



SMOOTH MOVES

TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

PRIORITY 1-54

End of Project Report 2024

Proudly supporting
youth social action

#iwill



Department
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COMMUNITY
FUND



Foundation

Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the children who took part in the project. We would also like to express our sincere appreciation to the schools that generously supported and facilitated all of the activities.

Furthermore, we are immensely thankful to our funders whose financial support made this 3-year project possible.

This report stands as a testament to the collective effort of students, schools, and funders, and we are truly grateful for their invaluable support and contributions.

We would like to say a special thanks Zofia Esland, Funding Officer at the Coop Foundation for all of her support and patience.

About Priority 1-54

Priority 1-54 is a Brighton-based CiC established in 2017. We offer creative youth and community engagement projects that seek to **inform, inspire and empower** children and young people in spaces and places where they live, learn, and play.

Our work is underpinned by youth voice and youth work principles, together with a recognition that young people's enjoyment and engagement in creative arts are not only an essential pathway to stimulate creativity and critical thinking but an invaluable life-enhancing tool to build resilience and promote positive mental health and emotional well-being.

Contact

Priority 1-54
40 Holland Street
Hanover
Brighton
BN2 9WB

www.priority154.com
john.khan@priority154.com
tel: 07846 137 597

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Recommendations



Early and Continuous Transition Support in Primary Schools:

Recognise the importance of offering transition support throughout Year 6, enabling early identification of vulnerable children and address transition concerns at key points in the academic calendar, fostering a continuous and proactive approach.



Utilise Creative Arts for Expression and Engagement:

Use creative evidence-based arts as a means to motivate and involve children in key activities. These arts can serve as therapeutic tools, providing a creative outlet for expressing concerns about the transition and reinforcing learning experiences in an engaging manner.



Peer-to-Peer Support with Transition Ambassadors:

Strengthen and expand peer-to-peer support across all secondary schools, emphasising the positive role of Transition Ambassadors in providing ongoing support and connection for new Year 7 students.



Targeted Support for Vulnerable Children:

Tailor support programs to address the diverse needs of vulnerable children. Differentiate activities within nurture groups based on individual requirements, such as those displaying high levels of social anxiety or behavioural issues.



Early Intervention with Nurture Groups:

Tailor support programs to address the diverse needs of vulnerable children. Differentiate activities within nurture groups based on individual requirements, such as those displaying high levels of social anxiety or behavioural issues.



Flexible Delivery Models for Transition Summer Camps:

Acknowledge and address challenges in implementing transition summer camps. Embrace a pragmatic and flexible approach, allowing schools to adopt various delivery models based on their specific needs and circumstances.



Parental Involvement and Support Workshops:

Promote and increase participation in parental workshops to support their children's transition to secondary school. Emphasise the benefits of joint learning opportunities for parents and children, addressing concerns, and offering practical tips. Communicate the value of these workshops in managing parental emotions about their child's move.



Share Best Practices and Lessons Learned:

Disseminate best practices and lessons learned from the project to contribute to national transition initiatives. Share insights on effective approaches, successful strategies, and areas for improvement. Collaborate with stakeholders to foster a culture of shared learning and continuous improvement in supporting children's transition experiences.

Project in numbers

86

young people took part in the nurture group program and completed the Arts Award Discovery Level.

197

the number of young people who were trained as Transition Ambassadors.

557

young people who attended the Transition Summer Camp workshops

1,320

Year 6 children who took part in the creative transition taster events

1,406

Year 6 children creative half-day transition workshops

2,143

young people who indirectly benefitted from the project

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has outlined the activities delivered as part of the Smooth Moves to Secondary School between January 2021 and December 2023, whilst highlighting both the challenges and opportunities moving to secondary school presents

1.2 This 3-year youth-led project was funded by the Co-op Foundation's #iwill Fund to support the emotional well-being and resilience of children as they move from primary to secondary school.

1.3 The report is set out under several broad headings. These include:

- The context in which the work took place
- Peer-to-Peer
- Smooth Moves workshop Year 6
- Supporting taster events in secondary schools
- Transition Summer Camps
- Nurture Groups for vulnerable children and young people
- Smooth Moves Survey

and even those who appear to be coping well at school, are all too easily knocked off course. [Young Minds: 2015].

2.3 Evangelou et al [2008] identified several key factors that contribute to a successful transition including:

- **Social adjustment:** Developing new friendships led to increased self-esteem and self-reported confidence. Perceiving older children to be friendly supported good transitions.
- **Institutional adjustment:** Support to get used to new routines and organisation helped children. Curriculum interest and continuity. Close primary and secondary links.

2.4 Work undertaken via our Smooth Moves project continues to address many of the concerns highlighted, by offering tailored support for disadvantaged children, particularly for those children disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

2.5 This project consolidated existing transition work undertaken by Priority 1-54 before and then at the height of the COVID outbreak in 2020, where evidence found the pandemic and lockdown restrictions have disproportionately impacted Year 6 children, with anxieties about moving to secondary school significantly amplified [National Youth Trend: 2020].

2. Context

2.1 The transition from primary to secondary school is viewed as a crucial and significant period for children, but despite this importance has been a neglected area of educational research in general [Toppins: 2011]

2.2 For many children moving to secondary school is often seen as a 'cliff edge' with 1-in-5 struggling and experiencing an associated drop in school achievement



2.6 From the outset of the project, we were acutely aware that the pandemic has continued to have a wide-ranging and detrimental impact on children and young people, parents and schools. For example, all the schools taking part in project reported a marked deterioration in their children's emotional wellbeing and resilience, concerns around absenteeism among vulnerable children.

2.7 As one teacher stated:

'Our children's resilience and ability to deal with change have clearly been affected by the uncertainty created by the pandemic. Normally, Year 6's would already be showing signs of having grown out of primary school, but we're seeing the exact opposite with children saying they don't want to leave school'

Year 6 Teacher

'I feel it *[mental health]* got much worse because I didn't like school in the first place and I got stressed when we were in these bubbles and I felt angry all the time. Sometimes I ran off from school which upset my mum and worried the school'

Year 6 child

2.8 For those moving up to secondary school in September 2020 and 2021, there was heightened anxiety among children. Many missed opportunities to mark the end of their primary school experience, SATS, saying goodbye to classmates and teachers, school trips and leaving ceremonies, and crucial transition taster events.

2.9 Moreover, COVID measures that were put in place by secondary schools also impacted children's sense of

belonging and connectedness to their new school. For example, many were placed in 'bubbles' and unable to mix with others in the year group or only allowed within a designated within the school, with significantly fewer opportunities to make new friendships or get to know their new teachers.

'I'm worried about going up to high school. I was before but now because of COVID I feel worst as I won't know my way around and will have to stay two metres away from everyone'

Year 6 child

'When we moved to secondary school we were put into Zones. But one of my friends was very nervous about the transition and I asked if I could hang out with her during break and lunchtime to make them feel better, but they said no'

Year 7 young person

2.10 Many of the issues and concerns outlined above, were again echoed in a national survey where 75% of Year 7 teachers felt that incoming Year 7s in September 2022 were unprepared academically and 79% said they were concerned that children were not ready emotionally or socially for secondary school [YouGov: 2022].

2.11 Many teachers spoke of enduring and persistent school absences, linked to mental health issues such as social anxiety and emotional-based school refusers. This trend is particularly pronounced among vulnerable children, with many ill-equipped socially and academically for secondary school.

2.12 We recognise that the challenges and impact of the pandemic is likely to be long-lasting, but also highlighted the significant importance of this and other transition projects taking place nationally.

2.13 This project provided an opportunity for Priority 1-54 to co-produce new resources and consolidate existing ones with young people. Their involvement highlighted several gaps in the resources. For example, young people felt the nurture group program, could better meet the needs and concerns of the Year 7 students, by focusing more on goal setting and friendship skills. Whereas the Transition Ambassador training was made more relevant and relatable by adding new case studies. All the resources will undergo a final revision with input from young people and disseminated widely.

2.14 A unique aspect of this project has been the use of creative arts, including several urban arts techniques, as a means to motivate and involve young individuals in key activities. This functioned as a unique vehicle for incentivising children and young people to actively participate. The inherent creativity associated with urban and graffiti arts captivated the interest of young people.

‘The artwork was a great conduit for free chat and supported all the activities and discussions’

Secondary Transition Manager

‘Really engaging conversations about children’s real worries moving to secondary school. Using the graffiti was really clever and helped to gain their interest’

Year 7 young person

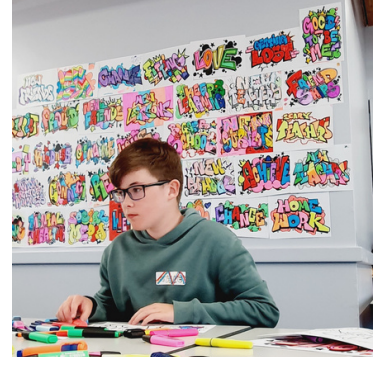
2.15 Additionally, the creative arts were employed as a therapeutic tool to facilitate the expression and exploration of children’s concerns about the transition to secondary school. By providing a creative outlet, the project created a safe space for individuals to articulate their worries and anxieties through artistic expression.

2.16 Finally, the use of urban and graffiti arts served as a means to reinforce and support the learning experiences of young people. The dynamic and interactive nature of non-conventional visual art provided a hands-on and engaging approach to education, complementing traditional learning methods.

3. Project Aims

3.1 Though not exhaustive the project aims included:

- The delivery of a wrap-around program of support for twelve schools (i.e. three secondary schools and 9 primary feeder schools) across 3 geographical areas of high deprivation
- The use creative art-based learning as a vehicle to place children at the heart of the transition process
- The delivery of an evidence-based peer-to-peer Transition Ambassador Program to support vulnerable Year 7s as they make the move to secondary school and beyond
- The deliver fun and creative transition workshops across primary schools to develop skilled-based strategies to manage change and build resilience
- Running a 3-day Smooth Moves Summer Camp school program in each secondary school offering targeted support for young people
- Provide a targeted nurture group program to support vulnerable Year 7s with a national Arts Award accreditation
- Work with parent/carers to explore their anxieties about their child’s move to secondary school and discuss strategies for supporting this move
- Administer a transition survey with Year 7s to understand their perceptions and experiences of their move to secondary school and offer benchmark data to inform key activities
- Provide CPD training for stakeholders co-delivered with young people to share best practice principles in supporting those most at risk of disengaging from education post-transition





Transition Ambassadors

What I enjoyed most about today was being able to be honest about how difficult moving to secondary school is without being judged' Year 7 Transition Ambassador

I loved all the activities - specifically the one where you write down what emotions you show and don't show to people around you. That really made me think. Thank you' Year 7 Transition Ambassador

I enjoyed the fact it was very relaxed and the open conversations about things we don't normally talk about. The work felt guided but not forced

The training was a mix of serious conversations about deep topics and there were light areas that made us laugh...so it wasn't boring

The serious stuff and discussions about mental health and self-harm got me thinking about my own experiences and how important this role is

Schools

The Smooth Moves training has been an amazing support to our transition program. The training of Transition Ambassadors has been brilliant. Ambassadors felt valued afterward and were proud to wear their new badges. Throughout the school year, they have been an invaluable asset in aiding the transition of the new Year 6 intake. A whole new batch of Transition Ambassadors was trained this year too and moving forward this is a tradition we would love to keep

'It's been fantastic having Smooth Moves come in and work with our Transition Ambassadors and deliver sessions in our transition week.

The students really enjoyed the work, and it provided our young ambassadors with some amazing new skills to support the new year 7's

The training was really engaging and accessible for all the Year 7's. The activities were super positive and the Year 7's are so keen to take up their new role. Thank you so your program did wonders for the student's self-esteem'

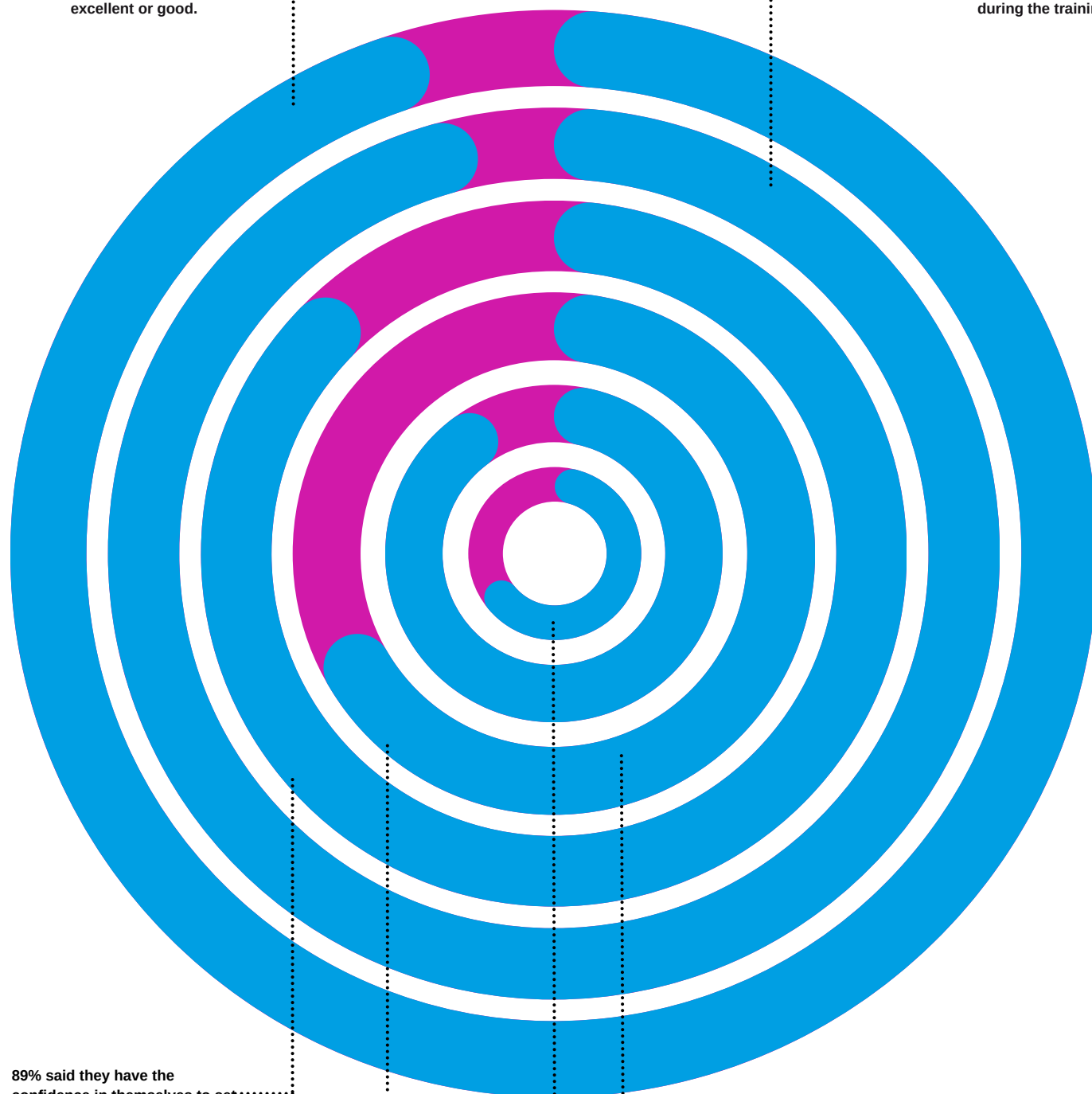


4. Transition Ambassador Training

4.1 The central objective of the Transition Ambassador role was to cultivate an environment that fosters a positive experience for children moving to secondary school, so they not only enjoy coming to school but also feel a sense of belonging and respect.

96% of young people rated the training as either excellent or good.

97% young people said they felt listened to and respected during the training..



89% said they have the confidence in themselves to set meaningful personal goals

69% said they felt part of a wider community

79% said they felt better equipped to deal with challenging situations including low-level safeguarding concerns

68% said they have good-quality relationships based on mutual trust and empathy

97% of Transition Ambassadors said they felt able to influence the type of support offered to students in their school following the training

4.2 The key aspect is ensuring that students are aware of the support system in place, particularly through their designated Transition Ambassadors, who are there to support them in case they encounter any challenges or problems.

4.3 The Transition Ambassador training drew upon an evidence-based Peer Support Programme developed by the Anna Freud Centre, underscoring the project's to commitment to using proven and evidence-based methodologies. It was then co-designed, with a group of existing Transition Ambassadors. The insights provided were instrumental in enhancing and optimising the training. The program was then piloted and further refined.

4.4 Key themes covered in the 1-day training program included:

- An insight into the problems encountered by Year 7s when moving to secondary school
- Exploring the key skills of Transition Ambassador
- Practising key active communication skills
- Solution-focused problem-solving
- Understanding confidentiality and safeguarding

4.5 The training was underpinned by a '**safety first**' principle, with confidentiality, disclosure and safeguarding forming a key element of the training, with all young people showing a good level of awareness of these responsibilities and boundaries.

4.6 Schools differed in their approaches to identifying and recruiting Transition Ambassadors, although several common principles were identified. In two schools, young people were selected via an open application process followed by a short interview to assess their motivations, maturity, and expectations.

'What I enjoyed most about today was talking about how difficult I found moving to secondary school was without being judged'

'I loved all the activities - specifically the one where you write down what emotions you show and don't show to people around you. That really made me think. Thank you'

Year 7 Transition Ambassador

4.7 Others recruited young people who had themselves struggled with the move to secondary school, those who had experienced friendship difficulties during Year 7, or came from disadvantaged backgrounds. We also asked schools to ensure they recruited young men so they could function as positive role models for the new intake of Year 7 male students.

4.8 In the final year of the project, all three secondary schools opted to recruit their Year 7 students as Transition Ambassadors. This decision was grounded in the schools' understanding of the challenges many of these students had faced during their move to secondary school.

4.9 During the training, many of the students spoke openly about the difficulties and challenges they had encountered in moving to secondary school. These discussions facilitated a deeper understanding of the challenges new Year 7s might encounter, fostering increased empathy within the groups, and how these insights could be used to support the new intake of Year 7s.

4.10 Notably, young people spoke in detail of the difficulties of forming friendships, losing existing friends, building relationships with staff, and feeling a sense of belonging within their school. As such, the training proved particularly valuable, as it enabled students to establish connections with their peers and adults they hadn't previously had.

Year 7 Transition Ambassador

4.11 Interestingly, during the training, young people were invited to identify three trusted adults in school if they were concerned about other students when undertaking their new role. However, many found this activity difficult with many stating that they didn't have any trusted adult they could turn to. This led to several discussions about the qualities of a trusted adult and the role of the Designated Safeguarding Leads in their schools.

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'It would be nice to be able to go to a quiet space and let my thoughts out to a trusted member of staff. But not everyone has a trusted member of staff in the school'

Year 7 Transition Ambassador

4.16 In each setting, students were encouraged to propose changes to the current transition process within their respective schools. Several suggestions were swiftly implemented by schools. For instance, placing maps of the school in areas such as reception and the canteen as a direct result of their recommendations.

4.17 Once trained the Transition Ambassadors took part in several activities in their school. These included supporting activities during their school's transition taster events as well as our nurture group program. In one school the Transition Ambassadors helped to run lunchtime transition clubs for more vulnerable Year 7s, offering a safe and quiet space and the opportunity to meet new people and make new friends. In two school they also made themselves visible at key points during the school day, helping new Year 7s find their way around the school between lessons and lunchtime, whilst in one school the Transition Ambassadors had been allocated to a specific Year 7 tutor group to offer informal support.

4.18 The project team was able to further consolidate their relationship with the Transition Ambassadors and schools by involving students in several other social action projects. This not only strengthened our relationship with young people and schools but has also presented additional avenues to support and enhance young people's critical thinking, leadership, and advocacy skills.

4.19 For example, in the first year, we approached Transition Ambassadors in one school to help co-produce a short, animated film focusing on school-based anxiety, with the film forming part of a new anxiety toolkit that was then disseminated to 150 schools in 2022. Transition Ambassadors worked alongside a professional film company to shape the content of the film and did voiceovers outlining key messages for schools on how to support those with anxiety.

'Thank you so much for the work you did with the Transition Ambassadors. The content and delivery were fantastic and really benefitted the students involved'

Head of Enrichment and Learning

4.20 Moreover, during our visits to secondary schools, we were made aware that several previously trained Transition Ambassadors, had taken on the role of Mental Health Champions within their schools, and went on to play an instrumental role following the death of one of their peer, by providing support to other bereaved students. This positive development underlines their commitment to social action whilst demonstrating the transformative nature and impact of their initial training.

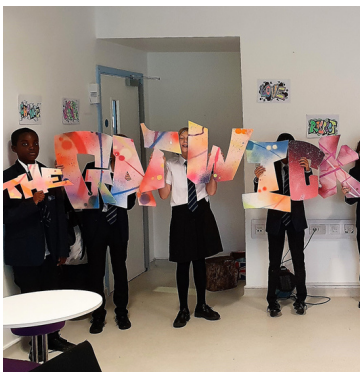
4.21 Feedback from young people who participated in the training was overwhelmingly positive, with participants highlighting the practical skills gained, such as communication and active listening skills and knowing how to support concerns new Year 7s might encounter.

4.22 Many appreciated the opportunity to discuss the challenges of moving to secondary school openly and without judgment. They also found the activities engaging, particularly those focused on supporting young people's emotional well-being, prompting thoughtful reflection. Transition Ambassadors spoke positively about their role in fostering a sense of belonging. Moreover, the training's emphasis on mental health and self-harm discussions resonated with older students, prompting reflection on personal experiences. The overall training delivery was praised for its relaxed and open atmosphere, as it allowed for open forum conversations on issues and themes not commonly discussed. Overall, the combination of activities, engaging facilitation, and the relevance of the content made the training valuable for the participants.

4.23 Feedback from schools was also overwhelmingly positive. Schools felt the training for young students was engaging and accessible and delivered in a way that fostered real enthusiasm among Year 7s and following the training many Ambassadors felt valued and proud to take on their new role becoming a valuable asset in their school, whilst acknowledging the training's positive influence on students' self-esteem.

4.24 Despite the training yielding incredibly really positive results, several challenges were encountered. These included:

- During the first year of the project, the role of Transition Ambassadors was limited due to COVID and social restrictions still
- The last-minute recruitment of the Transition Ambassador which meant a small minority of young people were not always fully committed to taking on their new role
- Logistical and safeguarding issues preventing Transition Ambassadors' from delivering the Year 6 workshops in the primary feeder schools
- Maintaining the momentum and enthusiasm of the Transition Ambassadors beyond the scope of the project to keep young people focused and engaged
- Providing ongoing supervision and support to the Transition Ambassadors.





Year 6 children

I liked the activities because they helped me feel less worried about going to secondary school. Thank you – it was extremely helpful!

The workshop was fun because the discussions we had were about being positive and looking into the future

It was good because other people felt the same way as I did about secondary school and when we talked it felt like we were being listened to and everyone's questions got answered, but in an honest way

I felt good to have my worries about secondary school accepted because everyone has a big change ahead of them

I liked the activities because they got me thinking about all the different situations we might have to deal with in secondary school. I also liked the art in between the activities because it gave me a break and a chance to relax

Schools

The activities made the children really think about their friendships. The delivery of the information was dynamic, thus holding their attention from start to finish

The children enjoyed the activities and graffiti with the discussions throughout invaluable'

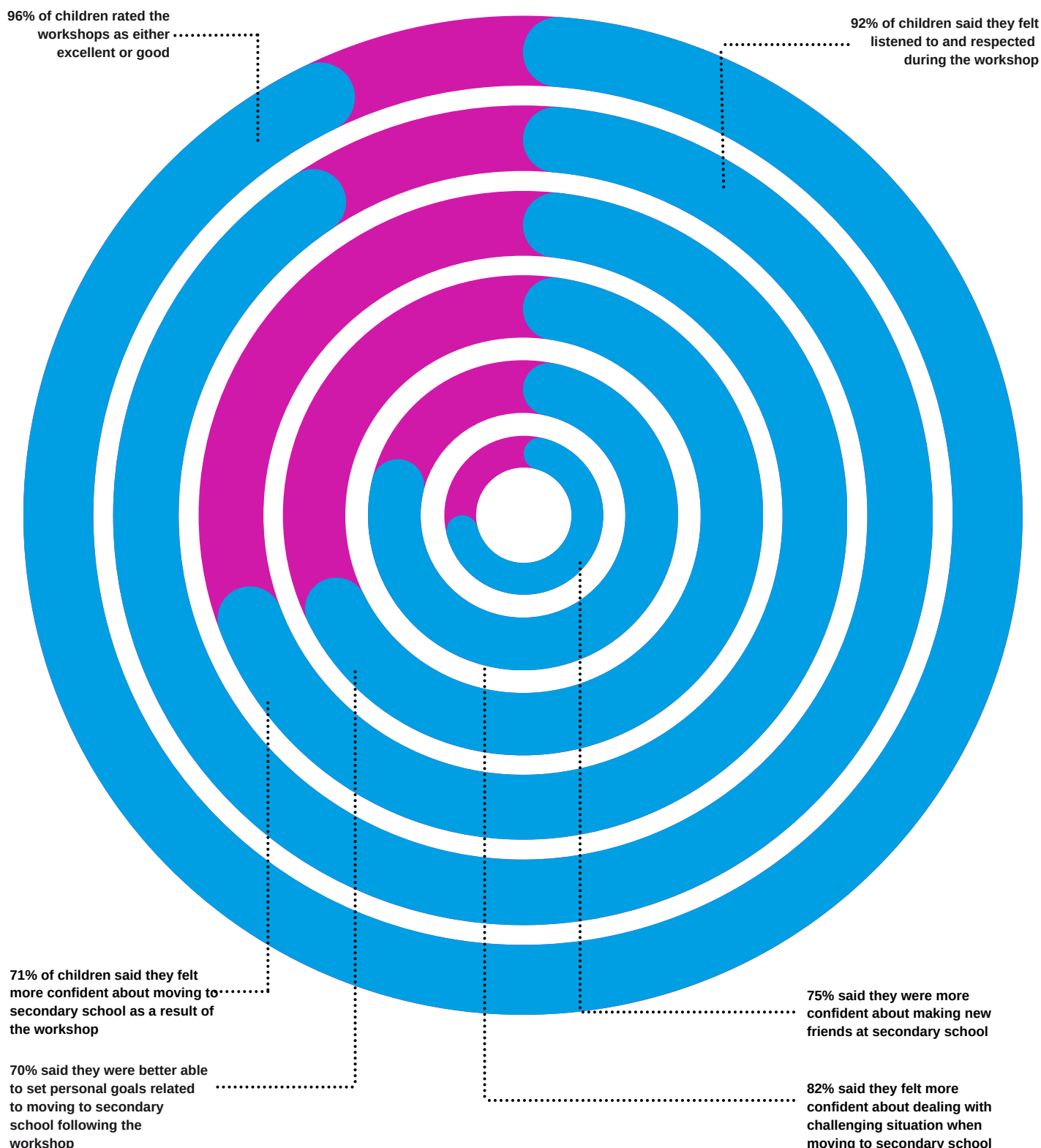
The children loved the workshop and the artwork they produced was amazing. All the activities were thought-provoking especially the 'thinking about secondary school' and friendship themes. The workshop was well-delivered but could have been a whole day rather than just a half-day

Thanks so much, this was such a fantastic workshop. The children really benefitted from the chance to talk about their worries, the things they are looking forward to, and the things they value about their friendships'



5. Year 6 Transition Workshops

5.1 Over the lifetime of the project 1,405 Year 6's took part in the Smooth Moves creative half-day workshops. While certain workshop activities acknowledged and addressed children's anxieties and worries, every attempt was made to emphasise and celebrate the positive aspects of their move to secondary school.



'I think it would help if we had more workshops like this. It was nice that Year 7s came in and we could ask them questions about what we'll experience next year'

Year 6 child

5.2 All the Year 6 children engaged positively with the workshops, particularly the creative art-based elements that were used to create a safe space to enable children to express their thoughts and worries about moving to secondary school.

5.3 Key activities focused on the importance of friendship e.g. maintaining existing friendships, making new friends and losing old friends, and developing skilled-based approaches to manage change and problem-solving to build resilience.

5.4 A small number of primary schools had provided opportunities for children to discuss their worries about moving to secondary school, though these schools were in the minority. Feedback from children suggests that there were other key points in the academic calendar to discuss their move to secondary. For example, in October when visiting their prospective secondary schools, and again in March when secondary school allocations are announced, and at the end of their primary school journey.

5.5 A key recommendation of this project is for primary schools to recognise the importance of offering transition support throughout Year 6, to enable early identification of at-risk children and plan appropriately over time, rather than leaving this until the end of the academic year, often post-SATS.

'I wish we had more support about moving to secondary because I'm really anxious...and it should have started after Christmas, not just before we leave'

Year 6 child

5.6 There was clear evidence that COVID the lockdown and social restriction have impacted significantly on children's well-being and mental health, with children openly disclosing mental health issues during workshops including social anxiety and self-harming.

5.7 In the first year of the project, many children expressed disappointment and frustration due to missing key events to mark the end of their time at primary school, as well as their transition taster events that were canceled at very short notice due to the extension of lockdown restriction in 2021. Where appropriate, the project team were able to respond by offering several primary schools additional creative workshops to support children's well-being as part of their end-of-year celebration events.

5.8 Even in the final year of the project, it was evident from discussions with teachers and general observations during the workshops that the COVID-19 pandemic was continuing to have a significant impact on the mental health and learning of large numbers of children. Translating into persistent absenteeism, social anxiety, and challenging behaviour.

'I enjoyed setting goals because it gave me something to focus on when I move to secondary school and made things seem clearer'

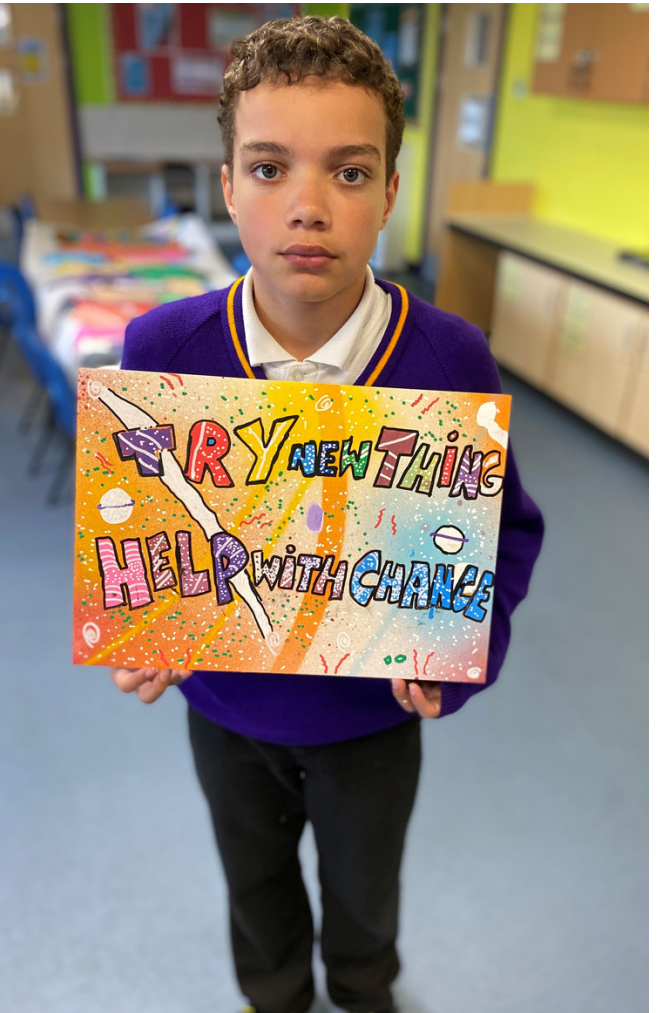
Year 6 child

5.9 Absenteeism when delivering the workshops in Summer 2023 was evident compared to previous years. This trend was sometimes, although not always, consistent with children identified as emotional-based school refusers, and other mental health challenges. With several teachers

CASE STUDY



Ben has quite profound learning and behaviour needs, which his allocated mainstream secondary school feels they will be unable to meet - feeling these would be best met at a local special school, which his mum is currently challenging. As a result, Ben was not invited to the school's taster week or transition summer school, which his primary teacher says has left Ben feeling really anxious about his move to secondary school.



'I wish our primary school gave us more opportunities to talk about the move to secondary school like today and give us extra support if we are worried'

Year 6 child

expressed real safeguarding concerns for these children and how they will manage their move to secondary school.

5.10 To ensure workshops in primary schools had the greatest impact, schools were encouraged to place children into two groups according to need. For example, those displaying high levels of social anxiety and worries about moving to secondary school and those displaying behavioural issues. This approach proved highly effective in providing more nuanced and targeted support for vulnerable children.

5.11 It was also noticeable in the final of the project, the pressure on Transition Managers from secondary schools to visit and meet Year 6's ahead of their Transition Taster Week. For example, in one secondary school, the Transition Manager had the responsibility of visiting over twenty-three primary feeder schools. As a result, Transition Managers often only had a very brief meeting with children with little opportunity to get to know them.

5.12 As a result, the project team was able to get to know children more and establish a real sense of rapport that some secondary schools struggled to achieve. This positive connection was then nurtured during subsequent Transition Taster events and the Summer School. The ability to initiate and sustain such a rapport underlies the impact of the workshops in enhancing children's transition experience and fostering a sense of belonging and engagement.

5.13 Children often experience and go through a multitude of changes as they move from primary to secondary, such as puberty, increased independence, identity, and friendships. The workshop, therefore, offered opportunities to not only talk about and explore these issues in detail but also self-care strategies to manage change. Consequently, two-thirds of those taking part in the workshop said they felt better able to deal with the change because of the workshop.

5.14 It was interesting to note that the focus of the workshops was personal goal setting, but the overwhelming majority of children found these activities particularly difficult to engage with, even with guided support from adults. With children struggling to both identify and set personal goals that might help them with their move to secondary school.

5.15 This difficulty set short-term and medium-term goals with a reluctance to think too far ahead may reflect how much the pandemic has created a real sense of uncertainty in every aspect of children's lives.

5.16 As a result, resources and activities were quickly adapted to give children more time to identify and explore their aspirations about secondary school and for the future i.e. being more independent, making new friends or joining afterschool clubs, and then breaking these down into bite-sized steps, to make them manageable and achievable.

'I liked talking about our personal goals and challenges for secondary school'

Year 6 child

5.17 A small but significant number of children said they still felt worried about their move to secondary school following the workshop. Discussions with these children clearly highlight several sources of anxiety.

- Being the only child in class moving to secondary school
- Where a parent/carer had chosen the secondary school without discussion with the child and so potentially creating a disconnect between them and their new school
- Failing to secure a secondary school of their choosing, and then losing the appeal added another layer of uncertainty, disappointment, and stress
- Where parents had chosen to home-educate without fully taking into consideration the wishes of the child, leading to a sense of frustration and powerlessness
- Children who display high levels of anxiety often due to the pandemic
- Children who had moved primary school multiple time, often as a direct result of domestic violence, highlighting the broader issue of the impact of domestic violence on a child's educational journey.

5.18 Understanding and addressing these concerns is crucial for providing adequate support to ensure a smoother transition for the affected children.



6. Transition Summer Camp

6.1 Transition summer camps have proven effective in helping children orientate themselves and become familiar with their new school environment. These camps offer an opportunity for children to navigate their surroundings with fewer time restrictions, make new friends, and meet their new teachers and support staff.

6.2 In the context of the Smooth Move program, a key component was offering a 3-day transition summer camp, specifically designed to provide targeted support to those deemed vulnerable. However, the implementation of this activity encountered various challenges throughout the lifetime of the project, necessitating a pragmatic and flexible approach that led to the adoption of various delivery models.

6.3 Despite the challenges, schools recognised the importance of transition summer camps, especially considering the disruptions caused by COVID, lost learning, and cancelled transition events. Schools were eager to run these camps, utilising national funding streams that made the activities free for all children. This was an important factor, given that the project took place in areas of high deprivation, in eliminating financial barriers and allows vulnerable children equal access to the support and resources provided by the camp. However, one school was unable to run a transition summer camp due to extensive building work taking place in the school. As a result, they asked for additional targeted support for children, during their school transition taster week.

6.4 The remaining two schools outsourced their transition summer camps to external providers, one with a sports focus and the other with a nature/forest school approach. The project team collaborated with these providers to identify vulnerable children and enhance their experiences by incorporating creative art-based activities with a transition focus. The proactive identification and support of children who may struggle with the move to secondary school, particularly in cases where there were attendance and mental health concerns, highlight a commitment to individualised care and intervention.

6.5 Different strategies were implemented across schools, including nurture group workshops, creative graffiti workshops co-facilitated with school staff, and personalised mixes of outdoor and indoor activities. This approach demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity. Providing opportunities for small cohorts of children to connect and express themselves creatively fosters a sense of belonging and support during the transition process.

6.6 The second year saw a continuation of these approaches and delivery models, although one school identified thirty vulnerable children and offered several engaging and dynamic activities, including creative graffiti workshops, delivered by PSHE and members of the pastoral team. Co-facilitating workshops with school staff, strengthens the collaborative effort to support children, whilst ensuring that transition support aligns with the school's overall objectives and values.

'I was a bit nervous about coming to the summer camp, but I'm glad I did because everyone got to know each other'

Year 6 child

* CASE STUDY *



Since lockdown, Catie has struggled with her friendships and is the only child from her old primary school going to her new secondary school. Catie said **'It's been 2 years of drama and arguments and all I want is a fresh start with new friends who actually care about me.'** While Catie was initially nervous about attending the summer camp, she said it was good because **'I got to know the Head of Year 7 and made friends with 2 people who are in my tutor group...so I'm glad I came'**.

'I enjoyed meeting new people and making two new friends and getting to know some of my new teachers and they made all the activities fun'

Year 7 child

6.7 In the final year of the project, one school was unable to run its transition summer school, so the project team offered additional target support to children during their transition taster week. At the second school, children were charged to attend the summer school, which significantly reduced children's attendance. However, we worked closely with the school to identify and support children who might struggle with their move to secondary school.

6.8 The third school took a slightly different approach than previous years, with the Head of Year 7 identifying thirty

children to attend a 3-day transition summer camp run by members of the pastoral team with support from Priority 1-54.

6.9 In summary, transition summer camps for vulnerable children moving to secondary school played a pivotal role in creating a positive and supportive transition experience for children. By addressing the specific needs of these children through targeted support, inclusivity, and engaging activities, the camps contributed to a smoother transition and set the stage for a successful secondary school journey.





Students who attended nurture group program

I've been worried about the secondary school which I know has been affecting my behaviour in class but by doing these workshops you made it easy and fun talking about this stuff

I really like how you made the workshop fun and supportive and how you could express your feelings without being judged

I liked the positivity and learnt when you talk about your feelings it helps you stay positive and happy

Today we learnt about how important friendships are and I now know I will make friends who will accept me for who I am

We spoke about what we can do if we have a problem at secondary school. The activity called "Talk or Walk" helped us think about choices we can make if we fallout with someone

I liked that we discussed different problems Year 7's have when they start secondary school and how to solve them

Schools

I can't tell you how much the children have enjoyed your workshops. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The children have been telling me how you put their minds at rest about things they were worried about. As a result of the workshop lots of them have now signed up for the summer holiday programme

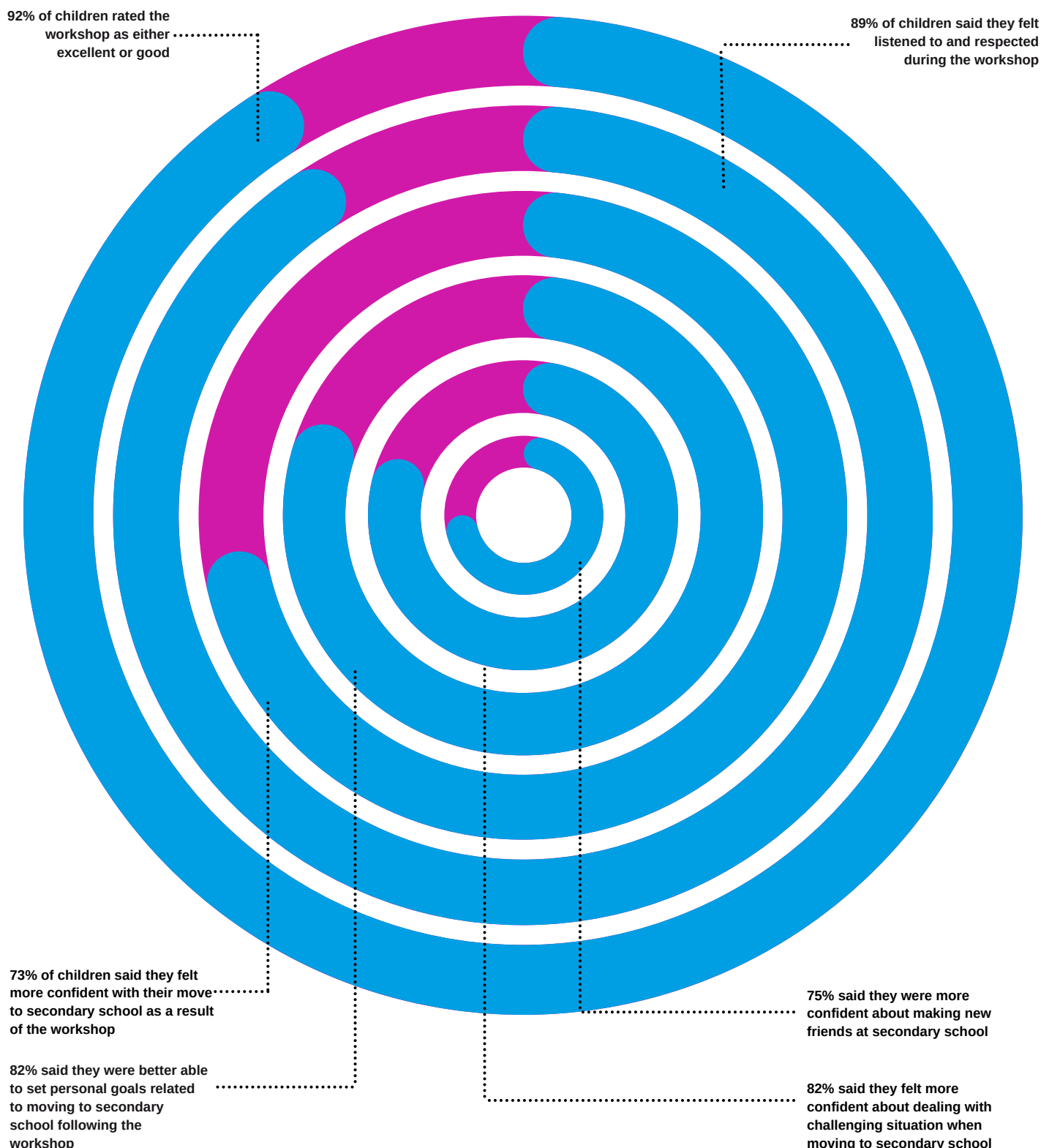
Children spoke so positively about the sessions, which were both engaging and memorable. Visits and workshops from familiar adults are invaluable for transition and provide positive experiences the children can take with them from primary to secondary. The workshops are crucial for vulnerable pupils, who always fully engage with sessions, to strengthen their relationships with their peers and staff, and feel more positive about themselves and transition

The group sessions certainly helped the children to develop new friendship skills and an understanding how other Year 6 pupils are feeling



7. Nurture Group Program

7.1 Offering two six-week nurture group programs for vulnerable children making the move to secondary school was a key element of this project. The overall aim was to address children's needs early in the transition process, thereby acting as a foundation for future success in secondary school and beyond.



‘I think the friendship activities - identifying what makes a good friend - was fantastic and helped them consider their choice of friends but also what potential new friends will look for in them’

Head of Pastoral Support

7.2 Some of the potential benefits for children include:

- A safe and supportive space for children to express their emotions and build trusting relationships with their peers and adults in schools.
- Provide a platform for discussing and developing coping strategies to deal with the specific challenges associated with transitioning to secondary school.
- Through targeted support within the group, children can develop a stronger sense of self-esteem and confidence.
- Building connections with peers facing similar challenges can contribute to a supportive social network and foster a sense of belonging

7.3 All three secondary schools initially agreed for the nurture groups to be undertaken in early September, though it later transpired schools were unable to meet this commitment. In the first year, this was due to concerns that Year 7's had fallen so behind with their learning due to COVID, and taking them off-timetable, to attend the nurture group program, ran the risk of them falling further behind with their learning. It was clear schools were trying to strike a balance between prioritising Year 7s 'lost learning' and supporting the emotional well-being of vulnerable students. However, by prioritising lost learning, this limited Year 7's opportunity to take part in the project.

7.4 In one secondary school, the Transition Manager felt the nurture group program needed to be offered later in the academic year in December or early January, as they felt this was when Year 7's often encounter problems in school. Yet this wasn't communicated to the project team until late in October 2021. When the program was finally delivered, it was evident that students had been struggling for some time, and only started receiving targeted support in five months after moving to secondary school. In another secondary setting, several factors led to the cancellation of the nurture group after two weeks due to, but was successfully delivered at a nearby primary feeder school. Despite the initial setback, the program's relocation proved positive and was delivered over two full consecutive days.

7.5 In response to the difficulties encountered in implementing the program, the project team opted to

deliver the program in primary schools as they typically have more flexibility in scheduling such programs, and possess a deeper understanding of the emotional well-being needs of children. The decision was also influenced by the growing concerns being expressed by primary schools about the increased vulnerabilities being exhibited by children due to COVID.

7.6 There were also concerns that skills for learning, such as motivation, concentration and stamina had also been significantly impacted. However, this did mean all of the nurture groups resources and activities had to be revised for Year 6's and differentiated to meet the diverse needs of children in each of the three primary school.

7.7 When discussing the program with Senior Leaders in primary schools, noted that existing inequalities and disadvantages experienced by Pupil Premium children had been further exacerbated by COVID and online learning, thereby widening the 'learning gap' between them and their peers [see NFER: 2022]. A decision was therefore made to target this particular cohort of children as many were not only deemed to be struggling with their confidence and self-esteem but also their readiness for transition.

7.8 Prior to delivering the final wave of Transition Summer Camp Summer, the Pastoral Manager in one secondary school used the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (see <https://www.elsanetwork.org>) as a screening tool to identify, who might benefit from more targeted support with their move to secondary school.

7.9 All the children who took part in the initial wave of nurture groups presented with far greater levels of need than was anticipated. For example, several children presented with significant levels of social anxiety and struggled to take part in the workshops, despite additional support being made available to them. As a result, the two nurture group programs were combined into one, so that workshops could be co-facilitated by two members of the project team, rather than one. This meant we were able to offer children more personalised support, whilst building a more positive and trusting relationship with them.



'The activities made the children really think about the friendships. The delivery of the information was dynamic throughout and held their attention from start to finish'

Transition Manager

7.10 Children's school attendance nationally, as remained problematic since COVID, and did impact the delivery of the program as these were delivered over six consecutive weeks, as children needed to build up a portfolio of artwork to go towards their Arts Award at Discovery level. However, attendance remained an issue for small minority children, which meant that additional workshops were needed to enable children to complete their portfolios.

7.11 Feedback from children was positive. They mentioned learning about the importance of friendships and expressed increased confidence in making friends who accept them for who they are. In particular, activities focused on identifying qualities of a good friend with activities enabling children to make thoughtful choices about their friends and friendship groups.

7.12 There was also a strong emphasis on open communication about feelings which was well-received by children, with participants noting that discussing emotions helped them stay positive and happy. Additionally, the children appreciated the workshop for addressing the challenges of moving to secondary school and the opportunity to discuss practical solutions. Overall, the children spoke positively about the creative and engaging nature of the workshops and a sense of readiness for the transition.

7.13 Adults in school who supported the delivery of the nurture group program also provided feedback. The teachers expressed satisfaction with the overwhelming positive feedback from the children and the evident enjoyment of taking part in the workshops.

7.14 They emphasised its impact on children's well-being and in supporting their readiness for secondary school. They also highlighted the significance of the program in helping children develop new friendship skills, whilst gaining an understanding of their peers' feelings about moving up to secondary school.

7.15 Overall, the teachers emphasised the importance of children having familiar adults deliver the workshops, how engaging the sessions were, and the program's role in strengthening relationships between children and promoting a positive outlook about their move from primary to secondary school.

8. Parent Workshop

8.1 Moving from primary to secondary school can also be a time of mixed emotions for parents and carers, but there are many things they can do to make the move to secondary school easier for their children. Alongside workshops for children, part of the project offer was a 2hr workshop for parents and carers. Despite numerous attempts to communicate the benefits of the workshops for parents only a handful of workshops were delivered.

8.2 The workshops were open to both Year 5 and Year 6 parents with children also invited to attend so that parents and children had an opportunity to learn together.

8.3 The aim of the workshop was to:

- Explore how parents can manage their own emotions about their child's move
- Examine how to talk openly and honestly together about any worries parents or their child might have
- Offer practical tips and ideas on how to support children manage the transition to secondary school

8.4 Of those who took part in the workshops, 88% said they felt more confident about their child's move to secondary school following the workshop, 12% said they felt no difference, as they felt extremely positive about their child's move to secondary school. More importantly, 93% of parents said they felt better able to support their child's transition following the workshop.

8.5 We asked parents and carers what schools could do to improve the transition process.

'At the beginning of September (Year 6), it was difficult to understand what each school was doing for open evenings/tours'

'It was easy to miss out. It would have been really helpful if the primary schools had facilitated a session for the parents to ask questions'

'More open days before we make our choices about secondary school'

'Better communication when it comes to open evenings in the secondary school'

'Teachers to take groups of children on the bus to school to get them used to it or at least discuss with the children how it all works'

8.6 Parents provided useful feedback on the workshops. This included:

- The need for parents to worry less about secondary school and the need to focus more on the positive aspects of their children move to secondary school.
- The value of hearing first-hand accounts from children and gaining insights on aspects related to the transition that they hadn't previously considered.
- The workshop facilitated a meaningful conversation between parents and their child about their feelings
- The benefits of parents being able to discuss feelings about secondary school with other parents.

8.7 Overall, the feedback suggests that the workshops played a crucial role in promoting positive attitudes, providing insightful perspectives, encouraging open communication between parents and children, and facilitating discussions that enhance parents' preparedness for the transition to secondary school.

9. Smooth Moves Year 7 Survey

9.1 At the end of each academic year, Year 7 students were invited to take part in short online survey about their move to secondary school. In July 2022, 164 students took part in the survey and 634 Year 7 students in July 2023. However, due to the low response rate in 2022, it was not felt appropriate to compare datasets.

9.2 A total of 634 Year 7 students across five secondary schools responded to the survey in 2023. Of which three were currently engaged in the Smooth Moves project, accounting for 46% of respondents.

9.3 Sixty-four percent were female, 30% were male, with 6% choosing to describe their gender another way. The large gender disparity was the result of 221 young women taking part in the survey from an all-girls secondary school. As such, it is important to acknowledge this gender imbalance and consider its potential implications when interpreting the survey findings.

9.4 Nearly a fifth (24%) of respondents said they needed extra support with their learning, significantly higher than the national norm of 14.9% (DfE: 2019). This variance may stem from the location and catchment of the school population in economically disadvantaged areas, where a greater concentration of children requiring additional learning support is prevalent.

9.5 Eighty-one percent of respondents said their move to secondary school had been a positive experience.

However, nearly one-fifth (19%) felt that their move to secondary school had not been positive.

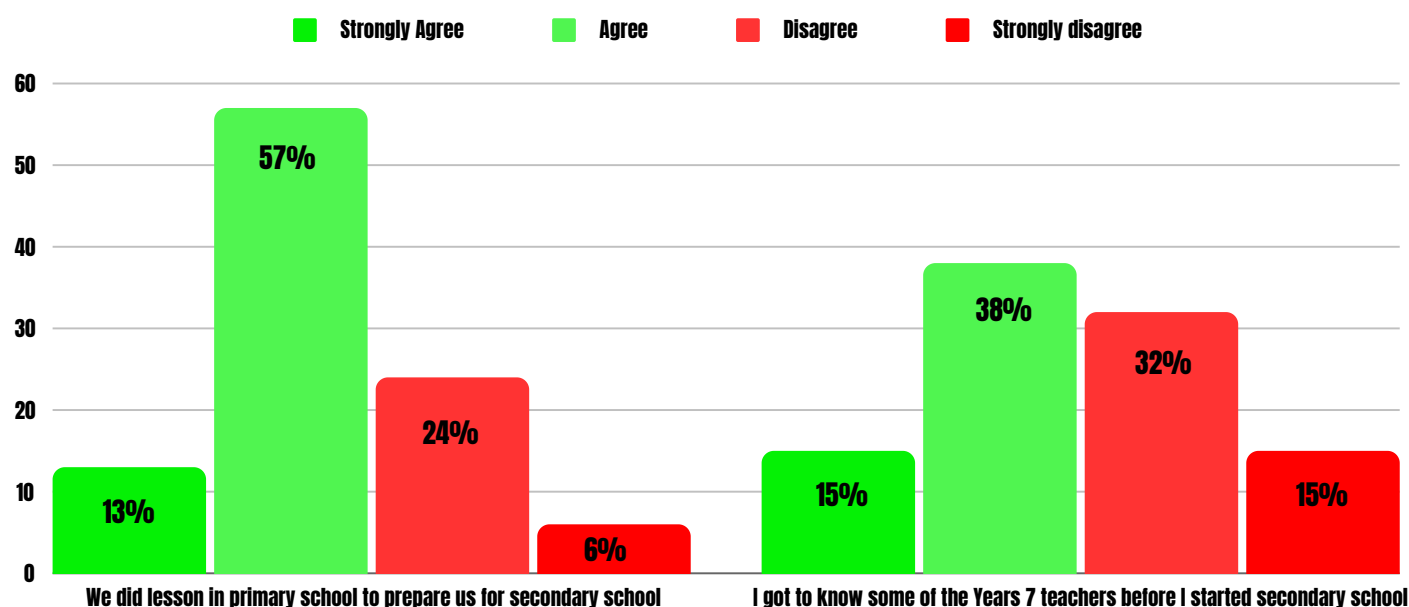
9.6 Twenty-one percent of male respondents said their move to secondary school had been a negative experience when compared to 17% of female respondents. Of the 137 Year 7 respondents who needed extra support with learning, nearly a third (31%) said their move to secondary school had been negative.

9.7 Taster days or weeks were viewed extremely positively by respondents, with 81% reporting that these had helped with their move to secondary school. Both male and female respondents found them equally beneficial, as did those with additional learning needs.

'They should do a longer taster week instead of 2 days. We need 2 weeks because I think that it would help people settle in better'

Year 7 young person

Table 1 - Preparing children for secondary school



9.8 This clearly underscores the potential importance of taster days or weeks as an effective strategy for alleviating any potential anxieties and uncertainties often associated with the move to secondary school. But also a crucial opportunity for children to familiarise themselves with their new school environment, curriculum, and potential future friends, teachers, and ultimately their readiness for their secondary school journey.

'The school could have Year 7s come and support Year 6 for the taster week and maybe have them come into class when they start secondary school to support them if they are struggling with change, even if it's just for a day or two to make them feel more welcome'

Year 7 male respondent

9.9 These were also viewed as crucial opportunities for students to familiarise themselves with the new school environment, curriculum, and potential future classmates/friends, teachers, and ultimately their readiness for their secondary school journey.

9.10 Creating a sense of belonging during the transition to secondary school is crucial for Year 7 students' overall development and ability to settle into their new

school. Year 7's sense of belonging was measured across three specific indicators. These included: feeling safe at school, feeling part of the school, and being proud to be at the school.

A sense of belonging has been linked to:

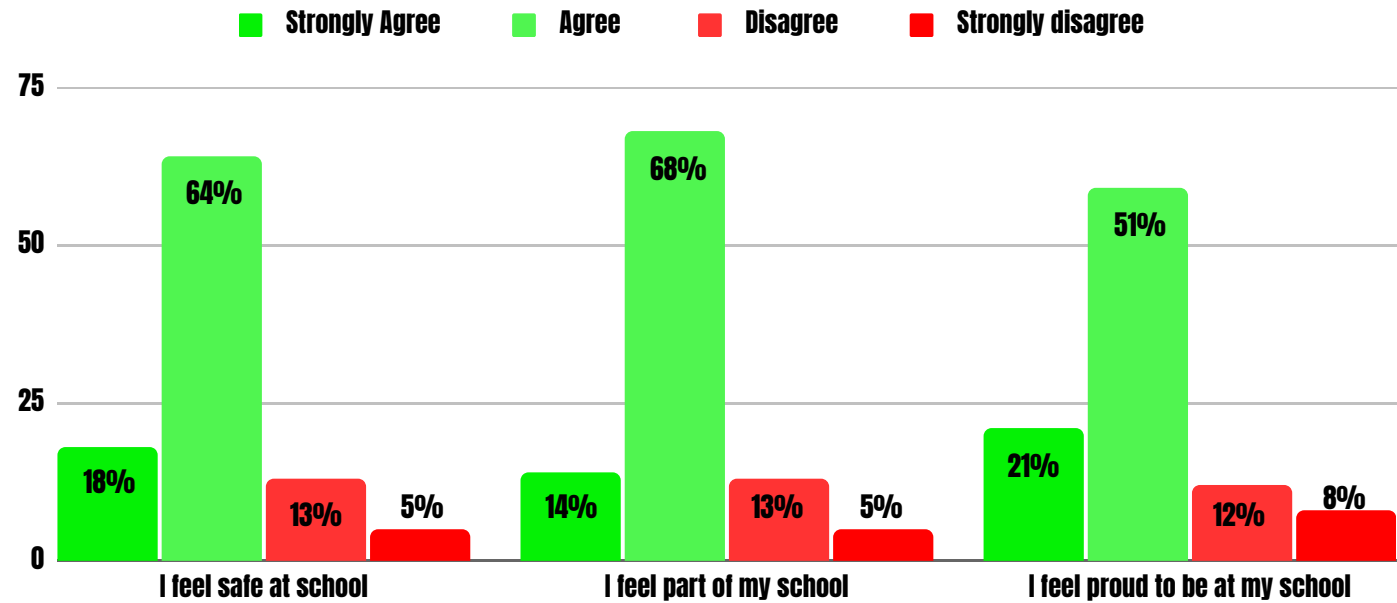
- Increased student motivation.
- Reductions in student absenteeism.
- Better mental health and emotional well-being.
- Improved academic attainment.
- A growing sense of agency in young people and a belief that they can make a difference.

9.11 Seventy-nine percent of respondents reported feeling safe at school. However, those requiring additional learning support felt less safe in school (35%) when compared to other respondents (21%), highlighting the importance of tailoring support systems to address the specific needs of students with SEND, in order to create an inclusive and nurturing school climate where all students feel safe.

9.12 Eighty percent said they felt part of their school, while one in five respondents said they didn't. Almost three-quarters (73%) of those surveyed said that they were proud to be at their school.

9.13 It is worth noting, that females scored higher across all indicators than their male counterparts.

Table 2: Creating a sense of belonging



91% of respondents said making new friends helped with their move to secondary school

9.14 Respondents were asked to identify the factors that had helped them settle into their new school. The top three things were: making new friends (91%), form tutors (59%), and transition ambassadors (55%).

9.15 Research indicates that friends and friendship groups provide a significant protective factor when moving to secondary school for several reasons. Friends offer essential emotional and psychological support during this significant life change, helping young people navigate the challenges and uncertainties of a new environment.

'Just the fact that secondary school is so different and such a big change, it's the shock that's scary, but I suppose there's nothing anyone can really do about that'

Year 7 female respondent

9.16 It was evident that form tutors play a pivotal role in caring for, supporting, and noticing young people as they move to secondary school.

9.17 Moreover, by building relationships with students, form tutors foster an environment of open communication and belonging, allowing for the timely identification and resolution of issues as they arise. They monitor progress, mediate conflicts, and provide personalized attention, tailoring support to individual needs.

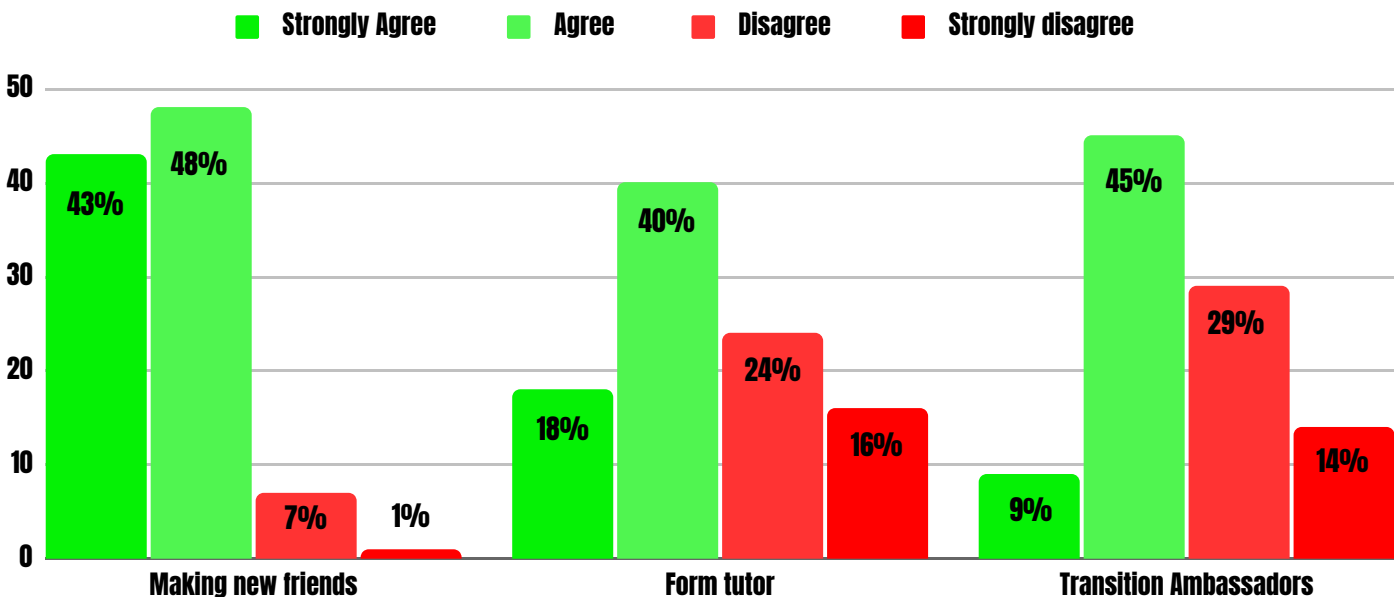
'The school needs to have consistent teaching, having supply teachers for most of the Year 7 and frequent changes in tutor groups has not helped'

Year 7 male respondent

'I think Year 7s should be able to pair with older students, like transition buddies, when starting school. You could get loads of older students from all the year groups'

Year 7 female respondent

Table 3: The top 3 things that helped Year 7s settle into secondary school



9.18 There were three key issues that respondents said they found challenging. These included:

- 61% of respondents expressed difficulty in losing existing friends that they moved up to secondary school with and so reflects the importance of social connections during this crucial period of adjustment.
- 53% of respondents reported struggling with homework, highlighting the academic demands that come with transitioning to secondary school and the need for effective support systems and study strategies to help students manage their homework effectively.

- 43% of students found it challenging to navigate interactions with older peers and underscores the potential social dynamics that can influence students' feelings of belonging and confidence in the new school environment.

9.19 Collectively, these findings highlight the complex nature of the transition to secondary school, encompassing both social and academic dimensions. Addressing these challenges necessitates a holistic approach that encompasses emotional support, academic assistance, and strategies to facilitate positive social interactions among students of different ages.

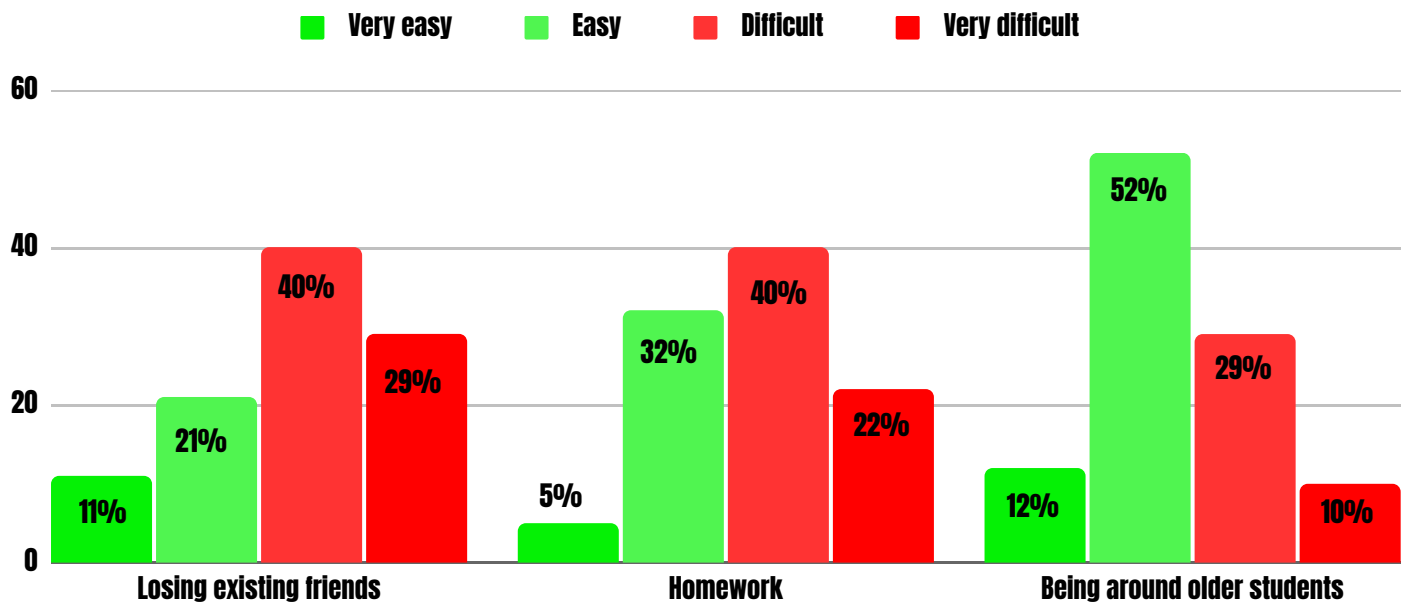
'At secondary school I'm still worried about losing my current friends'

Year 7 female respondent

'Give Year 7's less homework, I didn't have any in primary so this was a big shock to me. Slowly build it up'

Year 7 male respondent

Table 4 : The top 3 challenges about moving to secondary school



10. Conclusion

10.1 In conclusion, the Smooth Moves to Secondary School project has been a comprehensive effort to address the significant challenges and opportunities associated with the transition from primary to secondary school. Over the course of three years, the project has highlighted the complexities of this transition period, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its profound impact on children's emotional well-being and academic readiness.

10.2 The project's multifaceted approach, encompassing creative workshops, peer-to-peer support through Transition Ambassadors, nurture groups, transition summer camps, and parental workshops, has underscored the importance of addressing both the emotional and practical aspects of transitioning to secondary school.

10.3 Through targeted interventions and collaborative efforts with schools, the project has sought to provide tailored support to vulnerable children, recognizing the diverse needs and experiences of each student.

10.4 One of the project's strengths lies in its emphasis on co-production and collaboration, involving children, educators, and other stakeholders in the design and delivery of transition support programs. By incorporating feedback from participants, the project has been able to adapt and refine its strategies to better meet the needs of children and families, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment among all involved.

10.5 Despite the challenges encountered, including disruptions due to the pandemic and logistical hurdles in program delivery, the project has yielded positive outcomes. Feedback from participants, including children, parents, and educators, has highlighted the tangible benefits of the interventions, from increased confidence and resilience among students to enhanced communication and support networks within schools and communities.

10.6 The insights gained from the Smooth Moves project can inform future efforts to support transitions to secondary school, both locally and nationally. By continuing to prioritize the well-being and holistic development of students, fostering collaboration between schools and communities, and addressing systemic barriers to transition support, we can strive to create more inclusive and equitable educational experiences for all children.

10.7 Finally, the Smooth Moves to Secondary School project stands as a testament to the power of collective action and innovation in addressing complex educational challenges. Through its commitment to child-centred approaches and evidence-based practices, the project has made significant strides in enhancing the transition experience for children and families, laying the groundwork for continued progress and impact in the years to come.

