

Joint schemes of work

Whereas primary teachers see the need for the transfer of curriculum information (both on individual pupils and on the work covered) for continuity and progression and to avoid repetition of work, secondary teachers don't see this as a priority. Yet they see more value in and possibility for joint schemes of work than primary teachers, who would prefer to focus on assessment with secondary colleagues in the absence of headteachers. Some primary heads felt that jointly devised schemes of work with secondary schools might eradicate local variations, but would be impractical considering how many schools they send children to.

The production of joint schemes of work was given the "thumbs down" in practice, though their value in the pursuit of continuity and progression and in the prevention of repetition was freely admitted.

Lack of time and the numbers of schools involved were given as the reasons for this. However, there is a clear desire from some heads to retain 100% control of the curriculum, rather than dilute it with what secondary teachers in Year 7 might want.

What next?

- ★ Set up a secondary school focus group to review the reports and the schemes of work from the primary schools, focusing on knowledge, skills and concepts.
- ★ Set up a cross-phase pilot group of interested primary and secondary teachers to:
 - i) agree on attainment levels;
 - ii) work out the logistics of the production of a joint cross-phase scheme of work;
 - iii) write a joint scheme of work;
 - iv) review type, amount, format and timing of transfer information.
- ★ Call a borough conference in the summer term for curriculum continuity between Key Stages 3 and 4 to be tackled on a borough-wide basis, including the need for time allocation for transition work to be built into school budgets. This would pay for INSET on transition and for teachers to be released for cross-phase curriculum planning.

Further reading

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Curriculum continuity between primary and secondary school

NEIL HERRINGTON AND LESLEY DOYLE, HAINAULT FOREST HIGH SCHOOL, HAINAULT, ILFORD, ESSEX

AIM

To investigate teachers' opinions of measures currently in place to ensure curriculum continuity between primary and secondary school

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR THIS CASE STUDY

- ★ There are problems with curriculum continuity which are not easily resolved, mainly because of the lack of time and the absence of a general strategy.
- ★ The introduction of the National Curriculum, levels of attainment and SATs has made schools more inward looking and thus made curriculum continuity more difficult.
- ★ Primary colleagues spend hours on the transfer documents to pass on what they know about pupils.
- ★ The documentation remains largely inaccessible to secondary colleagues.
- ★ There is evidence of differing school cultures in the two phases, with teachers in each phase regarding what teachers in the other phase do with a sense of mystery.
- ★ Teachers from both phases expressed the desire to acquire a greater understanding of each others' teaching and assessment.
- ★ Improvements to curriculum continuity must be effected through better practice and meetings held in school time, not more work for teachers.

Contact

Neil Herrington or Lesley Doyle, Hainault Forest High School, Harbourer Road, Hainault, Ilford, Essex IG6 3TN
Tel: 0181 500 4266 E-mail: l.e.doyle.@cant.ac.uk.wellspardens@dial.pipex.com

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Explanation

Previous research has shown that pupils regress when they move from primary to secondary school. That is to say, they do not sustain the same rate of progress. Furthermore, levels of progress are lower for younger pupils and for boys.

What teachers do to minimise the difference between the way pupils learn in primary school and the way they learn in secondary school may be one of the factors to consider in addressing this issue.

We aimed to find out if teachers think curriculum continuity is important. What do they think is the most important information to be passed on from the primary to the secondary school? How can secondary teachers best use this information? In what ways can primary and secondary teachers work together to achieve commonality of goals? Most importantly, if changes are needed, how can they be introduced without increasing teachers' workload?

We focused on our 11-18 secondary school in the selective outer London borough of Redbridge, and our five main link primary schools. We asked primary headteachers and Year 6 teachers:

- ★ *the information they thought it was important to pass on to our secondary school to maximise curriculum continuity for the children;*
- ★ *how much time they spent on these reports;*
- ★ *how they thought the reports were used by the secondary subject teachers.*

We asked secondary teachers of maths, science, English, history and geography:

- ★ *what information provided by the primary schools about pupils they found most useful in helping curriculum continuity;*
- ★ *how they used the information they received;*
- ★ *whether they needed more or different information.*

Key Stages 2 and 3 (primary and secondary school) are separate parts of a child's education. It is difficult

for teachers in the two phases to do more than make haphazard, unexplored and limited contact, particularly at curriculum level, for either continuity or feedback purposes.

“Year Six teachers may doubt that their assessments are even read.”

Despite the efforts of teachers in the two phases, the fact that there is no strategy for ensuring curriculum continuity means there is a strong reliance on teachers making time to meet and collaborate.

One primary teacher said: “The contact is limited. No opportunity has arisen for discussion and I think we want different things at different stages.”

From a secondary teacher: “The information we receive is geared towards parents rather than us.”

Cross-phase work

More cross-phase work is needed, but the practical difficulties of co-ordinating Year 6 and Year 7 work and the lack of time for teachers to meet inhibit and even prohibit this. Opportunities to address continuity between primary and secondary schools are patchy, as is participation in meetings that the borough's subject advisers organise in the core subjects. Work focuses on in-phase implementation of the National Curriculum and assessment.

One primary headteacher said: “I can see some pretty hefty advantages in having shared blocks of work at Year 6/7 produced through collaborative planning.”

But a Year 6 teacher said: “Joint work would be unwieldy, and there is not enough time.”

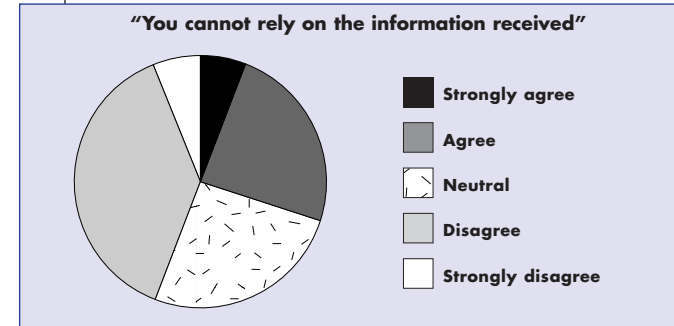
Curriculum complications

Assessment information has been complicated by the National Curriculum levels of attainment, which are interpreted differently in the two phases. SATs results at best only confirm teachers' assessments, which are considered more accurate and useful because they are fuller and give information about the pupils' attitudes to work.

The introduction of levels of attainment has exacerbated rather than alleviated the divide between the phases.

One primary headteacher said: “We have a child achieving Level 6 in Maths. Now that has to be taken on at secondary school, but I can see the comment being, ‘Well this isn't a Level 6 at Key Stage 3.’”

The chart below shows the degree of secondary teachers' uncertainty about the information they get on pupils from the primary schools.

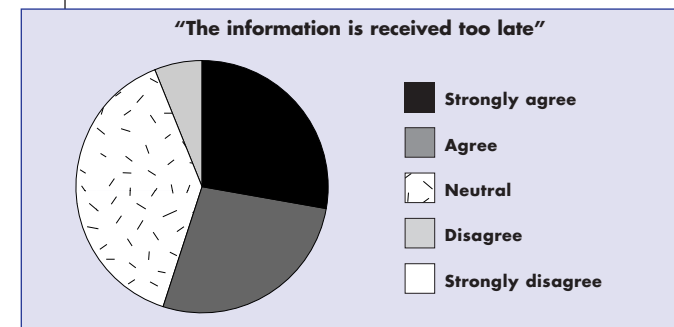


On the value of teachers' assessments compared to SATs, a Year 6 teacher said: “What we report on is what we have thought about the child throughout. The SATs score in itself is not helpful.”

Another commented: “You won't find there is much difference anyway.”

Transfer information not read

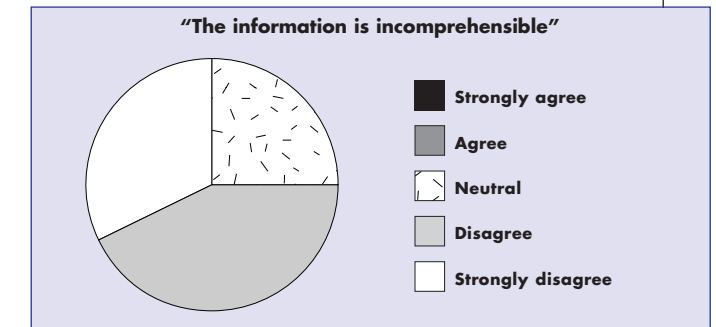
Year 6 teachers may doubt that their detailed, time-consuming assessments – with their emphasis on pastoral rather than academic information – are even read, let alone used by secondary colleagues. They keep subject information to a minimum, because they feel it is unlikely to be read. Some reported that they felt secondary teachers did not know how primary teachers worked. Both primary and secondary teachers agreed that curriculum planning is not possible because the transfer information is sent too late in the year for it to be of real use.



Many secondary departments either don't get or don't use the transfer information, thereby confirming Year 6 teachers' suspicions. If they do seek it out, it is when they want information about pupils' weaknesses. The format of the transfer information is unmanageable, but also inadequate in terms of curriculum information.

One of the most depressing comments we had was from a secondary subject teacher who said: “What information? It is not passed on to me!”

As for those who had at least seen the information on pupils from primary schools, the following graphs show the extent of the problem:

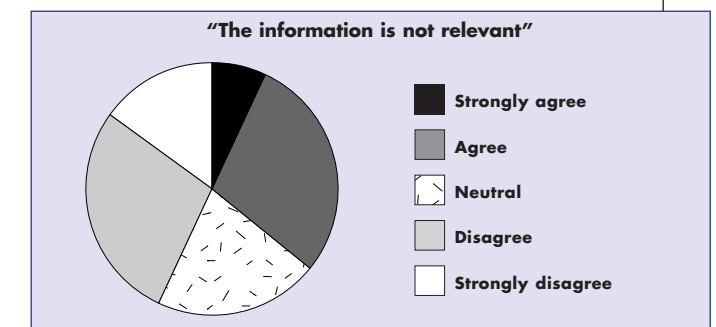


Pupil's attitude to work

Primary teachers say the most important information about the pupils to pass on to the secondary school is of a pastoral nature. In their view, knowledge of a pupil's attitude to work, social skills, strengths and weaknesses, and even the level of support from home, are more likely to help in maximising curriculum continuity for the pupil.

One primary headteacher highlighted the problem when she said: “The overall summary about the child is incredibly important because attitude and behaviour have an effect on everything.”

Secondary teachers' attitudes to this information are illustrated by this graph:



“The production of joint schemes of work was given the ‘thumbs down’ in practice.”