggestions, these were to do with making learning more fun, ensuring that there were no bullies at school, having more male teachers, a need for greater control over disruptive students in class, more opportunity to wear mufti rather than uniform all the time, and making food from the school canteen less expensive.

A similar question was put to students in Phase 3, towards the end of Year 9. The question was ‘Would you have liked the school or your teachers to do anything else to help you feel more settled or enjoy school more this year?’

To this question, the large majority (83%) of students again answered that the school or teachers did not need to have done more to help them feel settled or enjoy school more in Year 9, which is at odds with other data discussed in this report — students not engaging well with some of their learning in class, for example — suggesting that this and the equivalent Phase 2 question were perhaps not worded in a way that many students could relate to. However, there were 14 percent of students who did specify things that they felt would have helped them. Their ideas, in the main echoing important themes from the study, already identified, included the following:

- “Make it [the work] more interesting.”
- “Do more fun work.”
- “Make sure that we understand everything that we’re doing, like the work and what we do.”
- “[Some of the] teachers to treat me more fairly. Some of them treat me better [than other teachers].”
- “Be a bit more nicer — not giving us detentions all the time or keeping us in at lunchtime.”
- “It’s hard when teachers leave [partway through the year] and new teachers come. That happened with two of my teachers.”
- “Explain how the classrooms worked so I didn’t have to figure it all out myself.”
- “Take us outside more, we’re always stuck inside. Could do lessons outside.”
- “Control the kids so other students can learn easily. If kids are naughty and other people are trying to learn, tell them to quiet down or send them to another class to work for a day.”
- “Get [enable] third formers [Year 9s] to do more things — ’cause older students do it all. They take all the courts [etc]. They boss the third formers around. They need to give us more turns.”
- “Make it easier for us to play sports at lunchtimes — being able to use the gear.”
- “The uniform, I don’t like it. It takes away your individuality. We’re not allowed to wear black socks or jewellery. I don’t feel the same without jewellery. Jewellery doesn’t stop you learning!”
Whether the School Needed to do More to Help Students Feel Settled

Asked whether there was anything (more) she would like the school to do to help her feel more settled or comfortable or ‘get on better’, Emily said she was OK, and did not feel she needed more help at that stage (ie, in her first term in Year 9). In term 4, the question was repeated, and Emily answered in the same way:

“No [I don’t need the school or teachers to do anything else to help me feel settled or enjoy school better], ‘cause I enjoy it already.”

Comparing Secondary School with Primary School

Perceptions of Main Differences between Primary and Secondary School

Students were invited in each of Phases 2 and 3 to compare their present experience of school with their final year at primary or intermediate school. The specific question was: ‘Compared to school last year, what are the main things that you are finding different about school this year?’

Emily’s response in Phase 2 was:

“Having to wear uniform, having to move around [classes], having different teachers for different subjects. [Here at secondary school] there is a huge range of people, different cultures. Very different from [school] last year. Know only a few people after being used to knowing everyone.”

Eight or so months later, the ways in which her experience of school had changed since the transition were expressed as follows:

“The idea of periods and the six-day timetable, and carrying our bags, and all the different teachers. It’s a big change. But what is the same, is we stay with the same [form] class most of the time.”

After almost a year at secondary school, Emily was signalling that she was still very conscious of differences between her primary and secondary schools. However, comparing her Phase 2 and Phase 3 comments, it was apparent that she no longer felt daunted by the numbers of people in the school and by not knowing everyone, and was more able to recognise (positive) similarities in her two schooling experiences.

Preference for Primary or Secondary School

Students were not formally asked in Phase 2 whether, on the basis of their experience thus far, they preferred one school over the other. However, Emily volunteered the information that the two schools were…

“…just different — but I enjoy both schools.”

For Phase 3, it was decided to formally check with students whether they now had a preference for either their ‘pre’- or ‘post-transition’ school. The specific question was ‘On the whole, do you like the way things are at school this year, or would you prefer things to be more like primary [or intermediate] school?’

Emily’s response after a year of secondary school was:

“I like it here more. Last year it was good, we were like a whole big family and we were close. But here I’m out of my comfort zone — not knowing everyone [like I did before]. It’s better for us: a lot bigger, more people. It’s more like real life, like [you experience] when you are older.”

At the end of Year 9, Emily was still very aware of differences between primary and secondary school.
All Students

Comparing secondary school with primary school

In Phase 2 and again in Phase 3 we asked students to tell us the main things they were finding different about school compared to when they were in Year 8. The students identified aspects of secondary school they liked or preferred to primary school, as well as aspects they found difficult. And some responses were simply observations about differences with no particular value judgement attached.

Students’ responses early in Year 9

In Phase 2, most often, students referred to having to get used to:

• a much bigger school, with many more, and more diverse, students and teachers;
  – “Lots more teachers, the size of the school and the number of students. Small fish in a big pond this year.”
  – “Heaps of people. They all look the same in uniform.”
  – “All the different cultures at this school. We were told there are 50–60 different cultures at this school. At my last school they didn’t have that many different ethnic groups at school.”

• the different rules, routines, procedures, and ‘change’ generally;
  – “The bell time because we have to change class every hour. It’s very tiring because sometimes you get mixed up about the classroom changes (eg, in social studies, sometimes we go to one room and then it changes to another room).”
  – “Carrying around all your books — it’s heavy.”
  – “Interval, lunchtime: for interval we only get 20 minutes and lunchtime we get 45 minutes. It’s shorter than the ones at intermediate.”
  – “More subjects every day, more time at school — makes me tired. You get detention if you do wrong things.”
  – “[The layout] of the school being on different levels: [the grounds at my school last year] were completely flat. Here there are lots of stairs. Didn’t have corridors in old school. Can’t go in certain parts of the school (eg, can’t go in teachers’ car park and not allowed on some of the grass areas).”
  – “Swapping classes and not used to carrying my bag everywhere. I think secondary is fun but I do miss some things about primary — [for example], coming together as a whole syndicate to have fun. Miss the teachers.”
  – “Having to wear uniform, having to move around, having different teachers for different subjects. Huge range of people, different cultures, very different from last year. Only knowing a few people after being used to knowing everyone. They’re just different but I enjoy both schools.”
  – “The amount of people, getting used to all that. All the Year 9 classes — a lot more classes and teachers. We changed teachers for some things last year, this helped getting used to all the different classes and teachers because we were used to travelling between classes. Secondary school is probably better, but mainly they are just different. I like both.”
  – “How many classes there are. How many teachers there are and getting to know them all. Wearing a uniform (but I like wearing it). Having things called C block, B block [etc] instead of having room numbers. Nothing else really, except all the students. Such a lot of them.”
  – “Some of the teachers are not so nice, but mine are OK. I’m not bothered by being the youngest here but I miss not having teachers that know me. I miss all the teachers [from last year], I knew them all. I prefer primary but this was a good change, ‘cause I’d been there [at primary school] for a long time and needed a change.”
  – “It’s a longer day. Way later lunch hour, get really hungry by lunchtime. The amount of work [is more] and having to change classes. Like primary better: shorter days, easier work. I especially liked my teacher from last year.”

continued…
Comparing secondary school with primary school – continued

Students also often made reference to the increased opportunities — for example, through having subject options, and through the greater range of extra-curricular activities — they felt were available to them at secondary school:

- "Play sport for [the school] now rather than a club. More opportunities."
- "That you can choose your own subjects [here]."
- "The options, I especially like the options this year."

Students’ responses towards the end of Year 9

The students continued to compare primary/intermediate and secondary school in much the same terms — both favourable and less favourable — as they had earlier in the year, again referring to the size of the school, the number of students, and teachers, changing classes, student behaviours, and so on. Students also continued to say that the longer school days were tiring, and that differences in how they were learning/being taught, and expectations of them in terms of class work, homework, and certain behaviours, were an ongoing challenge.

- "Changing classes a lot and not so much to do at lunchtimes. The amount of people that smoke at lunchtimes and morning tea. They do it even though they get caught. All the rubbish [lying around] and gum stuck under desks."

continued…
### All Students

**Comparing secondary school with primary school – continued**

- “I knew all the teachers and most of the kids at primary, but there are so many kids and teachers here you can’t know them all.”
- “The amount of work — much more. It was really relaxed last year. Didn’t have so much homework. Have to get up early now, longer days.”
- “Swapping classes. Just the way things are done at [secondary school], for example, roll at every class. The standard of work has been raised. We work at a higher standard now (that’s good).”
- “The work is harder. The ‘bigness’ — how big the school is.”
- “Longer days: they feel longer. I always feel tired after school now.”
- “Carrying bag around, shifting classes. Here we know what classes we are having and when but at primary we didn’t.”
- “Getting here on time: we get detentions when we’re late, I’ve had heaps! Handing in your assignments at the right time — things are due at different times for different subjects, it’s hard.”
- “Work is much harder, takes time to get used to things.”
- “It’s bigger, work is a bit harder, teachers are more strict.”
- “A lot more going on, a good thing.”
- “The older kids. We used to be the oldest. It’s been a big change but I don’t really mind now. We have lots more teachers now: it took a while to get to know them, to know who they were.”
- “How we learn. And the longer hours — I’m tired.”
- “The teachers are way different from my other teachers last year, they’re really strict. Last year, teachers were just right, not very strict.”
- “My homework’s getting harder and I have big responsibilities in high school now, instead of mucking around — trying and doing well in school, staying out of trouble and keeping focused.”
- “Having older students in school with you, having a lot of teachers.”
- “Not having the same friends around, and the different classrooms.”
- “Work pressure (workload), different subject opportunities, the type of schoolwork.”
To the Phase 3 question ‘On the whole, do you like the way things are at school this year or would you prefer things to be more like primary school?’, just over three-quarters (76%) of the students expressed a preference for secondary rather than primary school at this time, while 15 percent of students stated that they would prefer ‘things to be more like primary school’. A further five percent of students didn’t have a preference, saying they liked both primary and secondary school ‘equally’, albeit often for different reasons. (Responses to this question were not obtained for the remaining four students.)

Students’ reasons for preferring secondary school included that:

- they were ready for a change;
  - “I was just ready for the change.”

- they felt more grown up at secondary school;
  - “It feels more grown up.”
  - “I like it this year, it makes you feel older. Would feel like you’d never grow up if you were still at primary, so it’s a cool feeling.”

- they liked having several teachers and moving around the school rather than staying in one classroom, with one teacher, all day;
  - “You aren’t sitting in the same class all the time and you get to meet other teachers.”

- they liked the greater diversity among the student population and making new friends;
  - “Just the people here and the different range of classes. More interesting, more to get to know and be friends with.”
  - “It’s better here at secondary — there are more students of the same age to talk to, lots of different ones.”
  - “Cause it’s pretty cool changing around classes.”
  - “Because of my new friends and the new teachers.”

- there was more interesting work and/or more helpful or knowledgeable teachers;
  - “Prefer this year, more options.”
  - “It’s a good school and the teachers are more helpful than last year.”
  - “This year is better. The teachers know more about their stuff.”
  - “I like things this year ’cause you learn new stuff.”

- there seemed to be a bit more freedom;
  - “Cause it’s got better stuff here — table tennis and stuff. You can do more things and you don’t have to wait to eat your lunch. Can just buy it at the canteen and you can buy it at interval and eat it then.”
  - “Like it this year, I reckon. I guess it’s more freedom. I reckon it’s not as strict as primary, [for example], ’cause you can eat lollies here, not like last year. Teachers here don’t notice so much. They don’t see you all day and don’t see little things like that.”
  - “I like it [here] — find it a bit easier. If you did something wrong at primary you would get into trouble but you can get away with a bit more here.”
  - “I like college better, but I miss some of my old friends (we still talk on the phone though). I like it better here because it’s more relaxed, less stressful.”

continued…
All Students

Preference for primary or secondary school – continued

• things were just different or new;
  - “I like the way things are this year because it’s different.”
  - “I like it here better, I don’t know why, but I like it better, even though I liked it last year. I still go up [to my old school to visit] every Wednesday.”

• they had simply now adjusted to their different situation.
  - “Cause I’m used to it now — used to [secondary] school.”

Students who after almost a year at secondary school still wished that things were more like primary school most often said that this was because they missed their previous teachers, preferred to remain in one class with one teacher throughout the day, liked the feeling of knowing and being known by everyone, and preferred a school that was smaller and more ‘manageable’ generally.
  - “Would like it to be more like primary school — have only one teacher for the day. I liked my teacher last year, I still see him sometimes.”
  - “Just want to have the same teacher all day. Miss my old teacher. And [miss] doing everything together in a syndicate. We were all friends and together all the time. And we had real cool teachers there.”
  - “Prefer one whole class that teaches everything, or else stay in the same class and teachers move around.”
  - “Prefer primary, less people there. I miss the teachers (go back to visit them).”
  - “Prefer primary, was more fun there. The work wasn’t too serious, now we have to work here.”
  - “Would like it to be more like my old school, it was more fun. Teachers were more fun and old friends are still there.”

And the students who liked both their primary and secondary schools made comments like the following:
  - “I like them in different ways. In some ways I like primary school better but in other ways I like this one. At primary it was mainly not so boring in class and at lunchtimes. But it’s better here [in relation to] changes of teachers and atmosphere: it’s bigger, more people, more interesting and exciting.”
  - “No, it’s good. It’s pretty good. It’s pretty much like primary really. The work’s a bit harder but that’s just what you expect from college. The teachers are just as nice.”
Lunchtimes

Spontaneous comments from some students in Phase 2 suggested that they were not finding lunchtimes to be the relaxing, fun, or comfortable breaks that they had been used to at primary school, and that this experience was making it more difficult for them to adjust to secondary school. We therefore thought it worth exploring this matter further in Phase 3, by asking all of our students whether they thought there were ‘fun things to do at lunchtimes’ or, in more general terms, how they were ‘finding lunchtimes at school this year’.

Emily’s view was:

“Well [they’re not really fun], not here — 'cause it's like you're getting older — no playground. You have to find your own fun. [It can be hard getting the chance to play sports at lunchtimes, for example, because] girls have to have an opposite team member [ie, there has to be another girl in the opposing team, because you can't play with all boys]. I play with the boys — rugby — when I can. I would like more things to do [at lunchtime]. I'd like a playground. All we can do is walk around and wait for something to happen — like a fight, which hardly ever happens.”

Emily wished lunch-breaks were more fun: the way they were at primary school.

| All Students |
| Views about lunchtimes at secondary school |
| To the specific question in Phase 3 ‘Are there fun things to do at lunchtimes’?, most students seemed largely happier than they had been earlier in the year with the nature of their lunch breaks, in that they had by now mostly made quite a number of friends at school and enjoyed the chance to get together with them at break times and talk. They had also found activities that they enjoyed, usually but not always in the company of friends, and had established where around the school they could undertake them, without being in anyone else’s ‘space’: |
| “Yes, there are some fun things. Like playing sports on the courts and we (friends and me) play netball shoots. We just do it when we feel like it: we get a ball out of the gym. But mostly we just talk and eat lunch. It’s fine I think.” |
| “Yes, play basketball and badminton in the gym nearly every day. The gym is only closed on hot days. [But just] hanging with friends is fun enough, that’s fine for me.” |
| “Play with friends, hang out, walking around, playing games, sometimes sport.” |
| “Yeah, sit in form class and have a laugh. Sometimes play soccer or ball games — [one of my friends] brings his ball from home.” |
| “Sit and read in music block.” |
| “Yes. Group activities and make our own fun. Library is open during lunchtime.” |
| Some students also mentioned that they had simply adjusted to the fact that things were now different than they had been at primary or intermediate school, accepting that this was just ‘how it was’: |
| “It was different at primary — like, we had the playground. Now we just sit and talk and go to the canteen and buy lunch. Not sure what I [would] want [to be different], it’s just how college is. (But more sports at lunchtimes would be cool.)” |
| But there were still a third of students who felt that lunchtimes at secondary school were not particularly enjoyable and would have liked more structured opportunities to participate in activities and/or more defined areas where they, as Year 9 students, could spend their break times. |
| “No. We just walk around, maybe go to the library. Would like to be allowed in the gym — well, we can go there, but it’s always full of older kids and you can’t play anything.” |
| “No. More entertainment would be nice as it can be a bit boring. We’re not allowed in the classroom at lunchtime even if it’s cold. Some classes are allowed in their class but we’re not.” |

continued…
Part III

All Students

Views about lunchtimes at secondary school – continued

− “Not really [fun] — just walk around, there’s nothing to do. I would like there to be more things to do, more sports. Opportunities for the girls to play touch: the boys won’t let us play, they think they’re too good for us. The teachers should help [by organising things for students at lunchtimes].”
− “Boring. Sit in our form room with friends. School should perhaps provide sport, and drama, art [etc] during lunchtime, especially in the winter.”

The latter group included some students who seemed to be simply misinformed about the opportunities available: for instance, they felt that they were ‘not allowed’ to borrow rugby balls, etc, from the gymnasium in order to play a game at lunchtime, when comments from other students showed that this was not the case, or just did not seem to know how to go about accessing the equipment they needed.
− “Not really. We’re starting to find things to do now but mostly it’s pretty boring. Do get fun lunchtimes sometimes — when you have a good time with your friends. But it would be quite cool to have a sports shed so each week a form could have a day to get gear out. Each form could have a sports tub where we could take stuff out. ’cause we can’t get gear [balls, etc] out now; if you want to play something at lunchtime people have to bring their own gear [from home]. The school should organise something like that.”
− “Not really, just talk with friends. Would like more [things to do] but don’t really know what. Have a playground like [at school] last year perhaps. You can’t go to the gym here, I don’t think so anyway. I would like that.”

And for a few students, lunch breaks could be particularly frustrating because of having to placate or ‘keep in with’ more dominant friends:
− “Not really. We just walk around, talk to each other. Sometimes me and one friend might want to go to the gym but another friend doesn’t so we don’t go if we don’t all agree. We don’t want to get angry with our friend so we stick together.”
− “There is fun stuff but my friends want to stay inside. There are inside people and the outside ones are the sporting ones. (I’d like to do the outside stuff but I stay inside with my friends.)”

There were students, too, who evidently enjoyed free-wheeling lunch breaks where they could spend time with their friends, but whose comments about ‘hanging out’, when it did not involve particular activities, seemed to suggest considerable potential for troublemaking to occur:
− “Yes, [lunchtimes are fun]. We play water fights, we chase people around or we hang around our friends’ boyfriends and we mock them.”
Brief Overview of School Experiences since Moving to Secondary School

By means of the statements listed in Exhibit G, we obtained a summary view of how students regarded some of their school experiences since moving to secondary school, together with their perceptions of the extent to which some aspects of primary and secondary school life differed. In general, Emily’s responses to these statements support her claim of ‘liking it here more’ at secondary school: for instance, in Phase 3 she answered ‘agree’ to the statement ‘I have more fun at school this year’.

It is interesting that early in Year 9, Emily judged her schoolwork to be around the same level of difficulty as the work at primary school, but by the end of Year 9 she thought it to be much more challenging. But she did not consider the work she was encountering to be more interesting than that at primary school — although from other information she provided throughout her various interviews, it was evident that Emily generally found much of her schoolwork to be interesting.

The research literature suggests that, compared to primary school, students may find themselves treated ‘less as an individual’ at secondary school. Emily had a close, positive relationship with her Year 8 teachers at primary school, and missed them a great deal in the early stages following transition. But while she ‘disagreed’ in Phase 2 with the statement ‘I am now treated more as an individual [at secondary school than I was in Year 8]’, she explained that this was because she felt she was “Treated equally [in each school]”. This statement was later qualified to some extent when Emily commented in Phase 3 that she realised her teachers now knew her much more as an individual than they had earlier in the year, which made her feel ‘more at home’ at secondary school.

Emily ‘totally disagreed’ with the statement that her Year 9 teachers were nicer or looked after her better than her teachers had the previous year. Although Emily did not consider she was treated more like a child at secondary school than previously, she did ‘totally agree’ in each of Phases 2 and 3 that she had had more school responsibilities in Year 8. She reasoned that this was “because I was an older student in primary school”.

Emily generally regarded secondary school as interesting and fun.

Exhibit G: The aspects of their primary and secondary school experiences that students were asked to compare.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparing Year 9 at secondary school with Year 8 at primary/intermediate school</th>
<th>1 = Totally agree</th>
<th>2 = Agree</th>
<th>3 = Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>4 = Disagree</th>
<th>5 = Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The work here is more demanding or challenging (harder)</td>
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<td>I am repeating work I did before</td>
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<td>The work is easier</td>
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<td>The work is more interesting</td>
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<td>I had more school responsibilities at my old school</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am treated more like a child here than at my old school</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am now treated more as an individual</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have more fun at school this year*</td>
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<tr>
<td>The teachers are nicer/they look after me better*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Students were not asked to rate these particular dimensions in Phase 2.

Emily’s answers here, while not identical, are largely consistent with her responses when commenting on various aspects of classroom environment — see Exhibit E and related discussion in Chapter Seven.

For example, to the statement ‘We do interesting things in class’ (Exhibit E, Chapter Seven), Emily gave a rating of ‘definitely true’ at all four phases of the study.

She did not feel she lacked individual attention at secondary school.
All Students

Comparing aspects* of Year 9 and Year 8

Two-thirds of students in each of Phases 2 and 3 ‘agreed’ or ‘totally agreed’ that, overall, work at secondary school was ‘more demanding or challenging (harder)’ than it had been when they were in Year 8. Two percent of students in Phase 2 and four percent in Phase 3 disagreed with this, with remaining students giving a neutral (neither agree nor disagree) response.

Almost a third (32%) of students in Phase 3 ‘agreed’ or ‘totally agreed’ that they were repeating work they had done before, a slight increase on the 29 percent of students who gave this response in Phase 2. In contrast, however, slightly fewer students in Phase 3 now felt that in general work was easier than it had been in Year 8 (18% compared with 15% in Phase 2).

Although a good majority (around two-thirds overall) of students judged work in their first year at secondary school to be ‘more interesting’ than it had been the year before, a slightly downward trend can be observed as the year progressed: that is, in Phase 2, 29 percent of students ‘totally agreed’ that their current work was more interesting than work the previous year, with a further 44 percent ‘agreeing’, whereas in Phase 3, although the proportion ‘agreeing’ remained the same at 44 percent, the proportion expressing ‘total agreement’ dropped to 21 percent. Six percent of students at each phase definitely did not agree that current work was more interesting than their previous year’s work, while remaining students (19% in Phase 2 and 26% in Phase 3) gave a ‘neither agree nor disagree’ response.

More than half of students (55% in Phase 2 and 51% in Phase 3) ‘agreed’ or ‘totally agreed’ with the statement ‘I had more responsibilities at my old school’. However, although students quite often talked in their interviews about the various responsibilities they had had in Year 8, such as mentoring younger students, ‘because they were the most senior students in the school’, there were also approximately one-fifth of students who ‘disagreed’ or ‘totally disagreed’ that they had had greater responsibilities at primary school than was currently the case.

While this latter finding was probably because a proportion of our students did not have particular responsibilities at primary/intermediate school, it also suggests that, for some students at least, even though they were now the juniors in ‘the big school’, there were nevertheless some opportunities for them to take on roles of responsibility quite early on at secondary school. (However, another possibility is that there may have been some students who interpreted ‘extra responsibility’ differently to what was intended in this context, thinking instead in terms of having to cope with increased homework and other unfamiliar demands on them since arriving at secondary school.)

Although a fifth of students in Phase 2 and 14 percent in Phase 3 felt they were being ‘treated more like a child’ in Year 9 than they had been in Year 8 at their previous school, approximately half of the students (49% in Phase 2 and 52% in Phase 3) disagreed or totally disagreed with this. And students’ responses on what one might expect to be a closely related dimension—that is, the statement ‘I am now treated more as an individual’—showed a similar, albeit slightly more positive, pattern, with 59 percent of students in Phase 2 and 63 percent in Phase 3 agreeing or totally agreeing. (At the other end of the scale, 13% of students in Phase 2 and 8% in Phase 3 disagreed or totally disagreed that they were now being treated more as an individual than they had been at primary or intermediate school.)

continued...
Chapter 11

The content of this section reinforces the views expressed by Emily and her parents about best and least liked aspects of school at each phase of the study — discussed in Chapter Seven.

All Students

Comparing aspects* of Year 9 and Year 8 – continued

Sixty percent of students in Phase 3 agreed/totally agreed that ‘I have more fun at school this year’ (13% disagreed/totally disagreed).

And to the dimension ‘The teachers are nicer/look after me better [this year], almost half (46%) of the students gave a ‘neither agree nor disagree’ response in Phase 3, with just over a third saying they agreed/totally agreed and 17 percent disagreeing or totally disagreeing with the statement.

It is of interest to compare these data with those in the ‘All Students’ section on p.227, on students’ comparisons of Year 10 and Year 9.

* Refer Exhibit 6 in the main text for the aspects students were asked to rate.

Parent Views on the Best and Not So Good Aspects of School for Emily in Year 9

Emily’s parents provided another perspective on what the first year following transition may be like for a student. For example, in Phase 3, they thought the ‘best things’ for Emily in her first year at secondary school had been:

“[Emily] taking on new challenges. Being able to settle in as well as she has, graduating with distinction. Being proud of what she has achieved.”

And on the subject of the ‘hardest — or not so good — things’ about Emily’s first year at secondary school, it was…

“…[Emily] being threatened physically and being scared to leave the classrooms.”

Her parents felt that Emily had responded well to the challenges that Year 9 presented.

The Best and Not So Good Aspects of School for Luke in Year 9: Parental Perspective

Towards the end of his first year at secondary school, Luke’s mother felt that the best things for her son about being in Year 9 were:

“Doing things he has never tried before — eg, performing arts. Gaining confidence in who he is as a person. Learning to accept responsibility for his actions, for his learning.”

And commenting on the ‘hardest’ or ‘not so good things’ for Luke over this same period, she stated:

“Being organised — right books, right place, right time, etc! Not being with [some of his] old friends. Not getting into the school of my choice. Average kids get lost in the crowd and become a number in a big school.”
Summary Statements on Emily’s Transition from Primary to Secondary Schooling

As a Year 8 student Emily was ‘scared’ at the prospect of moving to secondary school. However, she was also looking forward to it in a number of ways: 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 smooth transition. Both her parents and Year 8 teacher predicted that Emily would have few problems with the transition, and this prediction was well-founded according to feedback from the Year 9 form teacher.

Emily had some trouble balancing workloads at first: she felt a bit overwhelmed by everything that was new or different, and her response was to cut back on the amount of extra-curricular activities she took part in while in Year 9, until she felt ‘more settled’. There was also evidence (see previous chapter) that she was feeling less confident than she had at primary school about what she was best at in terms of her learning and subject areas, as she adjusted to learning new material and learning in different ways than she was used to in primary school. Another factor was increased fatigue: Emily mentioned that, in Year 9, she was very tired by the end of the school day.

Friends helped Emily to settle, as did a supportive family: her parents took a close interest in her progress and well-being and Emily was able to talk freely at home about her school experiences.

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. As well, she had positive experiences with teachers: she was especially pleased when she saw that they ‘knew who she was’. And her fear expressed in Year 8 about older students at secondary school being unfriendly, or even intimidating, was not realised (not counting the bullying episode discussed earlier in this report).

Over the course of the study, it was evident that Emily was gaining confidence. By the end of her first term in Year 10 she was thriving on the greater diversity of a bigger school, and receiving recognition for her developing leadership qualities, in that she was elected by her class to be a deputy student representative on student council.

Emily was keen to take up as many opportunities as she could but had to the good sense to realise that at times she had to be careful not to take on too much or it would undermine her ability to cope well with everything.

The following chapter presents information about Emily’s and ‘all’ students’ progression from Year 9 to Year 10, to provide a point of comparison for the Year 8–9 transition data.