

Mission Transition



Evaluation Report

by

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“I am extremely impressed by the Mission Transition programme. It has the components necessary to inform the pupils and ease this most important transition in the lives of sixth class pupils.” (PT11)¹

¹ Participating Primary Teacher’s Quote.

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List of Acronyms

AP	Atlantic Philanthropies
BNS	Boys' National School
CDU	Curriculum Development Unit
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science
DH&C	Department of Health and Children
ED	Electoral Division
GNS	Girls' National School
HSCL	Home School Community Liaison
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
MCYA	Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
MIC	Mary Immaculate College
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCO	National Children's Office
NLH	Northside Learning Hub
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMYCA	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
PE	Physical Education
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development
RPTC	Report of the Pupil Transfer Committee
SAPS	Small Area Population Statistics
SCP	School Completion Programme
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
TED	Targeting Educational Disadvantage
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Northside Learning Hub (NLH) was founded in 2007 with an overall aim of working in partnership to develop and implement practical and solution-focused responses to the high levels of educational disadvantage and early school leaving experienced by local communities on the Northside of Limerick. As such, it acts not only as a magnet for educational, technological and social capital, but also as a vehicle for active partnership in education between the community and voluntary, public and private sectors with a view to increasing aspiration, access and participation levels in lifelong learning.

An exploration of educational issues within the Northside Limerick community by the NLH highlighted the transition between primary and post-primary school as a key area of concern. As a result, NLH designed a transition programme targeted at pupils moving from primary to post-primary school, which they titled *Mission Transition*. Following an open invitation to tender (by the NLH) for the evaluation of the *Mission Transition* programme, the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick was awarded a contract to examine, in detail: (i) the perspectives of the participating pupils/students², their parents/guardians and school representatives/teachers, and (ii) the perspectives of the NLH staff involved in devising and delivering the programme. As outlined in the tender terms of reference, the evaluation ultimately aimed to achieve six specific objectives:

- Explore the rationale for the development of a transition programme through analysis of local, national and international studies;
- Provide a summation of the *Mission Transition* programme, how it was developed, managed and implemented, and how it has evolved i.e. what has worked, what has not and why;
- Determine the degree of effectiveness of *Mission Transition* in meeting its own objectives, as perceived by all stakeholders involved in the programme as well as identifying any unanticipated outcomes;

² For the purposes of this report, the term ‘pupil’ will be used when referring to those children who are attending primary school and the term ‘student’ will be used to refer to children attending post-primary school.

- Evaluate methods of in-school delivery that facilitate the programme and identify possible barriers to the effectiveness of the chosen methods of delivery;
- Elicit the extent to which the content of *Mission Transition* addresses pupil, teacher and parent concerns in relation to transition, and in turn eases the integration of pupils into post-primary schooling i.e. clarify if the objectives meet the current needs of the client group and whether the objectives are still relevant; and
- Make recommendations to inform the future development and practice of the programme based on findings.

Research Methodology

The evaluators engaged programme participants (pupils/students), teachers, programme staff and other relevant stakeholders using a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, in order to evaluate the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the *Mission Transition* programme.

The following summarises the scope and depth of the research study:

1. Documentary/desk research – to analyse and review national and international best practice and policy in the field of school transition.
2. Interviews and focus groups - qualitative data was gathered with the participating pupils/students and the NLH staff relating to: (i) the aims and objectives of the evaluation, and (ii) the participant perspectives on programme implementation.
3. Questionnaires – survey questionnaires were designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from principals/teachers, parents/guardians, pupils/students, and other stakeholders on a variety of issues associated with transition in general as well as programme implementation.
4. Telephone Interview – as part of the *Mission Transition* evaluation, a telephone interview was conducted with a representative of *youngballymun*, Dublin to explore the transferability of *Mission Transition* to other geographical, educational settings non-specific to NLH.

Prior to embarking on the evaluation project, the evaluation team (in conjunction with the NLH) established a project Steering Committee. The committee comprised of the following members:

- Jennifer Moroney Ward – Northside Learning Hub;
- Yvonne Lane – PAUL Partnership;
- Dr. Áine Cregan, Mary Immaculate College (advisory capacity);
- Hillary Pratt – Home School Community Liaison (HSCL), St. Munchin’s Boys’ National School (BNS) and St. Munchin’s Girls’ National School (GNS);
- Teri Coffey – HSCL, St Nessian’s Community College;
- Patricia McCarthy – HSCL, Salesian Secondary School;
- Tiernan O’Neill – HSCL, Corpus Christi Primary School;
- Rory McGann – Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College; and
- Karen Mahony – Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College.

Research Sample/School Profiles

A wide variety of schools were involved in the *Mission Transition* evaluation. At primary level, the schools involved included:

- An all-boys’ school catering for pupils from 2nd class to 6th class;
- A full stream all-girls’ school;
- A full stream co-educational school; and
- A full stream school catering for both boys and girls from Junior Infants to 1st class, and girls only from 2nd class to 6th class.

All schools placed a heavy emphasis on the holistic experiences of the pupils in their school and sought to provide an education that placed the pupil at the centre of everything that happened within the school.

At post-primary level, the schools involved in the evaluation included:

- A co-educational Vocational Education Committee (VEC) school;
- Two all-girls’ schools;
- A privately endowed, co-educational, boarding and day school; and
- An all-boys’ school.

Summary of Findings - Mission Transition

Strengths of Mission Transition	Challenges for Mission Transition
<p>All respondents (NLH staff, pupils and teachers) agreed that <i>Mission Transition</i> is meeting its objectives in relation to providing pupils with knowledge and skills to enable them to make a successful transfer from primary to post-primary school.</p>	<p>Similar to many educational initiatives, one of the more significant challenges to <i>Mission Transition</i> is the levels of parental participation. Despite the efforts of HSCL teachers, parental participation in this element of the programme has been limited.</p>
<p>Following the implementation of the <i>Mission Transition</i> programme, primary pupils expressed increased levels of confidence about moving to post-primary school while the number of pupils who felt unprepared decreased. Research participants agreed that the content being delivered is new and is something the pupils require.</p>	<p>Although the majority of respondents felt that the content covered in <i>Mission Transition</i> was appropriate, some respondents felt that alternative methods of delivery (e.g. summer camps) for the programme is needed to alleviate logistical difficulties such as timetabling, school operational procedures etc.</p>
<p>All respondents (NLH staff, pupils and teachers) agreed that a programme like <i>Mission Transition</i> would benefit all students moving from primary to post-primary. Post-primary teachers stated that those students who had previously engaged with the <i>Mission Transition</i> programme were better prepared for the transition from primary to post-primary than their non-engaging peers.</p>	<p>The <i>Mission Transition</i> programme currently works specifically with four primary schools and two post-primary schools. This presents a difficulty for <i>Mission Transition</i> in terms of programme implementation i.e. pupil migration to non-target post-primary schools means that not all pupils who receive the programme at primary level receive the follow-up element at post-primary level.</p>

<p>Areas covered in the <i>Mission Transition</i> programme such as: discussions about expectations, explanations of subjects, work around timetables, structure of the school system, discussions about new subjects and information about extra-curricular activities were all well received.</p>	<p>Suggested areas for improvement included more innovation, interactivity, school-specific tasks, videos and ICT-based elements, as well as a more robust-looking journal. It was also suggested that the content could be made more dynamic/interactive, and should incorporate areas such as homework, study skills and friendship skills.</p>
<p>Improved relationships between NLH and target schools as a result of the <i>Mission Transition</i> programme were evident.</p>	<p>The cost of delivering <i>Mission Transition</i> (in its current format), as well work on further developing the programme is heavily reliant on securing future funding.</p>

Recommendations³

1. The NLH should explore funding options to support the employment of a Research and Development Officer to further develop the *Mission Transition* programme as a resource to publishable standard.
2. The participation of pupils and students, as primary users of the *Mission Transition* programme, should be promoted in the drawing up of any revisions or amendments to the current programme.
3. The NLH should approach the DES and NCCA with the view to assessing the value and merit of piloting the *Mission Transition* programme at a citywide and/or national level.
4. The NLH should assess the merits of local schools adopting the role of delivering of the programme, and subsequently reassess their own role regarding the co-ordination

³ The recommendations contained in the Executive Summary are a summarised version of a more-detailed narrative, which can be found in Chapter 8 – Conclusions & Recommendations.

of the *Mission Transition* programme in areas such as administration, training and programme development. Such an approach would provide for a more cost efficient programme.

5. In light of recommendation no. 4 above, the newly appointed Research and Development Officer should explore the feasibility of teachers being supported to implement the class-based programme.
6. Given the evaluation findings, NLH in conjunction with other relevant educational bodies, should explore the suitability of integrating *Mission Transition* into the current SPHE 6th class curriculum.
7. A more coherent strategy for parental involvement should be developed by the NLH team, in conjunction with relevant others, to explore a more structured approach to the involvement of parents.
8. Until such time as necessary levels of funding are secured, NLH, in conjunction with target schools and local agencies, should explore suitable and alternative mechanisms for the smooth implementation of the *Mission Transition* programme.
9. The NLH should review the value of encouraging and supporting more open and authentic relationships between primary and post-primary schools (target and non-target).
10. Prior to any internal review of *Mission Transition* being conducted, the management at the NLH should communicate with educational bodies such as the DES and the NCCA to gain a greater understanding of proposed policy advancements relating to transition in the Irish educational context.
11. The newly appointed Research and Development Officer should explore possibilities for programme expansion to a greater number of primary and post-primary schools.

Chapter One - Introduction to the Research

1.1 Introduction

Every year, more than 50,000 young people in Ireland make the move from primary to post primary education (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) 2004). For the most part, it is believed that this time of transfer causes little or no long-term difficulty, with students quickly adapting to their new surroundings. In general, the majority of pupils transferring to post-primary school settle into their new surroundings during the first week and 25% settle in before the end of the first month (NCCA 2004). However, it is also suggested that over 16% of pupils, if left unaided, will take longer than a month to transfer comfortably (Smyth, McCoy & Darmody 2004, p.234). An international study suggests that 40% of pupils will experience some initial complication while making the transfer (Galton, Morrison & Pell 2000) while more recent Irish research suggests that approximately 1,000 pupils will fail to negotiate the transfer successfully (O'Brien 2008). This point is reiterated by Walshe (2008) who suggested that 30% of pupils in the Dublin Docklands area leave school before the age of fifteen, with most of this drop-off occurring during the time of transition. Reasons suggested for this include: a lack of communication, pupil age, new school structure, subject choices, lack of curricular continuity, separation from friends, teacher-pupil interaction, marginalized families and difficult socio-economic backgrounds (Galton et al. 2000; NCCA 2004; Smyth, McCoy & Darmody 2004; O'Brien 2008; Walshe 2008). The change of atmosphere between school structures (namely familial at primary level and goal-orientated at post-primary level) was also cited as a possible cause (O'Brien 2008).

1.2 Overview of the Northside Learning Hub

The Northside Learning Hub (NLH) was founded in 2007 with an overall aim of working in partnership with local education providers, families and young people to develop and implement practical and solution-focused responses to the high levels of educational disadvantage and early school leaving experienced by local communities on the Northside of Limerick - a community faced with many barriers to full social inclusion such as low levels of educational attainment and a high ratio of children to adults. Projects developed by NLH aim to increase the capacity of the community to overcome these obstacles by gathering and

organising members of the community and key stakeholders around an activity of common interest i.e. the healthy and positive development of children (NLH 2008).

1.3 Introduction to Mission Transition

An exploration of educational issues within the Northside Limerick community, as conducted by the NLH, highlighted the transition between primary and post-primary school as a key area of concern. A survey, carried out locally, with a mixed-gender sample of sixth class pupils in four Northside primary schools and first year pupils in two Northside post-primary schools led to the identification of a range of fears that the pupils linked to transferring to post-primary school (NLH 2007). As a result of the survey, the NLH designed a transition programme targeted at pupils moving from primary to post-primary school, which they titled *Mission Transition*. Between 2007 and 2009 *Mission Transition* was piloted in four primary schools and two post-primary schools with more than one hundred and twenty pupils/students⁴ engaging with the pilot programme each year. The programme was implemented in the participating schools in conjunction with the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Co-ordinators and Class Teachers/Year Heads. *Mission Transition* also includes a parent-focused element; however despite strong efforts from HSCL, teachers' levels of parental engagement at the time of the evaluation were quite low.

On the whole, the programme is managed by the NLH, but they rely on the co-operation and support of school management and staff, particularly during the programme delivery periods. The programme aims to prepare students and parents for the next stage of the pupil's education by helping them to understand that, although post-primary school is a time of great change, it also represents an opportunity for a fresh start. The programme aims in particular to build pupil/student confidence and foster a sense of excitement and anticipation and to address any feelings of fear or anxiety which may exist.

1.4 Background to the Mission Transition Evaluation

The combination of challenges such as low levels of educational attainment, a high ratio of children to adults and higher-than-average levels of crime and anti-social behaviour can play

⁴ For the purposes of this report, the term 'pupil' will be used when referring to those children who are attending primary school and the term 'student' will be used to refer to children attending post-primary school.

a role in determining whether or not young people within such communities reach their full potential (Limerick Regeneration Agency 2009). Projects developed by the NLH aim to increase the capacity of the community to overcome these obstacles by gathering and organising members of the community and key stakeholders around an activity of common interest i.e. the healthy and positive development of children (NLH 2007).

Following an open invitation to tender (by the NLH) for the evaluation of the *Mission Transition* programme, the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick were awarded a contract to examine in detail: (i) the perspectives of the participating pupils/students, their parents/guardians and school representatives/teachers, and (ii) the perspectives of the NLH staff involved in devising and delivering the programme.

As outlined in the tender terms of reference, the evaluation ultimately aimed to achieve six specific objectives, to:

- Explore the rationale for the development of a transition programme through analysis of local, national and international studies;
- Provide a summation of the *Mission Transition* programme, how it was developed, managed and implemented, and how it has evolved i.e. what has worked, what has not and why;
- Determine the degree of effectiveness of *Mission Transition* in meeting its own objectives, as perceived by all stakeholders involved in the programme as well as identifying any unanticipated outcomes;
- Evaluate methods of in-school delivery that facilitate the programme and identify possible barriers to the effectiveness of the chosen methods of delivery;
- Elicit the extent to which the content of *Mission Transition* addresses pupil, teacher and parent concerns in relation to transition, and in turn eases the integration of pupils into post-primary schooling i.e. clarify if the objectives meet the current needs of the client group and whether the objectives are still relevant; and
- Make recommendations to inform the future development and the practice of the programme based on findings.

1.5 Methodology

The evaluators engaged programme participants (pupils/students), teachers, programme staff and other relevant stakeholders using a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, in order to evaluate the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the *Mission Transition* programme.

Key methods employed include documentary/desk research, interviews and focus groups with programme staff/programme participants, whilst questionnaires were used to survey school principals, teachers, pupils/students and other relevant stakeholders. The following summarises the scope and depth of the research study:

1. Documentary/desk research – to analyse and review national and international best practice and policy in the field of school transition. Ultimately this exercise informed the development of the evaluation instruments and the recommendations.
2. Interviews and focus groups - qualitative data was gathered with the participating pupils/students and the NLH staff relating to: (i) the aims and objectives of the evaluation, and (ii) the participant perspectives on programme implementation (see Appendix A, B & C for the interview and focus group schedules).
3. Questionnaires – survey questionnaires were designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from principals/teachers, parents/guardians⁵, pupils and students, and other stakeholders on a variety of issues associated with transition in general as well as programme implementation (see Appendix D for a sample questionnaire). The surveys were administered to the six target schools of the programme (notably, Corpus Christi Primary School, Salesian Primary School, St Munchin’s BNS, St. Munchin’s GNS, Salesian Secondary School and St. Nessan’s Community College) as well as three non-target post-primary schools (Laurel Hill Secondary School FCJ, CBS Sexton Street and Villiers School).
4. Telephone Interview – as part of the *Mission Transition* evaluation, a telephone interview was conducted with a representative of *youngballymun*, Dublin to explore the transferability of *Mission Transition* to other educational settings non-specific to NLH.

⁵ The original terms of reference of the evaluation specified the need to access the perspectives of parents/guardians participating in the parent-focused element of the Mission Transition programme. However, having designed and disseminated a parental survey, the evaluators discovered that although NLH had designed a parent-focused element within the Mission Transition programme, at the time of the evaluation, parental participation in this element of the programme was limited. For this reason, the perspectives of parents/guardians relating to the implementation of the parent-focused element of Mission Transition could not be followed through.

Table 1 below displays the number and variety of perspectives accessed through the research.

Table 1: Research Participants	
Research Participants	TOTAL
Principal/Deputy Principal	8
Class Teacher	6
Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator	3
Year Head/Form Tutor	1
Other	4
Pupils (Primary)	49
Students (Post-primary)	42
Northside Learning Hub Staff	6
Youngballymun Representative	1
TOTAL	120

To protect research participants' identities and right to anonymity, codes were developed when preparing the data. Schools were assigned a letter based on their respective type (i.e. primary schools were assigned the letter P while post-primary schools were referenced using the letters PP) and each research participant a number. Hence teacher quotations were referenced by using the assigned capital letter followed by a capital T followed by a number e.g. primary school teachers were referenced with PT3, PT7 etc. while post-primary teachers were denoted by the letters PP e.g. PPT1, PPT7 etc. Similarly, pupil quotations were referenced using the school letter followed by the letter C followed by a number, e.g. PC3, PC6 at primary level or PPC5, PPC2 etc. at post-primary level. Children who participated in the focus groups were referenced using the same system, except that FG was placed in the middle, to distinguish these responses from the questionnaire responses e.g. PCFG1, PCFG2 etc. *Mission Transition* programme staff were referenced using NLH followed by a number e.g. NLH3, NLH9 etc.

1.6 Evaluation Steering Committee

Prior to embarking on the evaluation project, the evaluation team (in conjunction with the NLH) established a project Steering Committee. The committee comprised of the following members:

- Jennifer Moroney Ward – Northside Learning Hub;
- Yvonne Lane – PAUL Partnership;
- Dr. Áine Cregan, Mary Immaculate College (advisory capacity);
- Hillary Pratt – Home School Community Liaison (HSCL), St. Munchin’s Boys’ National School (BNS) and St. Munchin’s Girls’ National School (GNS);
- Teri Coffey – HSCL, St Nessan’s Community College;
- Patricia McCarthy – HSCL, Salesian Secondary School;
- Tiernan O’Neill – HSCL, Corpus Christi Primary School;
- Rory McGann – Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College; and
- Karen Mahony – Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College.

1.7 Research Sample/School Profiles

A wide variety of schools were involved in the *Mission Transition* evaluation. At primary level, the schools involved included:

- An all-boys’ school catering for pupils from 2nd class to 6th class;
- A full stream all-girls’ school;
- A full stream co-educational school; and
- A full stream school catering for both boys and girls from Junior Infants to 1st class, and girls only from 2nd class to 6th class.

Three of the four primary schools were designated DEIS Urban Band 1. All schools placed a heavy emphasis on the holistic experiences of the pupil in their school and sought to provide an education that placed the pupil at the centre of everything that happened within the school.

At post-primary, schools involved in the evaluation consisted of:

- A co-educational Vocational Education Committee (VEC) school;
- Two all-girls’ schools;

- A privately endowed, co-educational, boarding and day school; and
- An all-boys' school.

Two of the five post-primary schools involved in the evaluation were designated DEIS Urban Band 1.

1.8 Ethical Considerations

In undertaking the work involved in the *Mission Transition* evaluation, both the Steering Committee and the research team were cognisant of the ethical standards adopted on an on-going basis. Specific ethical issues were managed as follows:

Information Leaflet

Prior to gathering the consent of the pupils/students and their families to become involved in the evaluation, the research team disseminated an information leaflet to all prospective participants. The leaflet (see Appendix E), which contained information relating to consent; confidentiality; anonymity; voluntary participation, the right to withdraw and child protection allowed, the prospective participants to make an informed decision relating to their participation.

Informed Consent

The researchers sought and obtained the written consent of all pupils/students and their parents/guardians for their involvement/participation in the research.

Confidentiality

All information shared by pupils/students and their families with the evaluation team was treated as confidential. This meant that it was not shared with anyone else, except in aggregate form as part of report findings. While all efforts were made, confidentiality could not be guaranteed for other stakeholders, given that there may be one stakeholder from a particular organisation involved. Stakeholders were informed of this fact in advance.

Anonymity

The field work with pupils/students was undertaken on an anonymous basis. This meant that every effort was made to ensure that individual participants were not identifiable in the final

research report. While individual quotations are contained in the report from both primary and post-primary participants – the name of the school to which they belong is not identifiable through the code and so their anonymity is guarded, as is the anonymity of their schools. All digital recordings made during the course of the evaluation were destroyed following analysis.

Voluntary Participation

All participants were informed of their right to volunteer their participation in the evaluation, but also of their right to withdraw at any stage throughout the research process.

Dissemination of Findings

In terms of feedback and confirmation of findings, all participants received a copy of the draft final report and were given the opportunity to feedback and validate findings prior to publication. At various stages throughout the process, members of the Steering Committee were also invited to review draft sections of the report.

Doing No Harm

It was agreed that should any child protection issues arise throughout the evaluation, that the procedures outlined in the Children First guidelines (Department of Health and Children (DH&C) 1999) would be followed through.

1.9 Report Structure

The current evaluation report has been devised to:

- Present good practice guidelines identified during documentary/desk research;
- Discuss the main policy implications for the transition programme; and
- Present and discuss the key findings of the evaluation which will be used to facilitate future strategic planning and to make recommendations for further development of the *Mission Transition* Programme.

The report consists of eight chapters including the current introductory chapter. Chapter two puts the evaluation in context to the evaluation by providing a geographical and demographic background of the Northside of Limerick and an overview of relevant educational policy in

relation to pupils/students and transition. Chapter three outlines the programme model employed by *Mission Transition*, providing a description of the aims and objectives of the programme, programme delivery framework and associated programme activities. Chapters four, five and six present the findings of the evaluation in relation to each of the main stakeholders; namely, Northside Learning Hub, pupils (primary and post-primary) and teachers (primary and post-primary). Chapter seven uses a case-study approach to explore the transferability of the *Mission Transition* programme to an educational setting outside of Limerick City (i.e. Dublin). The final chapter, chapter eight, provides a summation of the evaluation, discussing the development, management, implementation and evolution of *Mission Transition*, as well as the strengths and challenges of the *Mission Transition* programme. The chapter concludes by providing a set of recommendations as determined by the evaluation.

Chapter Two - Evaluation Context

2.1 The Northside of Limerick – A Geographic & Demographic Overview

The most recent figures (2006) from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) identify Limerick as the fourth most populous city in the Republic of Ireland after Dublin, Cork and Galway (though its urban area population is greater than Galway's). After Dublin, Belfast, Cork and Derry, Limerick City and suburbs is the fifth largest urban area on the island of Ireland (CSO 2006). The boundaries of the city were extended on March 1, 2008, when the *Limerick City Boundary Alteration Order 2008* (Rabbitts 2008) came into effect. This added an area of approximately 1,020 hectares from County Limerick, increasing the city's area by almost 50% and increasing the population by an estimated 7,000 (Rabbitts 2008). However, despite the recent boom years, Limerick City still suffers from acute socio-economic polarisation and contains some of the most disadvantaged areas in the country as a whole (Fitzgerald 2007). For example, the unemployment rate in Limerick City (as recorded in the 2006 national census) was the highest in the Republic at 14.6% (CSO 2006), with one of the highest percentages of public housing among local authorities (41%) i.e. “*corridors of disadvantage*” (McCafferty 2005). This stark reality is compounded by the fact that 22% of Limerick City’s population has no formal education other than primary schooling, which is over 3% higher than national figures (CSO 2006).

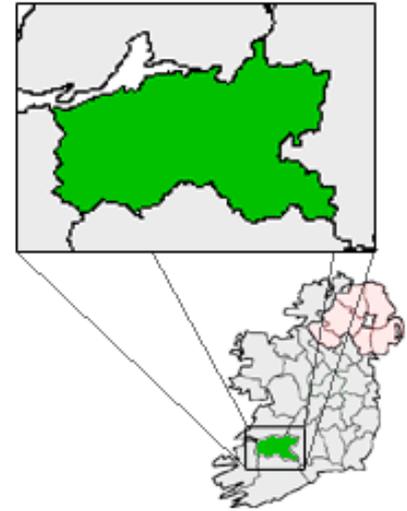


Figure 1: Geographic Location of Limerick (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limerick>)

For the purposes of providing a contextual overview of specific areas of Limerick City of concern to *Mission Transition*, a closer examination of the Northside Learning Hub catchment area is required. It is worth noting that a lot of the Northside catchment area associated with NLH is designated as a RAPID area (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) - a focused initiative by the Government to target forty-five of the most disadvantaged areas in the country, aimed at improving community co-operation and enabling future investment to be implemented through an approach of genuine partnership. That said, it is also important to note that NLH works with pupils/students

outside the Northside target areas (Meelick, Caherdavin etc.). Although relevant empirical data is currently unavailable, anecdotal evidence would suggest an increase in the number of families migrating from the NLH catchment areas to surrounding geographical regions (including the city centre) in recent years, hence a more flexible approach has been adopted by NLH in relation to their catchment areas for individual projects.

Statistics drawn from the 2006 Census of Population Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS), which contains the most recently available Census data for individual Electoral Divisions (EDs), is also useful here. An ED is the smallest geographic area for which Census data is publicly available. Limerick City comprises thirty eight EDs. The Northside Learning Hub’s target area is comprised of five EDs, as shown in Table 2 below. For the remainder of this document, the statistics will be presented as one overall statistic for the NLH’s target area, as opposed to the individual EDs.

Table 2: Northside Learning Hub’s Target Area	
Northside Learning Hub Target Communities	Electoral Divisions
Moyross	Ballynanty
St. Munchin’s	Kileely A
	Kileely B
	Castle A
	Castle B

As can be seen from the map below, the Northside area is composed of parts of two parishes and three distinct communities; namely Moyross (Corpus Christi Parish), Ballynanty (St Munchin's Parish) and Kileely/Thomondgate (St Munchin’s Parish). Politically, Kileely/Thomondgate comprises the EDs of Kileely 'A' and Kileely 'B'. Moyross and Ballynanty make up the Ballynanty ED.



Figure 2: Limerick City Electoral Map (Limerick City Council 2009)

Between 2002 and 2006, the population of the Irish state increased by 8.2% from 3,917,203 in 2002 to 4,239,848 in 2006 (CSO 2006). In contrast, the population of Limerick City fell by 1.9% from 60,955 in 2002 to 59,790 in 2006 (CSO 2006). More specifically, the electoral division of Moyross, on the Northside of Limerick, experienced a fall of 642 people (-15.6%) while St. Munchin’s parish experienced a more moderate decrease of 52 (-1.2%) (CSO 2006).

From a socio-economic perspective, the Irish state as a whole was classed as having a marginally above-average rate of relative affluence (2.1) in 2006, while Limerick City had a below average rate (-7.9) in that same year (CSO 2006). St. Munchin’s and Moyross EDs had rates of -13.2 and -32.3 respectively, which can be termed “disadvantaged” and “extremely disadvantaged” (Haase & Pratschke 2008). Meanwhile, the respective unemployment figures for Limerick City, St. Munchin’s and Moyross EDs significantly contrast national figures: Limerick City: 22%; St. Munchin’s: 27.1%; and Moyross: 39.6% (CSO 2006). Additionally, both St. Munchin’s and Moyross areas exhibit high levels of unemployment particularly amongst males (15 yrs+). The main categories of employment for the districts in this report

were identified as being ‘semi-skilled’ or ‘unskilled’. In that same year, significant disparity existed between national norms and these Limerick City EDs, particularly relating to number of professionals, people in managerial roles and people in non-manual labour. These statistics are particularly pertinent given the assertions that the capacity of the home to act as a nurturing agent in relation to child development and learning accessibility “*is compromised by factors such as poverty and class*” (Higgins 2008, p.45) while the OECD suggest that poverty and unemployment can impinge on parents’ ability to support their children either emotionally or educationally (OECD 1997, p.25).

Table 3: Total Unemployment Rate⁶		
Electoral Division	Unemployment Rate 2002 (%)	Unemployment Rate 2006 (%)
Moyross	21.3	24.6
St. Munchin’s	15.0	14.0
Limerick City	13.9	14.4
State	8.8	8.5

A correlation also exists between poverty and pupils/students being at risk of either leaving school early or not achieving their full potential (Daly & Leonard 2002). The 2006 CSO figures indicate that 18.9% of the Irish state population are recorded as having no formal education while 30.5% have obtained some form of 3rd level qualification (CSO 2006). Comparative figures for the percentage of population with 3rd level qualifications stand at: Limerick City: 23.9%; St. Munchin’s: 19.5%; and Moyross: 6% (CSO 2006). Across all three EDs, the figures for those aged 15+ who left school at or before the age of 15 do not compare favourably with national norms (see Table 4 below) (CSO 2006).

⁶ Although this evaluation draws on the most recent statistics available i.e. CSO 2006, it is also worth noting that the study was conducted during an economic downturn, at a time where unemployment nationally was on the increase (CSO 2010).

Table 4: Population of Young People Leaving School At/Before 15 Years		
Electoral Division	No. of School Leavers 2002 (%)	No. of School Leavers 2006 (%)
Moyross	1071 (44.3%)	643 (29.6%)
St. Munchin's	801 (27.5%)	495 (16.8%)
Limerick City	9172 (23.5%)	5382 (14%)
State	544,338 (21.9%)	322,345 (11.9%)

2.2 Relevant Irish Educational Policy

The Education Act (1998) is the main legislative framework for Irish primary and post-primary education, making formal provision for the education of every person in the State. Full-time education in Ireland is compulsory for children between six and sixteen years of age⁷ and the vast majority of Irish children attend non fee-paying schools (OECD 2007). This system of education consists of eight years of primary schooling and three or optionally five or six years of post-primary schooling, depending on the provision of a Transition Year following completion of the Junior Certificate⁸. The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 provides a framework within which issues relating to the educational welfare of children are handled. Under the recently agreed National Children's Strategy 2000 - 2010, it is proposed to develop the Irish context to become a place "*where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential*" (Government of Ireland 2000, p.4).

The NCCA, which includes representatives of teacher unions, school management bodies, parent bodies and other stakeholders is the body charged with responsibility for articulating

⁷ However, the majority of Irish children attend free formal schooling from the age of 4 years.

⁸ It is compulsory for Irish children to attend school from the age of six years through to the completion of their Junior Certificate, which takes place after three years of post-primary schooling. Following this, some pupils have the option to complete a Transition Year prior to beginning the two-year Leaving Certificate programme.

the goals and aims of the curriculum at both primary and post-primary levels. The (1999) primary curriculum identifies three aims of primary education:

1. To enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual;
2. To enable the child to develop as a social being through living and cooperating with others and so contribute to the good of society; and
3. To prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning.

(DES 1999)

The primary curriculum is learner-centred and emphasises the importance of literacy and numeracy, whilst also aiming to respond to the changing needs of its students relating to: science and technology; social, personal and health education; and citizenship. Teachers in primary schools usually teach the same group of students for one year and teach all subjects. The length of the school day is five hours and forty minutes, including breaks. The length of the school year is 183 days (OECD 2007). The post-primary curriculum comprises a junior cycle and a senior cycle. The junior cycle lies within the compulsory period of education while the senior cycle is an optional two or three years, depending on whether the school offers a transition year programme. Most students who begin the junior cycle will have spent eight years in primary school and the curriculum at post-primary level aims to build on the learning acquired through the primary curriculum.

2.3 Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

In 2005 the Department of Education and Science (DES) launched DEIS, a social inclusion action plan, with the aim of *ensuring “that the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities are prioritised and effectively addressed”* (DES 2005, p.9). It was hoped that, through DEIS, schools and their communities could achieve equality in educational participation and outcomes for pupils and students in line with national norms (DES 2009). DEIS brought together a number of previous interventions in schools including the HSCL scheme, the School Completion Programme (SCP), the Early Start Pre-School scheme and Giving Children an Even Break: Breaking the Cycle. Schools were selected for participation in the newly integrated School Support Programme (SSP) on the basis of the levels of socio-economic disadvantage in their areas. The determining socio-economic characteristics included the following: unemployment status, lone parenthood,

membership of the Travelling Community, large families, access free book grants and residence in local authority housing (NESF 2009). An index of disadvantage relating to urban and rural areas was developed, and a ranking of schools was produced. Urban schools were categorised into two bands, Band 1 and Band 2. Band 1 schools serve areas with the highest concentration of disadvantage and they receive maximum support in terms of funding and staffing. There are currently 876 DEIS-designated schools – this comprises 199 urban Band 1 primary schools and 141 urban Band 2 primary schools; together with a further 333 rural DEIS primary schools and 203 DEIS-designated post-primary schools (DES 2009).

Other DEIS-related initiatives indirectly include the work of the HSCL scheme which has 392 co-ordinators. This scheme was initiated in 1990 as a pilot project in 55 primary schools that were already part of the Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, the contemporary educational disadvantage policy (NESF 2009). The underlying policy of the scheme is one that seeks to promote partnership between parents and schools. The purpose of this partnership is to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and to promote their retention in the education system. Through the work of local HSCL co-ordinators, complemented by a network of regional and national co-ordinators, the HSCL Scheme focuses on supporting marginalised pupils; promoting co-operation between home, school and community; empowering parents; retaining young people in the education system; and disseminating best practice (HSCL 2006). Evaluations of the HSCL scheme have concluded that *“major effects on pupil achievement of a project such as the HSCL scheme would be likely to be long term rather than short term”* (Ryan 1999, p.31), but that large majorities of co-ordinators and principals believe that the scheme has had a positive impact on parents, schools, the community and pupils (Archer and Shortt 2003; Mulkerrins 2007). The SCP is also now part of DEIS, with each cluster of DEIS schools and other relevant agencies required to prepare and submit a costed plan for in-school, after-school, out-of-school and holiday supports for children who may be at risk of not fully benefitting from educational provisions.

The Social Inclusion Unit of the DES is responsible for policy, coordination of strategy and the administration of programmes relating to educational disadvantage at primary level (Government of Ireland 2006a). In May 2009 plans were announced to expand the remit of the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) with effect from the 1st September 2009, to include responsibility for the HSCL scheme, the SCP and the Visiting Teacher Service for Traveller pupils (VTTS) as well as the National Educational Welfare Service. The four

individual services will amalgamate some 750 personnel under the management of the newly expanded NEWB. According to the DES (2010), the rationale for this new single strategic approach is to deliver better outcomes for children, families and schools.

2.4 The Voice of the Child

The current evaluation is located within a specific Irish societal and policy context and the following developments are of particular relevance to it:

- Ireland's ratification, in 1992, of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations (UN) 1989)⁹;
- The subsequent introduction of the National Children's Strategy (Department of Health & Children (DH&C) 2000) in 2000, which led to the establishment of the National Children's Office (NCO) in 2001¹⁰;
- The enactment of the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002 (DH&C 2002), which resulted in the establishment of the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) in 2004¹¹; and
- The foundation of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) in 2005 which incorporates the former NCO.

The evaluation accessed the perspectives of a sample of pupils/students of primary and post-primary school age to exercise their right, under the UNCRC (UN 1989), the National Children's Strategy (DH&C 2000), the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002 (DH&C 2002) and the Education Act, 1998 (DES 1998) to participate in matters that affected them in their education, notably the transition between primary level and post-primary level schooling. It is anticipated that their involvement in this study will, in turn, better inform the development and delivery of the *Mission Transition* programme, as it is recognised that they (pupils/students) are the ultimate service users of the programme and it is their lives and

⁹ Which outlines that '*States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child*' (UN, 1989: Article 12.1).

¹⁰ Which states that children and young people should be given '*...a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity*' (DH&C 2000, p.30).

¹¹ Outlines that the OCO should be established as an independent office to perform the functions as laid out in the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002 whilst having '*...regard to the best interests of the child concerned and shall, in so far as practicable, give due consideration, having regard to the age and understanding of the child, to his or her wishes*' (DH&C 2002: Article 6.2).

experiences that are impacted by it. However, that participation was only possible with the approval of the school, which is grounded in a framework of the Education Act, 1998 (DES 1998) and the Primary School Curriculum (DES 1999). And finally, their participation was made possible through the permission of their parent/guardian as the ultimate gatekeeper i.e. according to the Irish constitution they are the primary educators of children and they therefore exercise their children's right to education (Government of Ireland 1937).

2.5 Historical Context of Transition

Transition, according to Downes (2009), is a social construct and therefore varies from person to person. For the purposes of this report, transition is defined as the process associated with transfer from primary to post-primary schooling (O'Brien 2004). The process of transition has been well-documented internationally, and to a lesser degree, nationally (DES 1981; INTO 2009; O'Brien 2004 & 2008; Smyth et al. 2004). The concept of support around the time of transition from primary to post-primary first arose in Irish education during the 1960s. The introduction of free education in 1966 resulted in large numbers of pupils entering post-primary education, accompanied with difficulties (on the schools' behalf) to cope with students who previously may not have traditionally transferred, namely "*slow learners, [children from] deprived backgrounds, [children displaying] emotional difficulties, [children with] specific learning difficulties, [children with] physical disabilities, [children with] sensory difficulties, uninterested and poorly motivated [children]*" (DES 1981, p.18). Difficulties such as poor communication, bullying, curricular discontinuity, poor teacher knowledge and a lack of pastoral care began to emerge as these students commenced their post-primary school journey. In an effort to alleviate such difficulties, the DES commissioned the Report of the Pupil-Transfer Committee (DES 1981), which made a number of recommendations to address the issue of transition. These recommendations included the introduction of pastoral care teams; the establishment of Transfer Advisors to school clusters; greater communication between primary and post-primary schools through report cards; improved parental involvement; and the provision of in-service training for teachers.

The first assertions that there was a statutory responsibility on all educational stakeholders to co-operate in the best interests of children were formalised in 1998, in the White Paper on Education – *Charting Our Education Future and the Education Act, 1998* (DES 1998). These

included the effective liaison and consultation between schools, parents and other bodies (OECD 2007). Subsequently, the revised Primary Curriculum (1999), made specific reference to transition, stating that the consistency between primary and post-primary junior-cycle curricula coupled with attempts to facilitate better communication at both levels, should help to ease pupil progress between primary and post-primary levels of schooling (INTO 2009).

2.6 Barriers to Successful Transition

As previously acknowledged, a number of key barriers to a successful transition have long been recognised throughout relevant literature. Some of the areas that warrant particular discussion include transition anxieties, the role of parents, parental cultural capital, class streaming, entrance exams and curricular discontinuity. The following sections will attempt to explore these barriers in greater detail under their respective headings.

Transition Anxieties

Prior anticipation of the move to post-primary school causes certain anxieties for the majority of primary pupils (Hargreaves & Galton 2002; O'Brien 2001), with girls expressing greater anxieties than boys (Hargreaves & Galton 2002; Knox 1987; O'Brien 2001). Girls' particular anxieties relate to getting something wrong in class. While boys also have anxieties relating to academic performance, they are more confident and reported to settle in to post-primary school more quickly than girls (NCCA 2004). According to O'Brien (2008), the majority of anxieties expressed by students directly before they enter post-primary school and in the few weeks directly after, relate to one of three areas of school life, specifically – social, institutional and academic concerns. Downes highlighted that the most difficult and long-lasting worry tends to be a fear of failure (or what Downes refers to as "*fatalism*") (Downes 2009). This anxiety/worry comprises elements such as subjects, homework and examinations (O'Brien 2008). Social anxieties often include being bullied, changes in friendships, safety concerns, dealing with other children and relations with teachers (O'Brien 2004; Smyth et al. 2004) while urban myths such as "*1st Year beatings*" are also highlighted (Measor & Woods 1984). Institutional anxieties tend to incorporate issues such as disciplinary procedures, size of the new building, timetables, longer school days and regular changing of classroom within the school day (Maunsell et al. 2007; O'Brien 2001). In the main, these types of anxieties tend to be short-lived and decrease after a brief period of time (O'Brien 2004).

The existence of such anxieties highlights the importance of effective support measures for pupils during the period of transition. One such measure may include the development of continuity of a familiar social environment across primary to post-primary (Downes 2009). Through this transitional environment, such as summer camps, key pupil concerns can be addressed by means of discussion, reassurance, encouragement, understanding and empathy (Evangelou et al. 2008). Sweeney (2006) advocates the establishment of a formal induction support team between post-primary schools and their feeder primary schools; comprising of principals, HSCLs, Year Heads, SEN and career guidance representatives. It is suggested that such an approach would allow for: the smooth transfer of pupils, continuity of pupil experiences, removal of fear and the building of positive relationships between parents, students and schools.

The importance of good quality relationships cannot be underestimated and Meier (1992) cites personalised, caring relationships with teachers as a pre-requisite for doing well in school. At the beginning of pupils' first year in post-primary school, they are generally positive about their school and teachers (NCCA 2004). Research suggests that students tend to increasingly express worries about their relationships with teachers at post-primary, with male students dominating this category. Fears mainly relate to teachers' strictness, standards of work and concern about school rules (O'Brien 2005).

Class Streaming/Entrance Exam

Another obstacle associated with transition to post-primary is that of student selection or 'streaming'. Streaming, which can be defined as "*classes grouped on the basis of [academic] ability*" (Smyth et al. 2004), has been much debated in academic literature (Hannan and Boyle 1987 & 1989; Smyth *et al.* 1996; INTO 2009; Lacey 1970). Such literature highlights that streaming is embedded in many post-primary schools and suggests that such practice has serious implications for students (O'Brien 2004). In recent times, there seems to be conflicting research as to the extent of the practice of 'streaming'. Specifically, the NCCA (2004) suggest that the practice occurs in a minority of schools, while O'Brien (2008) indicates that the practice of streaming is commonplace. Either way, both agree that the practice is a hazardous one. In a 2004 study among nine hundred first-year post-primary students, it was found that students in higher-level streams can often take longer to settle in due to the pace of learning (NCCA 2004). Conversely, students who are allocated to lower-

level streams are more likely to experience low levels of self-esteem, to be truant and to display stress-induced behaviours (Lacey 1970; O'Brien 2008; O'Kelly 1986, Smyth et al. 2006). In an attempt to ease the difficulties associated with streaming, and given the differing focus of the post-primary curriculum, teachers at primary level often prepare children for entrance assessments that are administered by post-primary schools (INTO 2009). Furthermore, it was found that primary teachers tend to tailor the primary curriculum towards those entrance exams (O'Brien 2004).

Curricular Discontinuity

Another difficulty with the transition process is that of curricular discontinuity. As mentioned earlier, the *Report of the Pupil Transfer Committee* (DES 1981) saw as problematic the sudden change from a type of learning that focuses on the child's active participation in the learning process to learning focused on individual subjects and a public examination system. This viewpoint is supplemented by Smyth *et al* (2004), who reports that first-year students often experience discontinuity in learning experiences between primary and post-primary school. Transition to post-primary means adopting many new subjects and engaging in familiar subjects in new ways. Although for most students the new curriculum provides a stimulating and challenging experience, there exist a considerable number of students for whom the curriculum does not match either their interests or needs (NCCA 2004). For some students, it is felt that: (i) the primary curriculum is not a good foundation for post-primary school subjects (INTO 2009); (ii) only half of post-primary level teachers reported familiarity with the nature of the primary curriculum (NCCA 2004); and (iii) post-primary school teachers often hold unrealistic views of the primary curriculum (Galton et al. 2003). This would appear hugely significant since Smyth *et al.* (2004) found that students are more likely to experience transition problems if they feel their primary subjects did not prepare them for post-primary school. That said, levels of discontinuity can vary and may be more prevalent in certain school contexts (INTO 2009).

Transition Interventions

In an attempt to alleviate the impact of some of the difficulties associated with transition, a variety of intervention programmes for, and approaches to, transition have begun to be implemented, often at a local level and that such programmes assist in the transition from primary to post-primary by:

- providing information on the new system and structures which the pupil will encounter;
- enabling pupils to identify strategies which will assist them in overcoming the difficulties which may arise; and
- Providing a forum for pupils and their parents/guardians to express any fears that they may have during the process of change.

(SCP 2005, p.20).

Some examples of programmes/initiatives with a particular remit for dealing with transition include the 'Ok, Let's Go' Programme (Galway VEC 1998), the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme, SCP, Meitheal and Primary/Post-primary Co-ordinators (INTO 2009).

2.7 Parents and Transition

Research also highlights the crucial role of parents in supporting their children during the process of school transfer (Anderson et al. 2000). Although fathers have a strong input in to the choice of school, it is mostly mothers who engage in extensive educational work and research into post-primary schools around the time of transition (O'Brien 2008). Areas such as encouraging communication between primary and post-primary; seeking advice/information; encouraging pupils to partake in extra-curricular activities; and the selection of a particular post-primary school are all seen as key functions of the female parent/guardian (Sweeney 2006). In Ireland, little or no research exists in relation to school selection, with parents at liberty to choose their preferred school and to apply accordingly (O'Brien 2008). However, research suggests that parents' cultural capital, social class and race/ethnicity play an important role in the selection of post-primary level schooling (Gerwitz et al. 1994).

Parental Cultural Capital

The development of the concept of cultural capital facilitated Bourdieu to explain "*the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes*" (Higgins 2008, p.16). According to Bourdieu "*cultural capital*" can be subdivided into three distinct forms. The embodied form is located in "*long-lasting dispositions of mind and body*"

(1986, p.243) and this can be understood in relation to this study in terms of the attitudes parents, teachers and children to learning and an acknowledgement of learning aspirations. Secondly, the objectified state can be understood in terms of “*cultural goods*” (ibid, p.243) which can include pictures, books, dictionaries and computers. Finally, cultural capital can be understood in terms of how the ‘institutionalised’ state “*confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital it is presumed to guarantee*” (ibid, p.243) and can be understood in terms of the link between accreditation or educational achievements and employment.

As pointed out by Higgins (2008, p.16), “*a domestic environment replete with cultural capital may facilitate educational attainment more easily, thus making learning more accessible than an environment without such privilege*”. Parents with strong levels of cultural capital generally occupy the middle classes and are skilled at choosing their child’s school while migrant families (though they may also occupy the middle classes) are at a disadvantage as they lack first-hand knowledge to interpret the Irish educational system (INTO 2009). Additionally, middle class parents traditionally seek schools where streaming is practiced, believing that academic achievement rather than general well-being should be the focus of education (O’Brien 2008). Evangelou et al. (2008) found that parents who lacked cultural capital, or those who tried to use their cultural capital to subvert the system, were likely to hinder a successful transition for their child. Whether or not a parent can successfully negotiate the post-primary school selection process, making a successful transition to post-primary still remains a complex process and is often affected by elements such as social class, the resources of a child’s family, the post-primary system, as well as by the characteristics of individual schools (O’Brien 2004).

Parental Involvement

Research suggests two decisive predictors of parental engagement, namely school practices and parental beliefs/perceptions (Dauber & Epstein 1993, Desforges 1993, Sheldon 2002, Sheldon 2009). Specific school practices that have been shown to improve parental involvement include: assigning homework specifically designed to promote pupil-parent interactions, holding workshops for families and improving communication levels to parents about their child’s education (Sheldon 2009). Parental predictors include educational aspirations and attitudes toward school, as well as parents’ own beliefs regarding their educational responsibilities (Desforges 2003, Sheldon 2009). Other influential factors for parental involvement include teacher attitudes, family resources and a belief that parents can

affect meaningful educational change for their child (Desforges 2003, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1997, Sheldon 2002).

The home is a key site for child development, it is “*the basic setting within which children are introduced to social living*” (Schaffer 2004 cited in Higgins 2008, p.22). Wescott, Dodd and Konzal contend “...*that what parents do at home to support the school’s efforts is a major influence on how well children do in school*” (2000, p.248). Parental involvement at home can include activities such as discussions about school, assisting with homework and reading with children. Henderson and Berla highlight the central role of the home in creating a positive learning environment and conclude that “...*regardless of income, education level or cultural background, all families can and do contribute to their child’s success*” (1994 cited in Higgins 2008, p.23). They found that the most accurate predictor of student’s achievement was neither “...*income or social status but the extent to which the family was able to*”:

- Create a home environment that encourages learning;
- Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children’s achievement and future careers; and
- Become involved in their children’s education at school and in community.

(1994 cited in Higgins, 2008, p.23)

Research regarding parental involvement at school suggests that higher levels of parental involvement, manifested in such ways as attending meetings, volunteering or assuming a role of responsibility (e.g. Board of Management) within a school, plays an influential role in the educational progress of the child (Sheldon 2009). The INTO emphasise that the school must:

“... *ensure that parents have the opportunity to learn about and become familiar with how and what their children learn in class, they need to know that their active participation is both welcome and needed and that it can make a significant contribution to their children’s welfare*” (1994, p.99).

Parental ability to play a proactive role in preparing the child for school and in helping them negotiate their educational journey is dependent on many factors including their own prior school experience and educational attainment, their understanding of their roles as parents and their access to networks, resources and supports (Sheldon 2009). Parental lack of value

for education is regularly cited as a cause for educational failure, specifically in relation to working class parents (Hanafin & Lynch 2002, Sheldon 2009). However, difference between middle class and working class parents emerges not in the aspirations they have for their children but in the resources available to them to operationalise their aspirations (Sheldon 2009). By providing the necessary supports, there are immediate practical parent outcomes. According to Haynes and Ben-Avie parents may “...learn ways to help their children” and “...become more motivated to further their own education” (1996 cited in Higgins 2008, p.45).

Epstein et al. (2002), in an attempt to assist educators in promoting greater parental involvement developed a framework for defining six different types of parental involvement which list practices that can help to promote parental involvement in learning. A summary of Epstein’s framework is provided below:

- **Parenting:** Help all families establish home environments to support children as students. E.g. Parent education and other courses or training for parents, home visits at transition points to pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school etc.
- **Communicating:** Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. E.g. Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools.
- **Volunteering:** Recruit and organise parent help and support. E.g. Annual survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers.
- **Learning at Home:** Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. E.g. Information on homework policies, skills required for students in all subjects, how to assist students to improve skills on class and school assessments.
- **Decision-making:** Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives. E.g. Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements, school councils and committees for family and community involvement.

- **Collaborating with Community:** Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. E.g. Information on community, recreational, social support, and other programs, information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents.

(Epstein et al. 2002)

Ethnicity and Gender

Studies examining transition processes have explored the relationship between ethnicity/gender and factors relating to successful transition, identifying that students from the Travelling community; students of non-Irish national parentage; and female students tend to take longer to settle in to post-primary school (NCCA 2004; Graham & Hill 2004). In general, research suggests that most parents recognise the importance of transition for their children but have differing levels of ability to support their children through this challenging time (Darmody 2008; Evangelou et al. 2008; Gutman and Midgley 2000). It has also been suggested that some parents may be unaware of the significance of institutional practices in the school and consequently may seem more distanced from the school (O'Brien 1987). On the other hand, those parents with cultural capital have little or no difficulty in "*choosing schools, supporting academic work and purchasing social advantage in suitable leisure-time activities*" (INTO 2009, p.9).

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a geographic and demographic profile of the Northside of Limerick, NLH's primary target area. According to most recent CSO figures (CSO 2006), St. Munchin's and Moyross areas exhibit high levels of unemployment when compared with national norms and have been classed as "*disadvantaged*" and "*extremely disadvantaged*" respectively (Haase & Pratschke 2008). Additionally, both St. Munchin's and Moyross areas exhibit high levels of unemployment particularly amongst males. In educational terms, the percentage of population with 3rd level qualifications is lower than the national norm while figures for those aged 15+ who left school at or before the age of 15 are considerably lower than both Limerick City and the national norms. All of these factors, as suggested by research, can have a negative impact on the educational aspirations and attainment levels of

pupils/students and their families. This chapter also explored the historical context for transition in Irish education since 1981, as well as discussing relevant legislation and some of the more pertinent issues in the area of transition as highlighted by research – namely transition anxieties, class streaming, entrance exams, curricular discontinuity, the role of parents and cultural capital.

Chapter 3 - Programme Model

3.1 Northside Learning Hub

The Northside Learning Hub (NLH) was founded as a charitable company in October 2007. It was formed with an overall aim of working in partnership with local education providers, families and pupils/students to develop and implement practical and solution-focused responses to the high levels of educational disadvantage and early school leaving experienced by local communities on the Northside of Limerick City. For a number of years, prior to the inception of the NLH, local partners worked together to establish how the buildings and grounds that were generously donated in educational trust by St. Martin's Centre Trust and the Salesian Order to the NLH could be developed to make a real impact on the educational landscape. A steering group was established to assess the possible objectives of the project and engaged a group of consultants (80:20)¹² to carry out a consultative process with local communities, schools and pupils/students to establish the possible aims of any proposed projects. Following this consultative process, consensus formed amongst all concerned that the NLH should concentrate on working to address the high levels of educational disadvantage and the early school leaving experienced locally (NLH 2010).

As stated earlier, the NLH serves a community faced with many barriers to full social inclusion such as low levels of educational attainment and a high ratio of children to adults. The area surrounding the NLH has also been affected by higher than average levels of crime and anti-social behaviour (NLH 2008). The combination of challenges such as those outlined can play a role in determining whether or not pupils/students within such communities reach their full potential. The nature of communities and their associated resources impacts both directly and indirectly on the individual (Higgins 2008). Community characteristics such as expectations, role models, skill transfers, peer group interactions between individuals and the quality of housing may all impact on the capacity of the community to support children's learning (Kellaghan 1993; Gibbons 2001; Higgins 2008).

¹² 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World is an Irish-based educational charity founded in 1996. It promotes popular education on human development and human rights. For 80:20, education is fundamental to understanding the shape and nature of our unequal world, to interacting with that world as well as to imagining and shaping a different world (80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World 2010).

Projects developed by NLH aim to increase the capacity of the community to overcome these obstacles by gathering and organising members of the community and key stakeholders around an activity of common interest i.e. the healthy and positive development of children (NLH 2008). The general aim of NLH is to develop projects that offer a holistic and flexible approach to addressing these issues.

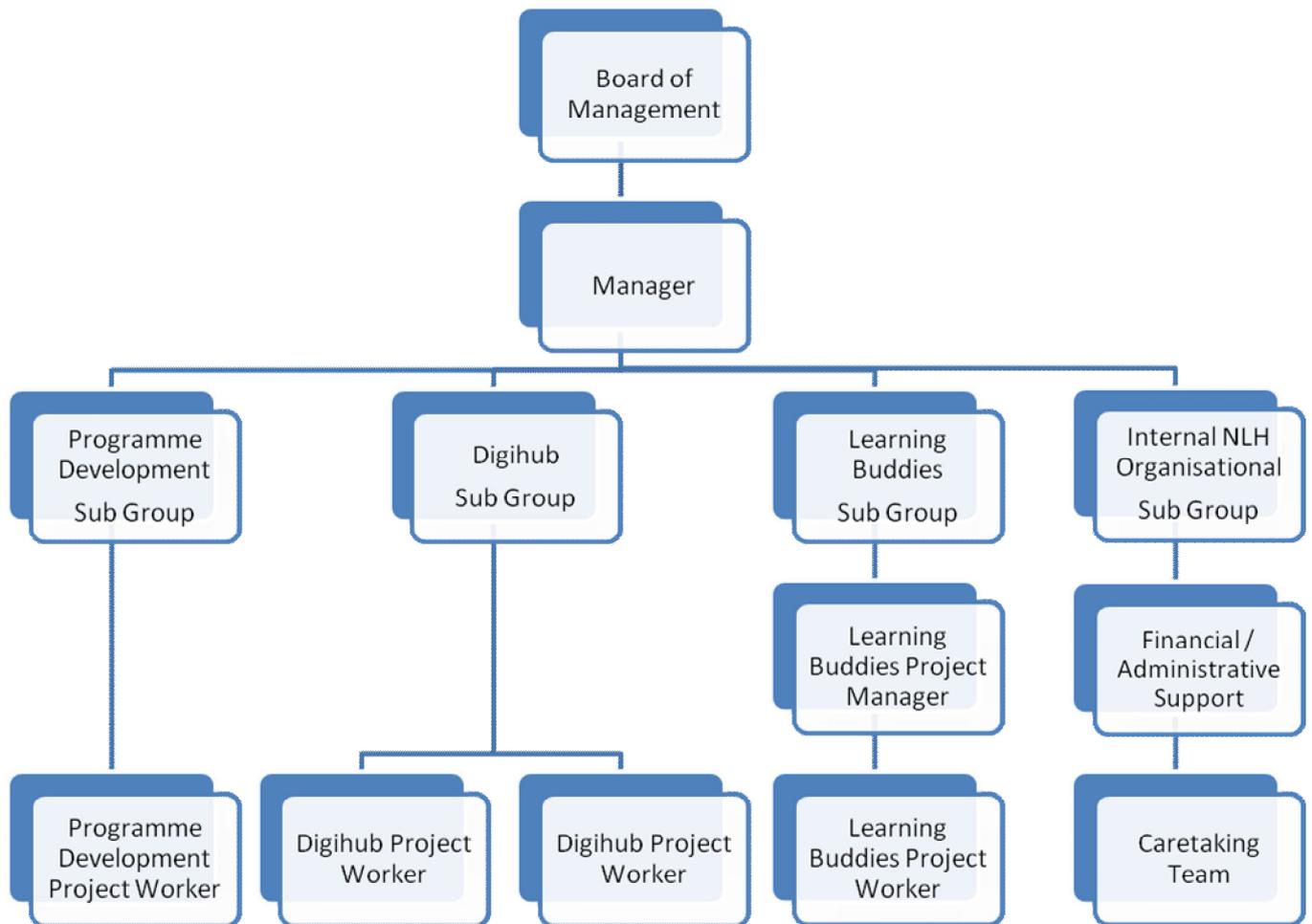


Figure 3: NLH Organisational Structure¹³

The NLH has identified the following strategic objectives designed to meet the needs of pupils, students and their families in the Northside area:

¹³ The Mission Transition Project Worker, in conjunction with the Programme Development Sub Group, has particular responsibility for the design, implementation and review of Mission Transition.

- Deliver projects and programmes that encourage pupils/students to actively engage and fully participate in mainstream society in a safe and welcoming facility;
- Provide a creative approach to the delivery of key aspects of the mainstream educational curriculum and health agenda to students and families who sometimes find a non-formal approach to learning more accessible;
- Develop projects that encourage pupils/students to explore their talents and abilities in a way that inspires the wider community;
- Provide transition, participation and progression opportunities for all pupils/students in the Northside catchment area from primary to third level education;
- Provide opportunities for family-learning and support; and
- Work in collaboration with other agencies to offer opportunities for personal growth through non-formal learning.

3.2 Mission Transition

Mission Transition is a programme, developed by the NLH, which aims to prepare students and parents for post-primary education i.e. it is a programme which supports the transition process from primary school to post-primary school. This programme aims to increase the levels of confidence and readiness in sixth class pupils and guide them through the initial weeks of first year in post-primary level education. The programme consists of a student element and a parent element¹⁴, and aims to help both students and parents to understand that a new school can provide an opportunity for a fresh start, as well as many enjoyable experiences.

The inception of *Mission Transition* came about during an exploration of issues within the Northside community which highlighted the transition between primary and post-primary school as a key area of concern for local pupils/students (NLH 2008). A survey, carried out locally in 2006 by NLH with a sample of sixth class pupils in four Northside primary schools and first year pupils in two post-primary schools led to the identification of a range of fears

¹⁴ Originally, it was intended that this evaluation would access the perspectives of parents/guardians participating in the parent-focused element of the Mission Transition programme. However, as previously mentioned (see footnote 4), although the parental element of the programme has been designed, at the time of the evaluation the implementation of the parent-focused element was non-existent.

that the pupils linked to the process of transferring to post-primary school (NLH 2008). As a result of the survey, NLH designed a programme, which they titled *Mission Transition*.

Mission Transition has been piloted in four primary schools and two post-primary schools since 2007. Approximately one hundred and twenty pupils/students engage with the *Mission Transition* programme on an annual basis, in conjunction with their HSCL Co-ordinator and Class Teacher/Year Head. The annual cost of the programme is outlined in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Mission Transition Annual Cost Breakdown		
Description	Total Cost of Programme p.a.	Cost per Child p.a.
<i>Mission Transition Project Worker annual salary (including PRSI)</i>	€40,000	€333.33
Print & Stationery	€3,000	€25
ICT Costs (Software/Laptop etc.)	€1,500	€12.50
Travel & Expenses	€500	€4.17
Total	€45,000	€375

Based on the delivery of the programme to one hundred and twenty pupils/students, these figures indicate that the cost of implementing the *Mission Transition* programme per pupil/student is €375 per annum. The majority of this cost is associated with the salary of the *Mission Transition* Project Worker who co-ordinates and delivers the programme (€333.33 per pupil/student), as well as ancillary costs such as printing (€25 per pupil/student), ICT related costs (€12.50 per pupil/student) and travel (€4.17 per pupil/student).

Aims and objectives of Mission Transition

The over-arching aim of *Mission Transition* is to “*ease the transition process from primary school to post-primary school for students and parents*” (NLH 2008). The programme aims, in particular, to give pupils and students the confidence to turn their feelings of fear and anxiety into excitement and anticipation, by helping them to understand that although post-primary school is a time of great change, it also represents an opportunity for a fresh start.

The objectives of the programme (as determined by the NLH) are that students and parents will:

- Gain knowledge of the structure of the post-primary school day e.g. timetables;
- Learn about the structure of the post-primary staff system;
- Recognise and understand the need for school rules;
- Explore the post-primary syllabus, new subjects and subject choice;
- Gain confidence to combat fears / anxieties; and
- Become familiar with the support-system available to them.

(NLH 2008)

Programme Delivery

Since 2007, *Mission Transition* has been implemented in four primary schools and two post-primary schools annually. Ordinarily, the programme is implemented within the latter eight-week period of the primary school calendar and within the initial eight-week period of the post-primary school calendar (for the follow-on programme). As outlined previously, the programme is managed by the NLH but relies heavily on the co-operation and support of school management, staff and HSCLs, particularly during the implementation periods. The *Mission Transition* Project Worker was responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of the *Mission Transition* programme between 2007 and 2009, in association with the HSCL Co-ordinators of participating primary and post-primary schools.

Upon visiting the participating schools, the Project Worker employed a variety of approaches to deliver the programme e.g. journal activities, group discussions and student/parent presentations. In 2009, NLH staff were involved in the delivery of the pupil/student element, while HSCL Co-ordinators attempted to deliver the parent-focused element of this programme¹⁵. Following endorsements by the participating HSCL Co-ordinators, the programme has more recently been implemented by non-target schools. Those schools are located within the greater Limerick City area, but also within Ballymun, Co. Dublin¹⁶.

¹⁵ See footnote 4 on page 19 in relation to the implementation of the parental element of Mission Transition.

¹⁶ Consultation was conducted with a Ballymun programme representative during this evaluation. The findings of that process are contained in Chapter 7 of this report.

Programme Activities

The content of the *Mission Transition* programme can be classified into four distinct sections, namely Preparation, Transfer, Induction and Consolidation. The Preparation and Transfer elements are dealt with at primary-level, while Induction and Consolidation are covered in early post-primary. A description of the underpinning aim of each element is outlined below:

- a) **Preparation** – providing students and parents with information about the nature of post-primary education, the structure of the school day, the structure of the staff system and the support network;
- b) **Transfer** - a more in-depth look at what to expect, where to go and what is required for beginning post-primary school. This usually occurs during the final week of primary school and culminates in a Graduation/Farewell ceremony;
- c) **Induction** – orientation and knowledge of the new school system. This takes place after the students have begun their post-primary school experience; and
- d) **Consolidation** – once students have adapted to their new environment, they are presented with opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to be responsible for their own learning in post-primary school.

The central focus of the programme throughout these four elements is the use of the *Mission Transition* journal. While the pupils are in 6th class, and in conjunction with the *Mission Transition* Project Worker, pupils work their way through the *Mission Transition* journal covering topics such as Expectations, Staff Systems, Entrance Exams, Understanding the Subjects and Extra Curricular Activities while in 6th class. Once the pupils have moved to post-primary, topics such as Timetables, the School Journal and Teachers are introduced. A more specific programme plan is outlined in Table 6 below.

Programme Plan

6th Class

- Expectations
- School Day
- Staff System
- Support Network
- Entrance Assessments
- Understanding the Subjects
- New Subjects to Explore
- Subject Choice
- Extra Curricular Activities

1st Year

- Orientation
- Timetables
- School Journal
- Uniform, Books & Stationery
- Classmates
- Teachers
- Change
- Extra Curricular Activities
- Open Night

Table 6: Mission Transition Programme Plan

Each of these sections are delivered by the *Mission Transition* Project Worker using a range of teaching methodologies such as pupil-discussion, role-play, journal activities (see Appendix F, G & H), pair work and group work to explore programme content in each of the specific areas outlined above.

Chapter 4 - Northside Learning Hub Perspectives

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the perspectives of the Northside Learning Hub staff familiar with the *Mission Transition* programme, namely -

- The NLH Manager, with responsibility for overseeing all of the NLH programmes;
- The *Mission Transition* Project Worker, with responsibility for the design and implementation of the *Mission Transition* programme; and
- One NLH Project Manager (managing another NLH project) and three Project Workers, involved in the delivery of the *Mission Transition* programme.

4.2 Methodology

Methods of data collection utilised during this phase of the evaluation were qualitative in nature. One-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with the NLH Manager and the *Mission Transition* Project Worker (see Appendix A for interview schedule). The remaining NLH staff, involved in the delivery of the programme over the past number of years, were invited to partake in a semi-structured focus group (see Appendix B for focus group schedule). Confidentiality was guaranteed to all participants. However, given the unique positions of the NLH Manager and the *Mission Transition* Project Worker, anonymity could not be guaranteed to the persons holding those positions. All interviews were digitally recorded to facilitate analysis and verification, and were destroyed at a later date. Data relating to three central themes was gathered, those themes were: the development of *Mission Transition*, the implementation of *Mission Transition*, and *Mission Transition* programme outcomes. This chapter is presented under those themes.

4.3 The Development of Mission Transition

The findings contained in the following section have been sub-divided under three headings:

1. The aims and objectives of *Mission Transition*;
2. The early stages of development of the programme; and
3. Recent changes to the programme.

Aims and Objectives of Mission Transition

The main aim of the *Mission Transition* programme, as articulated by the majority of NLH staff, is to work with parents and pupils to improve their knowledge and confidence relating to the transition between primary and post-primary school in a more structured way. The NLH staff highlighted that the main reason for wanting to include the participating pupils/students and parents in the programme was that for many parents, it may have been quite a number of years since they attended post-primary school themselves, and in a number of cases their experience of attending post-primary school may have been a negative one:

“You wouldn’t want any of that negativity funnelling down to the kids.” (NLH2)

Initially the programme was delivered in four primary and two post-primary schools which fell within the general catchment area of the NLH. The programme has since evolved, and although it is still solely delivered by the NLH to the pupils/students within the four primary schools and two post-primary schools located in the Northside of Limerick City, it is intended that the programme be transferable to any school willing to implement the programme. Justification for such an approach, as pointed out by one of the NLH staff, was that:

“...every school has people who are going to have trouble coping when they move into a school that is bigger... it doesn’t mean that they have to be disadvantaged by any means.” (NLH2)

Early Stages of Development of the Programme

In the early stages of developing the *Mission Transition* programme, NLH benefitted from the generous provisions of the Salesian Order who provided funding for the development of the programme over a three-year period. Prior to the employment of a *Mission Transition* Project Worker, the NLH Manager conducted an unpublished, informal survey among target primary schools to establish what the pupils knew about post-primary school; what they did not know; and whether or not they had anxieties and fears relative to transferring to post-primary school. The NLH Manager outlined that this informal survey identified the need for a local transition intervention/programme. Following the employment of a *Mission Transition* Project Worker, an initial draft of the *Mission Transition* programme was developed and was reviewed by schools. According to the NLH Manager, other areas, such as bullying, friendship and self-esteem, were suggested by the teachers as elements that might be included in the programme. Although these elements were seen as factors associated with transition,

NLH staff felt that the inclusion of such elements, in a formal way, might deflect from the core focus of the *Mission Transition* programme and could end up duplicating the SPHE curriculum:

“The argument could be made that a programme such as Mission Transition should be a stand-alone curricular area” (NLH1)

This point was further re-iterated during focus group discussions with NLH staff who suggested that the *Mission Transition* programme was essentially about passing on information and skills pertaining to the structure of post-primary school and how it works. According to one NLH staff member, the focus for *Mission Transition* is about:

“...delving into the knowns and unknowns by providing a programme which is 70% knowledge and 30% skills. This in turn helps to give knowledge, build awareness and encourage confidence in managing oneself.” (NLH4)

Recent Changes to the Programme

During the fieldwork, the NLH staff agreed that since its inception, the programme has undergone very little systematic change other than some aesthetic changes to the design and layout of the pupil journal. While all NLH staff agreed that the revised journal had greatly enhanced the programme, some members of staff expressed reservations about the complexity of information presented within it. According to some staff, the ideal target audience for *Mission Transition* were the pupils/students who were most likely to drop-out of post-primary school during their first year. They added that such “*at risk*” pupils/students were usually those experiencing literacy difficulties. A number of staff agreed that the journal must be pitched at a certain level, so as not to distract or overly-complicate things for the pupils/students with whom they engage (which they felt might negate the benefit of a programme such as *Mission Transition*). Both the NLH Manager and *Mission Transition* Project Worker, during their interview, also acknowledged that the journal may be a little intimidating, particularly for pupils/students with low literacy levels, and should consider its choice of vocabulary and design wisely. They felt that the adoption of urban/youth slang (although fantastic to look at) might encourage poor spelling among the pupils/students with whom they engage:

“There’s a page at the moment that has the School Rulz with r-u-l-z, and I just hate that because kids’ spellings are so bad anyway that you are nearly encouraging it.” (NLH2)

4.4 The Implementation of Mission Transition

The following section will be presented under the following sub-headings:

1. The delivery model;
2. Programme delivery logistics;
3. The programme structure; and
4. Successful transition.

The Delivery Model

During the course of consultations between the research team and the NLH Manager it emerged that the responsibility for the implementation of the programme initially rested with one specific *Mission Transition* Project Worker. However, in 2009, due to a change in staffing circumstances, a number of other NLH staff, along with one HSCL co-ordinator, also became involved in the delivery of the programme across the six schools. The NLH Manager highlighted that arrangements were made for a system of shadowing/training for some of the other NLH staff. It was outlined that these staff then arranged to cover schools involved in the *Mission Transition* programme. Schools were also offered an opportunity to meet with the *Mission Transition* Project Worker to discuss the *Mission Transition* programme and to self-deliver the programme in the classroom, however, as outlined by the *Mission Transition* Project Worker, such meetings rarely materialised. Overall, while it was acknowledged that all teachers did engage with the programme at varying levels, it was felt that for *Mission Transition* to continue to be successful, it needed an increased level of engagement from teachers in schools. According to the NLH Manager it was the aspiration of NLH that schools would take the programme on themselves after its first year of delivery. However, as evidenced throughout this evaluation, this has yet to materialise.

Programme Delivery Logistics

One of the difficulties of the *Mission Transition* programme, as identified by the *Mission Transition* Project Worker, was deciding on the methods and times for delivering the programme. As previously outlined, the programme is co-ordinated by one NLH staff member, with the support of other staff as required. The *Mission Transition* Project Worker spends six weeks preparing the programme journal and visiting each school at primary level and post-primary level to disseminate the journals and implement the programme.

While the content of the *Mission Transition* programme, as previously highlighted, follows a set structure across all schools, NLH staff outlined that the methods of delivery are very much tailored to suit the needs and requirements of each individual school, with a degree of flexibility in terms of timetabling visits etc. A difficulty with this delivery approach (as identified by NLH staff during both the individual interviews and the focus groups) was that the timing of the programme tended not to suit some elements of the programme, for example, the Entrance Exam element of the programme would be more beneficial if it were delivered prior to the primary level students completing their post-primary level entrance exam. Both the staff and management of the NLH were concerned that current scheduling does not meet the needs of the pupils/students i.e.:

“...that’s great but it doesn’t really work well in that one of the sheets on the transition programme is about what the entrance exam is going to be like and they [pupils] have already sat the exam.” (NLH2)

The participating NLH staff also highlighted that because the person delivering the programme was external to the school staff, NLH was reliant on the flexibility of individual teachers and individual class timetables. The NLH staff highlighted that, although they were always conscious not to clash with subjects that the pupils really enjoyed e.g. PE and Art, this was not always within their control or at their discretion:

“The last thing pupils want to do is give it up Art or PE and you don’t want them hating you coming in.” (NLH5)

Other logistical issues identified by NLH staff mainly related to the timeframe for delivery within post-primary schools i.e. the number of weeks required to run the programme and the number of visits to include. Staff generally felt that a “short/sharp” programme of three weeks (with two visits each week) was the most effective of the current models of operation. According to NLH staff, one particular school had adopted a unique induction programme that had helped to overcome some of the logistical difficulties relating to *Mission Transition* at post-primary level. During their five week *Mission Transition* programme, 1st years remained in one class for the day (similar to primary) and teachers came to them. The programme delivered during this period of time included literacy, numeracy and a number of other elements central to *Mission Transition* (e.g. an introduction to the timetable, meeting staff and an introduction to school subjects etc.). It was outlined that such an approach allowed for easy integration of the *Mission Transition* programme.

The Programme Structure

As outlined previously, the *Mission Transition* programme works specifically with four primary schools and two post-primary schools in the Northside of Limerick City. NLH acknowledged that this presents a difficulty for *Mission Transition* in terms of programme implementation, particularly if those pupils who engage with the programme at primary level transfer to a non-target post-primary school as they will not receive the follow-up element at post-primary level. Some staff at NLH suggested that they would ideally like to see the programme extended to other schools:

“It’s a pity to get half a programme. If as many schools as possible at primary level did it and then as many schools as possible at post-primary did the first year section, you would be covering a lot of the cohort. If the majority of schools took it up, then the majority of pupils would have the follow through.” (NLH2)

Successful Transition

Overall, the NLH staff felt that a successful transition could be defined as: a pupil who was enjoying post-primary school; had overcome any fears that he/she may have had before transferring to post-primary school; was displaying an ability to make new friends; and was armed with the necessary knowledge to carry them through their post-primary level career. Conversely, it was suggested by the NLH staff that an unsuccessful transfer could be characterised by: pupils who look a bit lost; and pupils with high levels of absenteeism / who regularly leave school early. An indicator of the success of the programme for this year’s cohort, as determined by the NLH staff, was articulated by the following statement from one of the participants:

“There doesn’t seem to be too many of them with that lost look about them.” (NLH2)

4.5 Programme Outcomes

This section has been sub-divided and presented under the following headings:

1. The successes of *Mission Transition*;
2. The challenges for the programme; and
3. The future development of the programme.

Successes of Mission Transition

There was consensus that “*Mission Transition is 60% - 70% there*” (NLH3) in terms of programme development. NLH staff particularly felt that *Mission Transition* was meeting its objectives in relation to pupils by providing them with the knowledge they require. This, they felt, was being achieved through direct teaching and discussion about post-primary school, which resulted in prior preparation for the students:

“I think it [Mission Transition] is definitely helping and meeting its objectives. Even now going into the post-primary schools it’s really nice, they’ll come running up and say ‘Oh hey, can I show you my timetable etc.’” (NLH2)

All NLH staff outlined that they felt that the content being delivered to the pupils/students was new and that the knowledge was something the pupils/students required. However, some staff also felt that a key success of the programme was that pupils began to realise that they were not the only ones lacking knowledge:

“First years weren’t going in knowing everything – Mission Transition is also about knowing that not knowing everything is ok.” (NLH4)

The majority of NLH staff felt that they built up a relationship/rapport with the students with whom they engaged and that, in their opinion, was another success of the programme. The NLH staff believed that an indicator of that rapport was the positive reaction that they felt the students displayed when they (the NLH staff) returned to the respective post-primary schools. From both the manager and staff perspective, it was also felt that a mutual sense of respect and acceptance developed between NLH staff and teachers at each of the target schools as a result of *Mission Transition*. The NLH staff indicated that such a sense of acceptance was evidenced by the fact that some of the sixth class and first year teachers supporting the programme had remained constant over a number of years of the programme delivery. One respondent felt that *Mission Transition* had:

“...helped build a great relationship with schools on the back of the programme ... and opened the door for other NLH initiatives. This also facilitates NLH ability to continue relationships between ourselves and young people through primary school into post-primary school, up to Transition Year” (NLH1)

Challenges for Mission Transition

Many of the minor challenges identified by NLH staff tended to focus on logistical and organisational issues, such as timetabling and operational procedures in the participating schools. In terms of timetabling, the NLH staff felt that the practice of withdrawing pupils for resource classes etc. should be avoided during *Mission Transition* time. They (NLH staff) also outlined an awareness of the fact that the engaging pupils were dissatisfied if *Mission Transition* was delivered during, what they referred to as the pupils/students “*fun time*” e.g. during subjects such as Art or PE. This, the NLH staff believed, generated a negative attitude (for some students) towards the transition programme. Some NLH staff also felt that SPHE would be an ideal slot for introducing/administering the transition programme and that such a timetabling arrangement would help to avoid any negativity in the future.

Although all the NLH staff felt that the content covered in *Mission Transition* was appropriate, some felt that improved methodologies for delivery of that content needed to be explored. Suggestions included: more innovation, interactivity, school-specific tasks, videos and ICT-based methodologies. Most staff members believed that the programme needed to retain the pupil journal although there was some ambiguity as to whether it should be a digital or printed version. The main justification for the retention of the journal was that it presented a useful revision tool, which both the pupil and parent/guardian could refer to at a later date.

Two of the more significant challenges to *Mission Transition*, as identified by the NLH staff, were: (i) the poor level of parental engagement with the programme (despite the efforts of HSCL Co-ordinators), and (ii) the lack of follow-through with pupils who attended non-target post-primary schools. Most of the respondents were disappointed that the parental element of the *Mission Transition* programme had not developed as quickly as the pupil programme. They outlined that, while several attempts had been made to engage parents through informal coffee mornings, it was difficult to encourage sufficient numbers to engage with the programme. While *Mission Transition* staff acknowledged the great efforts of HSCLs in attempting to engage parents, they expressed disappointment that such (what they termed) “*a vital element of the programme*” had received low levels of parental engagement. From a management perspective, a more coherent strategy for parental engagement needed to be developed over the coming period:

“Although extensive efforts have been made to organise parent workshops, attendance has been low.” (NLH1).

The other significant challenge identified by the *Mission Transition* staff focused on the fact that a number of pupils who had previously engaged with the primary element of *Mission Transition*, would fail to receive any follow-up at post-primary level as they were attending non-target post-primary level schools. The NLH staff partly attributed this challenge to a migration of families from the NLH's geographic target areas to other spatial areas, over the recent past, while the NLH Manager outlined that this migration of families is having an impact on all NLH projects.

Future Development of Mission Transition

The NLH staff felt that the delivery of any pilot programme would identify teething problems. In particular, they felt that the movement of students from target primary schools to non-target post-primary schools contributed to some of the challenges of the programme in its current format, and consideration would need to be given to how best to deliver the post-primary phase of the programme to pupils/students after they had entered post-primary level education. However, NLH staff believed that ultimately the success of the programme relies on the adoption of responsibility by class teachers and HSCLs for the delivery of the programme at classroom level. This, according to NLH staff, would alleviate most of the challenges identified in the previous section.

Overall, the NLH Manager felt that funding constraints were limiting NLH's ability to develop *Mission Transition* but, that said, they would hope to secure future funding from other agencies/individuals to develop *Mission Transition* as a commercial programme (on foot of this evaluation). This programme, they felt, could then be presented to government agencies such as the DES, NCCA, SCP etc. with a view to curricular integration. The NLH identified their future role as primarily a supportive agency with particular responsibilities for administration, training and programme development. Most NLH staff saw no reason why the programme could not be implemented citywide while feelings expressed during the focus group suggested that most staff felt the programme should form an essential element of the SPHE curriculum at both late-primary and early post-primary level (perhaps on a pilot basis initially). The success of such an approach, as outlined by NLH staff, would depend on the implementation of the entire programme and not the selection of a few elements of the programme i.e.:

“... if anyone was going to take it and it was going to be done, that they would take it in its entirety and use it, they wouldn't just pick pages 1, 4 and 7.” (NLH2)

While NLH staff acknowledged that the pupil journal forms a central element of the *Mission Transition* programme, they outlined that the journal itself should only be one element of the programme. They suggested that given teachers' expertise, they would be in a unique position to employ suitable methodologies for the effective delivery of the programme, which they felt would ensure the inclusion of all pupils/students, particularly those with particular needs and abilities.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the perspectives of the Northside Learning Hub staff working with the *Mission Transition* project, namely the NLH Manager, the *Mission Transition* Project Worker, one Project Manager and three Project Workers (not directly employed with *Mission Transition*). Data gathered were analysed and presented under three central themes: the development of *Mission Transition*, the implementation of *Mission Transition*, and the *Mission Transition* programme outcomes.

Responsibility for the implementation of the programme has largely rested with the *Mission Transition* Project Worker, who in conjunction with the NLH Manager, identified and attempted to address a need for support in the area of transition from primary to post-primary school. According to respondents, it is felt that *Mission Transition* is meeting its core objective, namely to work with pupils to improve their knowledge and confidence relating to transition, although it was acknowledged that the parental element of the programme requires further development and consideration. Overall the programme has undergone little change since its inception and is very much reliant on the assistance of teachers and HSCLs to ensure the programme is implemented effectively in each of the target schools. A number of key successes and challenges associated with the programme were identified, as well as areas of possible future development. Areas of success that were identified included the effective dissemination of knowledge and information to pupils about post-primary school, as well as relationship building between the NLH and key target schools. Challenges which arose during the programme, according to NLH staff, focused on a lack of parental involvement and the difficulties associated with providing a follow-up to pupils who attended non-target

post-primary schools. Additional challenges of a logistical nature were also mentioned. Findings relating to future development, including the future sustainability of *Mission Transition* and the possibility for curricular integration of the programme were also presented.

Chapter 5 – Pupil/Student Perspectives

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of pupils and students perspectives, prior to the time of transfer from primary school (i.e. final term in 6th class) and shortly after they had made the transfer to post-primary school (i.e. 1st term in post-primary school). The data presented in this section were gathered using questionnaires and qualitative workshops at primary level and questionnaires at post-primary level. This chapter will initially present the findings from the participating 6th class pupils (n=49) followed by the findings from the 1st year students (n=42). Both sections will be presented under the following headings: participant profile, attitudes towards primary school, moving to post-primary school and views relating to *Mission Transition*.

5.2 Methodology

The methodological framework for accessing the perspectives of the students who engaged with *Mission Transition* during the second year of its implementation period included: (i) survey questionnaires and (ii) workshops. Each will be dealt with separately below:

- i. Questionnaires: Two survey questionnaires were designed for the evaluation. The first was disseminated amongst the participating pupils while they were still in primary school, and the second questionnaire (which re-tested the students' fears and anxieties upon making the transition to post-primary school) was disseminated to the same sample of students upon commencing their post-primary journey. In total, 91 survey questionnaires were completed by 49 pupils/students, 49 of which were completed before the pupils made the transition to post-primary school i.e. when they were in sixth class of primary school. The additional 42 were completed (as a follow-up) with the same group of pupils after they made the transition i.e. when they were in first year in post-primary school. Therefore, 86% of the original sample of 49 pupils was tracked to post-primary school (see Appendix D for sample survey questionnaires).

- ii. Workshops: Six workshops were conducted with 47 pupils who were, at the time of the evaluation, completing their engagement with the *Mission Transition* programme at primary level. The workshop encompassed three main themes:
- a. Student knowledge and awareness of *Mission Transition*: which examined what the participating pupils knew about *Mission Transition*, if they knew why they were engaging with the programme, what they thought of the programme staff, and whether they thought *Mission Transition* helped to prepare them for post-primary school.
 - b. *Mission Transition* Activities: this section examined the types of activities that the pupils were involved in through *Mission Transition* and whether or not they felt those activities were useful.
 - c. *Mission Transition* Improvements: This theme asked the participating pupils to discuss and complete the following statement: “*I’m the new boss of Mission Transition and will make it better by ...*”

The workshops drew on creative methodologies such as: arts and crafts, discussion groups, story-line (where students complete a story) and circle time to gather the required data. The participating pupils were invited to analyse the data themselves e.g. through recorded responses (on flip-charts), verbal interpretations of individual and group paintings/drawings, verbal representations of the discussion groups, and to verify that the data recorded by the facilitators was an accurate portrayal of their perspectives.

Confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed to all participants. The evaluators were cognisant of the Children First guidelines (DH&C 1999) should any child protection concerns arise, and pupils/students were made aware of each of these ethical considerations, as well as their right to withdraw from the evaluation, at any time. All paintings and drawings were gathered (with prior consent of the pupils) by the evaluators for further analysis.

5.3 Primary Pupils Perspectives

Participant Profile

For the academic year 2008/2009, one hundred and twenty seven pupils across four primary schools were involved with the *Mission Transition* programme and as mentioned earlier, forty-nine pupils participated in the primary pupil questionnaire element of the evaluation.

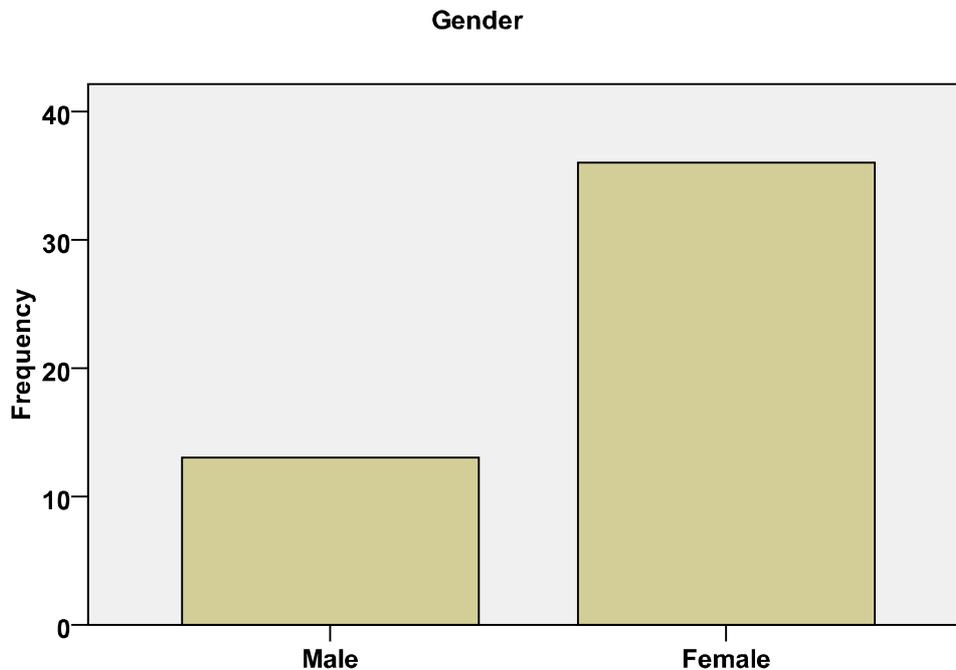


Figure 4: Primary Participants' Gender

Of those respondents, thirteen (26.5%) were male and thirty-six (73.5%) were female. Almost all pupils (98%) lived with their mother while 83.7% of respondents specified that they also resided with their father or male guardian.

The majority of respondents indicated that they talk to their parents/guardians about their pastimes (69.4%), friends (69.4%), happiness (77.1%) and how they spend their money (61.3%), with girls being more likely to talk with their parents than boys. Conversations pertaining to education ranked particularly high, with pupils identifying that areas such as how well they were doing in school (85.7%), discussions about post-primary school (89.8%), hopes for post-primary school (75.5%) and expected challenges for post-primary school (79.6%) all being discussed at some time or another.

Table 7: Primary Pupils - How many friends do you have in this school?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Three or more	48	98.0	98.0
	One	1	2.0	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	

Almost all pupils (98%) stated that they had three or more friends while one respondent stated that he/she had one friend, with all friends being other members of their primary school class.

Table 8: Primary Pupils - Which of the following do you do with friends? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Play sports	33	68.8%
Watch TV	32	66.7%
Talk about boys	29	60.4%
Play video games	20	41.7%
Talk about girls	14	29.2%
Do homework	10	20.8%
Shopping	8	16.7%
Go to the park	3	6.3%
Hanging out	3	6.3%
Go to town	2	4.2%
Music	1	2.1%
Cinema	1	2.1%
Other	1	2.1%
Total	157	327.1%

The most frequently mentioned pastimes for pupils were: playing sports (68.8%), watching TV (66.7%), talking about boys (female respondents) (60.4%) and playing video games (41.7%). Popular activities for boys when engaging with friends included playing video games, sporting activities, watching TV and talking about girls, while popular activities for girls included talking about boys, playing sports, watching TV and doing homework.

Attitudes towards Primary School

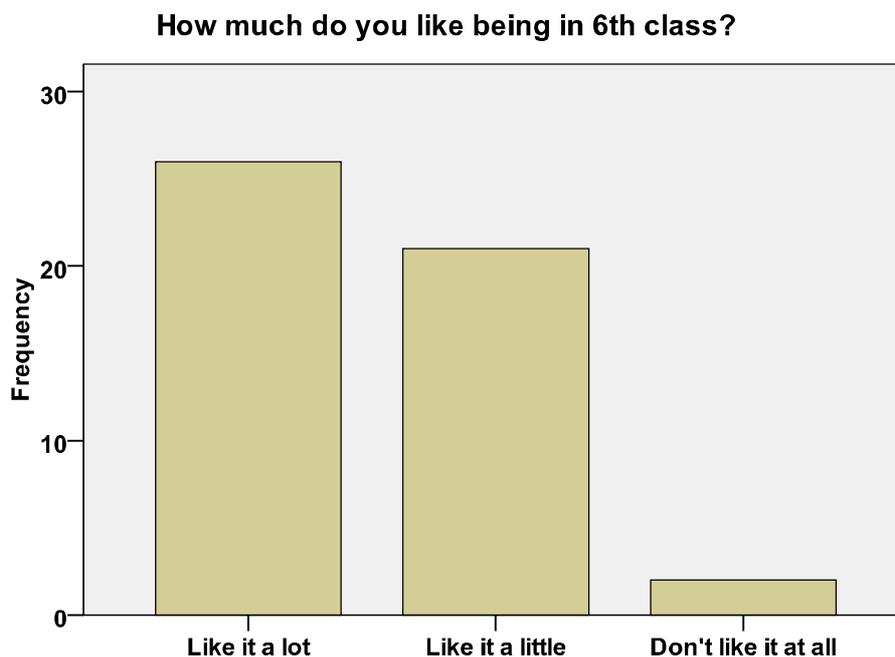


Figure 5: Primary Pupils - How much do you like being in 6th Class?

Almost two-thirds (61.2%) of respondents were attending a DEIS primary school and 95.9% of pupils indicated that they liked being in 6th class in their current school.

Table 9: Primary Pupils - What do you like most about your primary school?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Teachers	5	10.2	10.2
	Sport	13	26.5	36.7
	Friends	31	63.3	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	

When asked to clarify what exactly they liked about their current school, respondents identified friends (63.3%), sport (26.5%) and teachers (10.2%). The majority of boys identified sport (84.6%) while the remainder chose friends (15.4%). On the other hand, girls were more likely to identify friends (80.5%), followed by teachers (13.8%) and sport (5.7%).

Table 10: Primary Pupils - What do you like least about your primary school?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Teachers	7	14.3	14.3
	Homework	34	69.4	83.7
	Friends	1	2.0	85.7
	Schoolwork	4	8.2	93.9
	Nothing	1	2.0	95.9
	Missing Answer	2	4.1	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	

Despite their apparent levels of satisfaction with primary school, over one-third (39.6%) of respondents felt that schoolwork was not very interesting. This sentiment was particularly evident amongst girls, with 42.9% of female respondents indicating that schoolwork wasn't very interesting while the number of boys who felt that schoolwork wasn't interesting was slightly less (30.7%). Eleven respondents (22.4%) acknowledged that they had thought of leaving school before finishing 6th class (almost two-fifths of all boys surveyed), 12% stated that they would prefer to be in another school and three respondents (6.1%) felt that nobody at the school noticed them. Homework was the least liked element of primary school (69.4%). That said, three quarters of respondents said that they would miss their primary school (75.5%) - the majority of these were girls (86.4%).

Table 11: Primary Pupils - If you were to miss a day of school, what would the main reason for doing that be?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sick	41	83.7	85.4
	Homework not done	1	2.0	87.5
	Bored	2	4.1	91.7
	Holidays	2	4.1	95.8
	Broken bones	1	2.0	97.9
	Missing Answer	2	4.1	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	

Of those who had missed days during the current school year, the main reason was illness (85.4%). Two respondents indicated that they had missed school because it was “*boring*”. If

pupils had a problem at school, their mother (53.1%) or a friend (14.3%) were the most likely confidants.

Moving to Post-Primary School

Table 12: Primary Pupils - How are you feeling about moving to post-primary school?				
Valid		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Excited	21	42.9	42.9
	Nervous	12	24.5	69.4
	Don't know	7	14.3	95.9
	Happy	3	6.1	75.5
	Confused	2	4.1	79.6
	Sad	1	2.0	44.9
	Confident	1	2.0	81.6
	Missing Answer	2	4.1	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	

The majority of pupils (85.4%) involved in the evaluation of *Mission Transition* were looking forward to post-primary school, with 42.9% feeling excited; 24.5% feeling nervousness; and 6% feeling happy. 14.3% of respondents were unsure as to how they felt about moving to post-primary school.

Table 13: Primary Pupils - Are you looking forward to any of the following in post-primary school? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Making new friends	44	89.8%
More freedom	37	75.5%
Greater variety of activities	36	73.5%
Learning new things	35	71.4%
Greater variety of subjects	33	67.3%
More responsibility	31	63.3%
Finding my way around school	30	61.2%
Doing practical subjects	25	51.0%
Having more teachers	20	40.8%
Being with older relatives	14	28.6%
Not looking forward to anything	2	4.1%
Sports	2	4.1%
Other	1	2.0%
Total	310	632.7%

Table 13 above presents the findings relative to the areas that pupils are looking forward to in post-primary school. This was a multiple response question. The participating pupils outlined that they are looking forward to: making new friends (89.8%), having more freedom (75.5%), enjoying a greater variety of activities (73.5%), learning new things (71.4%) and finding their way around the new post-primary school (61.2%).

Table 14: Primary Pupils - Are you concerned about any of the following challenges in post-primary school? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Getting lost	37	75.5%
Doing more subjects	24	49.0%
Being in a bigger school	23	46.9%
Getting picked on	20	40.8%
Having new classmates	19	38.8%
Learning / keeping the rules	17	34.7%
Having more teachers	15	30.6%
Being the youngest in school	13	26.5%
Entrance exams	12	24.5%
Not knowing anyone	11	22.4%
Doing PE and sports	8	16.3%
Doing practical subjects	6	12.2%
Missing Answer	1	2.0%
Total	206	420.4%

Pupils expressed concerns relative to moving to post-primary school including: getting lost (75.5%), doing more subjects (49%), being in a bigger school (46.9%) and getting picked on (40.8%). Despite the wide range of concerns among pupils, over three quarters of respondents (75.5%) expected to cope well with these challenges in post-primary school. The majority of pupils felt that they would get on well with teachers in post-primary school (69.4%), while forty-four (89.8%) felt that they would get on well with other pupils. 91.8% of pupils expected post-primary school to be more work than primary school, and 91.8% of pupils believed that their current level of performance at school would be maintained or improved.

Table 15: Primary Pupils - Who decided which post-primary school you would go to? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Myself	48	98.0%
Mother	38	77.6%
Father	31	63.3%
Aunt	4	8.2%
Grandmother	2	4.1%
Sister	2	4.1%
Stepfather	1	2.0%
Stepmother	1	2.0%
Teacher	1	2.0%
Foster Parents	1	2.0%
Brother	1	2.0%
Total	130	265.3%

The table above refers to a multiple response question and indicates that in the majority of cases, the pupils were most likely involved in a consultative process involving themselves (98%), their mothers (77.6%), and their fathers (63.3%) (or some combination of the three). The predominant criteria for the selection of their chosen post-primary school included: a nice school with good facilities (59.2%), friends/relatives attending that school (57.1% / 51%) and proximity to home (49%).

Table 16: Primary Pupils - Which of the following hopes do you have for post-primary? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Do well with schoolwork	43	87.8%
Making new friends	43	87.8%
Doing the Leaving Certificate	42	85.7%
Staying out of trouble	41	83.7%
Doing well in tests/exams	41	83.7%
Doing the Junior Certificate	40	81.6%
Sporting success	39	79.6%
Getting on with teachers	36	73.5%
Sports	2	4.1%
Other	1	2.0%
Total	328	669.4%

Over 87% of pupils stated that they had hopes for themselves in post-primary school, with doing well in schoolwork (87.8%), doing the Leaving Certificate (85.7%), staying out of trouble (83.7%) and doing the Junior Certificate (81.6%) all being identified among their hopes.

Mission Transition

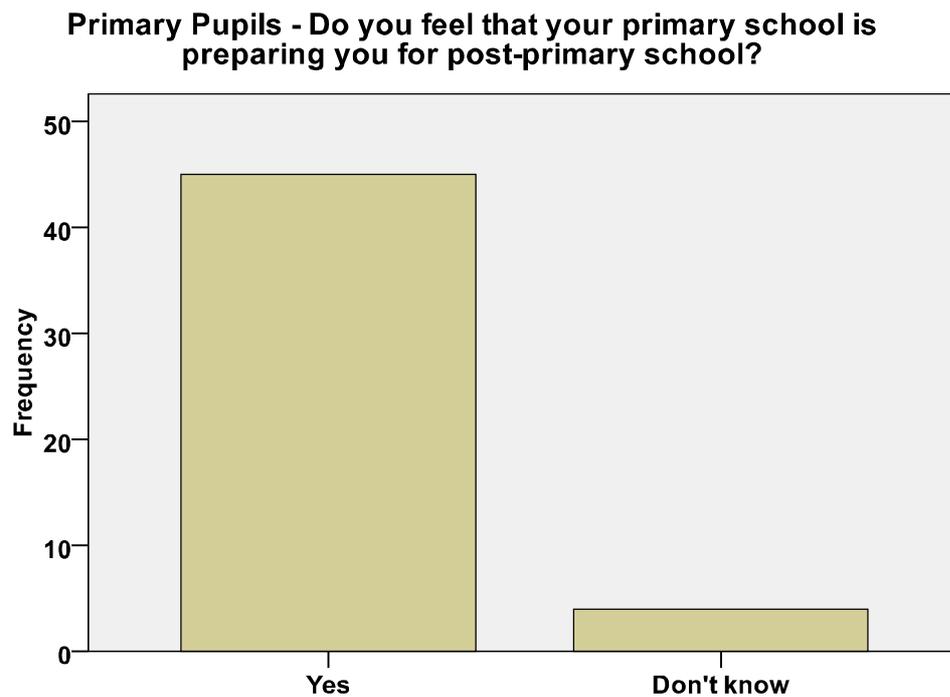


Figure 6: Primary Pupils - Do you feel that your primary school is preparing you for post-primary school?

With regard to preparation for transition to post-primary school, over 90% of respondents (with little difference between genders) highlighted that their primary school was preparing them at some level. All of the respondents expressed a good knowledge of the *Mission Transition* programme, understanding that the core focus of the programme was to prepare them for post-primary school by providing them with knowledge and information around areas such as timetables, subjects and acronyms (CSPE, SPHE, ICT etc.). There was some ambiguity among the students as to why they were chosen for *Mission Transition*, although a large number of pupils identified preparation for post-primary school as the reason for their selection. Other students outlined that they felt they were included in the programme because “we’re special” (PCFG1), “[the] principal asked them to come” (PCFG3) or “[we’re the] best school, [and the] best 6th class” (PCFG2).

Primary Pupils - Has Mission Transition helped you to get ready for post-primary school?

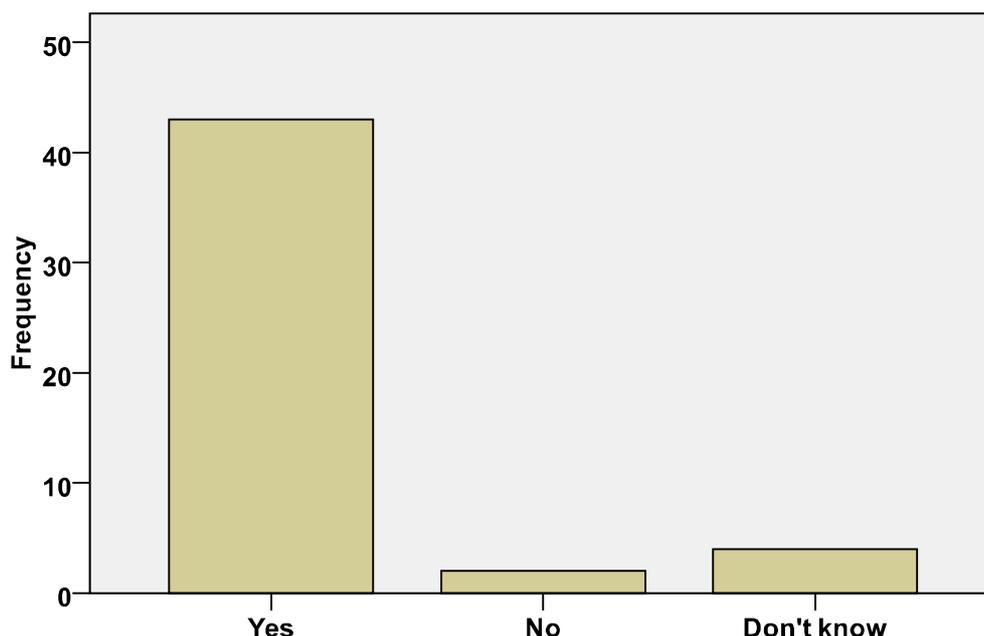


Figure 7: Primary Pupils - Has Mission Transition helped you to get ready for post-primary school?

87.8% of pupils stated that *Mission Transition* had helped them to get ready for post-primary school. When asked about how they felt prior to working with *Mission Transition*, just over half of pupils (52.1%) expressed confidence about moving to post-primary school, while 43.8% stated that they were not ready to make the move to post-primary school.

Table 17: Primary Pupils - How confident do you feel now that you've worked with Mission Transition?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very confident	29	59.2	61.7
	Confident	14	28.6	91.5
	Not confident	2	4.1	95.7
	Don't know	2	4.1	100.0
Missing	Answer	2	4.1	
Total		49	100.0	

Following engagement with the *Mission Transition* programme, 91.5% of respondents expressed confidence about moving to post-primary school (no pupils outlined that they felt unprepared for their move, following *Mission Transition*). Areas covered in the *Mission*

Mission Transition programme towards which the participants expressed the highest levels of satisfaction included: discussions about expectations (89.6%), work around timetables (87.8%), the structure of the school system (89.6%), work around new subjects (85.7%) and information on extra-curricular activities (83.3%). These sentiments were reiterated during the focus group sessions where pupils were asked to produce a piece of artwork to depict their favourite element of the *Mission Transition* programme. Elements other than those mentioned above were: (i) the “Magic Box”, which was an instrument that allowed pupils to post anonymous questions in to a box, and (ii) activities carried out in the *Mission Transition* journal.

Table 18: Primary Pupils - How would you rate the Mission Transition staff?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very good	37	75.5	75.5
	Good	8	16.3	91.8
	Fair	2	4.1	95.9
	Poor	1	2.0	98.0
	Very poor	1	2.0	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	

With regard to students’ views of the staff that implemented the *Mission Transition* programme in the schools, forty-five (91.8%) felt that staff involved in the delivery of the programme were either good or very good. This point was triangulated through the qualitative focus group element of the evaluation, where students used adjectives such as: “*nice*”, “*helpful*”, “*kind*”, “*calm*”, “*clever*” and “*great with kids*” to describe the staff. Some of the other comments included: “*they are brilliant at their jobs*” and “*they know their stuff*”. Over one-fifth (23%) of respondents also depicted the staff as their favourite element of *Mission Transition* during the artwork session.

Areas of the programme which were less well received (i.e. fair, poor or very poor) included: work on the entrance exam (46.9%) and the length of the programme (34.7%). Although pupils also expressed some reservations about the *Mission Transition* Certificate (31.3%), it should be pointed out that over 50% of respondents had not yet received their ‘Certificate of Involvement’ at the time of the evaluation¹⁷, while another 40% were unsure as to whether or

¹⁷ The first *Mission Transition* Certificate of Involvement is awarded to each participating pupil following the successful completion of the primary programme, and the second certificate is presented following completion of the post-primary programme.

not they had received a certificate. Some pupils also remarked during the focus group that the programme could be “*boring*” at times.

Table 19: Primary Pupils - In your opinion what was the best thing about Mission Transition? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Explanations	19	39.6%
Timetable	9	18.8%
Subjects	6	12.5%
Journal	5	10.4%
Enjoyment	3	6.3%
Nice staff	3	6.3%
None of it	3	6.3%
No class work	3	6.3%
Doing work/activities	1	2.1%
Total	52	108.3%

Over 90% of pupils felt that *Mission Transition* covered all the fundamental elements necessary for preparing them for post-primary school. Of all the aspects of the *Mission Transition* programme, pupils felt that the explanations provided about post-primary school (39.6%) were the best part of the programme. Other elements such as working on the timetable (18.8%), explanation of subjects (12.5%) and doing activities in their *Mission Transition* journals (10.4%) were also outlined.

Table 20: Primary Pupils - Can you suggest any changes that you would make to Mission Transition for next year's 6th class? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Nothing	23	47.9%
More dynamic content	8	16.7%
Improved journal	6	12.5%
Better timing	6	12.5%
Games	2	4.2%
Entrance exams	2	4.2%
Activities	2	4.2%
Chocolate	1	2.1%
Total	50	104.2%

When asked to suggest areas for future improvement of *Mission Transition*, almost half (47.9%) of the participants outlined that there was no area that needed improvement. However, some felt that the content could be made more dynamic (16.7%); that the *Mission Transition* journal could be improved (12.5%); and that better timetabling of lessons needed to be introduced (12.5%).

This area was also explored during the focus group element of the evaluation. When asked to complete the statement “*If I were the new boss of Mission Transition, I would make it better by ...*” pupils outlined that: it needed to be made more fun with less reading and writing (15%), and that it (*Mission Transition*) should include visits to post-primary schools (13%). Another predominant theme of the focus groups was that the timetabling for the *Mission Transition* programme (within the primary school day) needed to be improved so that it was not rushed, and to ensure that pupils were not missing out on “fun stuff” i.e. classes such as PE or Art. The inclusion of some *Mission Transition* work prior to the entrance exams was also highlighted as a possible improvement.

5.4 Post-Primary Students Perspectives

Participant Profile

One hundred and twenty seven pupils across four primary schools engaged with the *Mission Transition* programme in the academic year 2008/2009, and forty-nine primary pupils participated in the primary school questionnaire element of the evaluation. At the time of the evaluation, *Mission Transition* was being implemented in two Limerick City post-primary schools. Of the initial forty-nine primary school participants, twenty-one transferred to one or other of the two target post-primary schools and the remaining twenty-eight transferred to post-primary schools with which the *Mission Transition* staff do not engage. Given the low number of evaluation participants transferring to target post-primary schools, the evaluation team approached three non-target post-primary schools, to which the primary school participants had transferred. The evaluation team requested access to these pupils as part of the *Mission Transition* evaluation. As a result, the evaluation team gained access to forty-two of the initial forty-nine primary school respondents (85.7%). Of those forty-two participants at post-primary level, 50% were attending a target NLH post-primary school and had engaged with the second phase of the *Mission Transition* programme. The remaining 50% had transferred to non-target post-primary schools, and consequently had not re-engaged with, or

received, any follow-up from the *Mission Transition* programme or staff. At the time of data collection, the students had been attending their respective post-primary schools for two months.

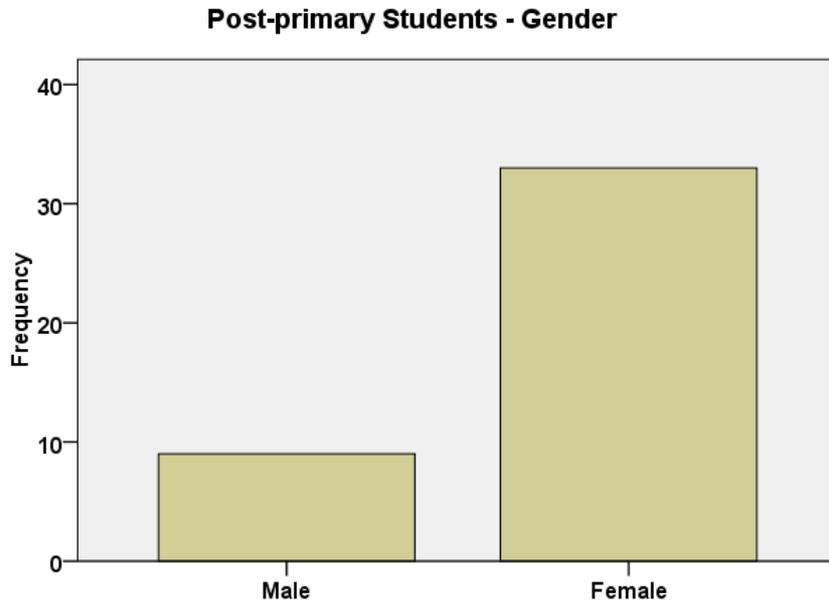


Figure 8: Post-Primary Students Gender

Of the forty-two participants, nine were male (21.4%) and thirty-three were female (78.6%). As was the case at primary level, the majority of respondents indicated that they talked to their parents/guardians about: pastimes (76.2%), friends (71.4%), happiness (76.2%) and how they spend their money (50%). Topics of conversation pertaining to education continued to rank particularly high, with areas such as how well they were doing in school (90.5%), positive experiences of post-primary school (83.3%) and negative experiences of post-primary school (66.6%) highlighted as areas for discussion at some time or another.

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	17	40.5	40.5
	No	16	38.1	78.6
	Sometimes	9	21.4	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	

Despite the fact that 50% of pupils were no longer receiving any input from *Mission Transition*, 61.9% of all respondents stated that they spoke to their parents about *Mission Transition*.

Attitudes towards Post-Primary School

Post-primary Students - Were you looking forward to secondary school over the summer?

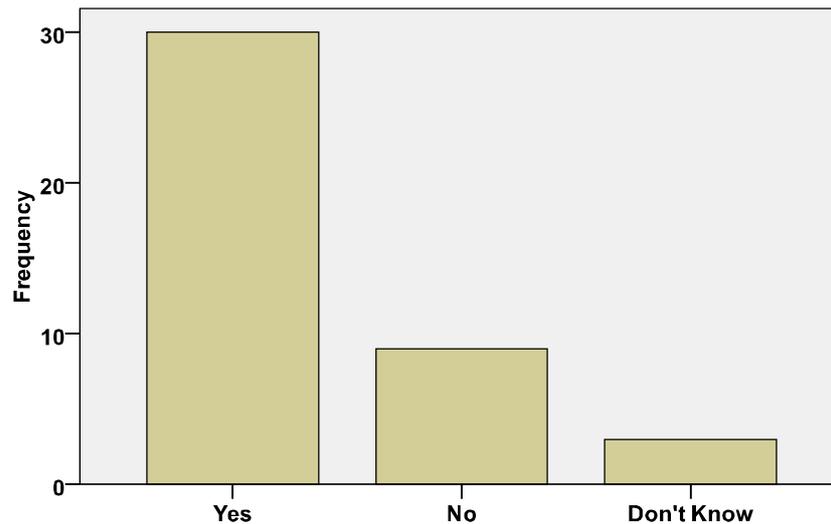


Figure 9: Post-Primary Students - Were you looking forward to post-primary school over the summer?

Almost three-quarters of participants (71.4%) outlined that they had been looking forward to post-primary school over the summer holidays. The participants identified a variety of emotions relating to their 1st day of post-primary school, with happy (71.4%) and nervous (61.9%) being the predominant emotions.

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	16	38.1	38.1
	No	17	40.5	78.6
	Don't Know	9	21.4	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	

When asked whether or not post-primary school was as they expected, over one-third (38.1%) said it was as they expected, while 40.5% stated that it was different. Over one-fifth

(21.4%) of respondents were unable to decide whether or not post-primary school was as they had expected.

Post-primary Students - How are you finding secondary school so far?

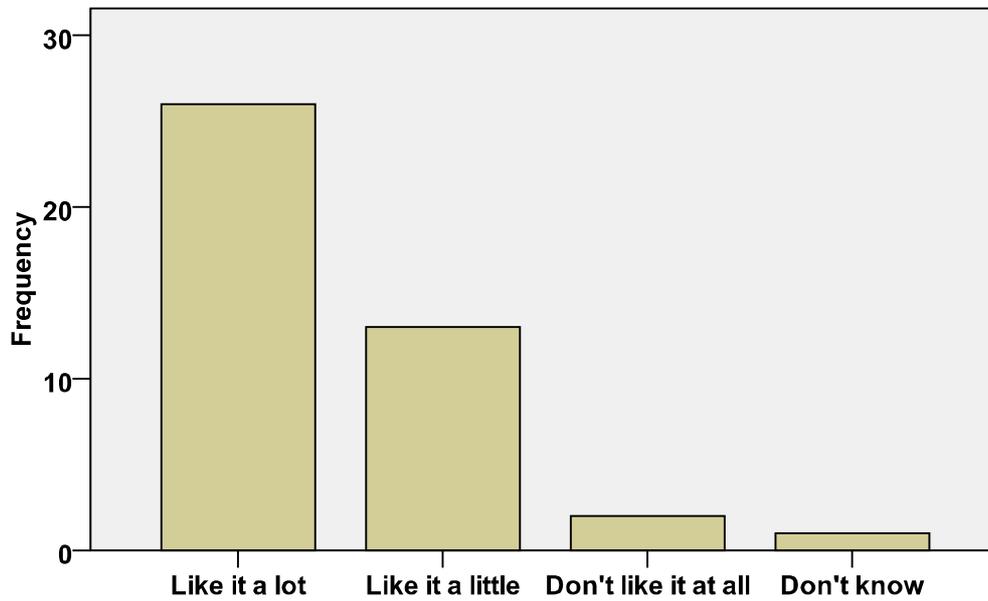


Figure 10: Post-Primary Students - How are you finding post-primary school so far?

Similar to the views expressed at primary level, thirty-nine (92.9%) respondents felt that they were enjoying post-primary school, with 61.9% stating that they liked it more than primary school. Over two-thirds (69%) of respondents felt that there was a difference between primary school and post-primary school. Some of the differences identified included: “*more classes*”, “*more teachers*” and “*a wider variety of subjects*”.

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	10	23.8	23.8
	No	22	52.4	76.2
	Don't Know	10	23.8	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	

Over three-quarters (76.2%) of the respondents stated that they would not go back to primary school if they had the opportunity.

When asked to identify areas of satisfaction about their current post-primary school, respondents identified: sports (69%), feeling safe (90.5%), understanding the rules (92.9%), ability to keep to the rules (90.5%), friendly teachers (76.2%), acceptance by peers (90.5%) and difficulty levels of school-work (85.7%).

Table 24: Post-primary Students - Which of the following do you like most about post-primary school? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Making new friends	37	88.1%
More freedom	31	73.8%
Greater variety of activities	30	71.4%
Finding my way around school	27	64.3%
Greater variety of subjects	25	59.5%
Having more teachers	23	54.8%
Doing practical subjects	22	52.4%
Learning new things	22	52.4%
More responsibility	21	50.0%
Being with older relatives	12	28.6%
Don't like anything	4	9.5%
Other	5	11.9%
Total	259	616.7%

Specific areas that respondents like about post-primary school included: making new friends (88.1%), having more freedom (73.8%) and enjoying a greater variety of activities (71.4%). Unlike primary, very few participants at post-primary level stated that they would prefer to be in another school (4.8%).

Table 25: Post-primary Students - Which of the following do you find difficult in post-primary school? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Homework	12	28.6%
Doing more subjects	12	28.6%
Having more teachers	11	26.2%
Entrance exams	11	26.2%
Getting lost	8	19.0%
Being the youngest in school	8	19.0%
Getting picked on	8	19.0%
Learning / keeping the rules	7	16.7%
Being in a bigger school	7	16.7%
Doing PE and sports	4	9.5%
Doing practical subjects	4	9.5%
Not knowing anyone	4	9.5%
Having new classmates	4	9.5%
Other	3	7.1%
Missing Answer	8	19.0%
Total	111	264.3%

Participants outlined areas of difficulty for them which included: doing more subjects (28.6%), homework (28.6%), entrance exams (26.2%) and having more teachers (26.2%). Over four-fifths (81%) of participants felt that they were coping well with the challenges in post-primary school. Of those who had missed days during the current school year, the main reason identified was illness (87.8%). 45.2% of post-primary pupils stated that they got into trouble with post-primary school teachers (talking in class (70.7%), forgetting books (48.8%) and not paying attention in class (29.3%) being cited as the main reasons for getting into trouble). Two respondents indicated that they had missed school because of the teachers (4.9%). Additionally, if pupils had a problem at school, their mother (64.3%) was their most likely confidant.

Table 26: Post-primary Students – Which of the following hopes do you have for yourself? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Doing well in tests/exams	36	85.7%
Doing the Junior Certificate	36	85.7%
Doing the Leaving Certificate	34	81.0%
Making new friends	33	78.6%
Doing well with schoolwork	32	76.2%
Getting on with teachers	31	73.8%
Staying out of trouble	30	71.4%
Sporting success	24	57.1%
Other	1	2.4%
Missing Answer	1	2.4%
Total	258	614.3%

Thirty-six students (85.7%) stated that they still had hopes for themselves in post-primary school, with “*doing well in test/exams*” (85.7%), “*doing the Junior Certificate*” (85.7%), “*doing the Leaving Certificate*” (81%) and “*making new friends*” (78.6%) all being identified as hopes. “*Doing well with schoolwork*” (76.2%), “*getting on with teachers*” (73.8%), “*staying out of trouble*” (71.4%) and “*sporting success*” (57.1%) were also mentioned frequently.

Mission Transition

All forty-two students involved in the evaluation of *Mission Transition* felt that they were settling in well to post-primary school at the time of the second phase of the evaluation.

Table 27: Post-primary Students - How long do you think it has taken for you to settle in, or get used to, post-primary school?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Within the first week	23	54.8	81.0
	Straight away	11	26.2	26.2
	Within the first month	7	16.7	97.6
	I'm not sure I've settled in yet	1	2.4	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	

Eleven respondents (26.2%) indicated that they had settled in straight away, twenty-three (54.8%) within the first week, seven (16.7%) within the first month, and one was unsure whether or not he/she had fully settled in yet at the time of the evaluation.

Table 28: Post-primary Students - Looking back, do you feel your primary school did enough to prepare you for post-primary school?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	29	69.0	69.0
	No	11	26.2	95.2
	Don't Know	2	4.8	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	

Twenty-nine respondents (69%) felt that their primary school had done enough to prepare them for post-primary school, with boys (100%) being more satisfied than girls (60.6%) with the level of preparation they received at primary level. Both *Mission Transition* and/or a good teacher were identified as the main cause/reason of that preparedness.

Table 29: Post-primary Students - In your opinion, how well do you feel your post-primary school is helping you to settle in?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very well	23	54.8	54.8
	Well	15	35.7	90.5
	Not so well	3	7.1	97.6
	Don't know	1	2.4	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	

With regard to post-primary school, the majority of respondents (90.5%) felt that their school was helping them to settle in; with discussion of timetables (85.7%), subject choices (71.4%), meeting the Principal/Year Head (76.2%), and school tours (76.2%) all being highlighted as elements that had eased the transition. When asked to identify which people were most helpful with regard to settling in; friends (73.8%), parents (59.5%), teachers (52.4%) and *Mission Transition* staff (45.2%) were identified.

Post-primary Students - How well do you feel Mission Transition helped you to settle in to post-primary?

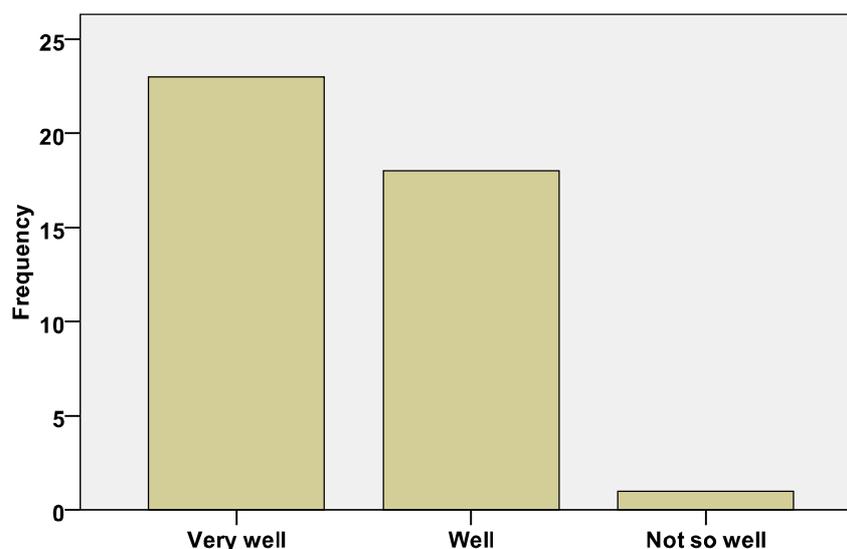


Figure 11: Post-Primary Students - How well do you feel Mission Transition helped you to settle in to post-primary?

97.6% of respondents felt that *Mission Transition* had helped them to settle into post-primary school. Now that they were in 1st year, post-primary pupils were again asked to rate the various activities contained in the *Mission Transition* programme. Similar to primary pupil perspectives, areas covered in the *Mission Transition* which showed the highest satisfaction levels included: discussions about expectations (85.7%), work around timetables (90.5%), structure of the school system (76.2%), work around new subjects (92.9%) and information on extra-curricular activities (85.7%).

Table 30: Post-primary Students - Now that you are in 1st year, how would you rate the Mission Transition staff?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very good	26	61.9	61.9
	Good	13	31.0	92.9
	Don't know	3	7.1	100.0
	Total	42	100.0	

As with the primary school participant responses, the vast majority of post-primary school respondents (thirty-nine/92.9%) felt that the *Mission Transition* staff involved in the delivery of the programme were very good (61.9%) or good (31%). The importance of having a *Mission Transition* certificate also increased among pupils at post-primary level, with 78.6%

of respondents indicating its usefulness. Of those respondents who attended non-target schools, 81% felt that they would have liked to have re-engaged with *Mission Transition* in their 1st year of post-primary school, while 61.9% believed that they had an easier move from primary to post-primary school than their fellow students who did not engage with *Mission Transition* at primary level. 100% of respondents agreed when asked if they felt that a programme like *Mission Transition* would benefit all students moving from primary to post-primary. Reasons for such assertions included: general preparedness, prior knowledge of the school system and being able to read timetables (among others).

In an effort to ascertain whether or not *Mission Transition* was meeting its objectives, post-primary level participants were given a number of statements, which they were asked to rate on a scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'don't know'. The findings relating to each of the statements posed are outlined in Table 31 below.

Table 31: Post-primary Students – Now that you have moved to post-primary school, how well do you rate the following statements?							
	Strongly Agree (N (%))	Agree (N (%))	Disagree (N (%))	Strongly Disagree (N (%))	Don't Know (N (%))	Missing Answer (N (%))	Total (N (%))
I know my way around the school	26 (61.9%)	13 (31.0%)	2 (4.8%)	-	1 (2.4%)	-	42 (100%)
I can understand my timetable	35 (83.4%)	6 (14.3%)	1 (2.4%)	-	-	-	42 (100%)
I can describe the correct school uniform	30 (71.4%)	9 (21.4%)	2 (4.8%)	-	-	1 (2.4%)	42 (100%)
I know when and how to use my locker	34 (81%)	8 (19%)	-	-	-	-	42 (100%)
I know the job of all the different teachers in my school	20 (47.6%)	17 (40.5%)	3 (7.1%)	-	2 (4.8%)	-	42 (100%)
I can name most of the people in my class	35 (83.3%)	6 (14.3%)	1 (2.4%)	-	-	-	42 (100%)
I know all about the different subjects in post-primary school	24 (57.1%)	11 (26.2%)	3 (7.1%)	-	2 (4.8%)	2 (4.8%)	42 (100%)
I have joined some extra-curricular activities	24 (57.1%)	8 (19%)	7 (16.7%)	1 (2.4%)	1 (2.4%)	1 (2.4%)	42 (100%)
I am enjoying post-primary school so far	28 (66.7%)	8 (19%)	3 (7.1%)	1 (2.4%)	2 (4.8%)	-	42 (100%)
I feel I am ready to be responsible for my own learning	28 (66.7%)	11 (26.2%)	3 (7.1%)	-	-	-	42 (100%)
I know where to go / who to talk to if I've a problem in post-primary school	29 (69%)	12 (28.6%)	1 (2.4%)	-	-	-	42 (100%)

This table suggests that the *Mission Transition* programme is meeting its objectives for the vast majority of students in areas such as:

- Knowledge of the structure of the post-primary school day e.g. I know my way around the school (92.9%) / I can understand my school timetable (97.7%);
- Recognition and understanding of the school rules e.g. I can describe the correct school uniform (92.8%) / I know when and how to use my school locker (100%);
- Exploration of the post-primary syllabus, new subjects and subject choice e.g. I know all about the different subjects in post-primary school (83.3%);
- General confidence to combat fears and anxieties e.g. I am enjoying post-primary school so far (85.7%) / I feel I am ready to be responsible for my own learning (92.9%); and
- Learning about the structure of the post-primary staff system e.g. I know the job of all the different teachers in my school (88.1%) / I know where to go/who to talk to if I have a problem (97.6%).

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of student perspectives, prior to the time of transfer from primary school (i.e. final term in 6th class) and shortly after they had made the transfer to post-primary school¹⁸ (i.e. first term in post-primary school). Findings from the participating 6th class pupils (n=49) and follow-up with the same 1st year students (n=42) were both analysed and presented under the headings: participant profile, attitudes towards primary school, moving to post-primary school and views relating to *Mission Transition*.

It was clear that pupils recognised the change in atmosphere between primary school and post-primary school, with a combination of excitement and nervousness being the over-riding emotions around the time of transition. Overall, pupils/students involved in the evaluation held the *Mission Transition* programme in very high regard, with some of the more practical elements such as discussions and explanations being mentioned frequently. The majority of respondents felt that the programme had helped them to prepare for post-primary school and felt that all pupils would benefit from partaking in a transition programme such as *Mission Transition*. It was also clear that pupils had developed a strong affinity with NLH staff involved in the delivery of the *Mission Transition* programme.

¹⁸ Of those forty-two participants at post-primary level, 50% were attending a target NLH post-primary school and had engaged with the second phase of the *Mission Transition* programme. The remaining 50% had transferred to non-target post-primary schools, and consequently had not re-engaged with or received any follow-up from the *Mission Transition* programme or staff.

Chapter 6 - Teachers Perspectives

6.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the perspectives of the teachers (principals, class teachers, HSCLs and support teachers) from the six participating primary and post-primary target schools and three non-target post-primary schools. Twenty-two teachers participated in this strand of the research - questionnaires were designed to gather the primary school teachers' perspectives and, due to time constraints, structured interviews were used to ascertain the views of post-primary school teachers. This chapter will initially present the findings of the primary school teacher questionnaires (n=11), followed by the findings of the interviews conducted with the post-primary school teachers (n=11). All eleven primary school teachers were working in target *Mission Transition* schools, while three of the eleven post-primary teachers were working in non-target schools. Both sections will be presented using the following headings: participant profile, attitudes towards post-primary school and views of *Mission Transition*.

6.2 Methodology

Four primary schools and five post-primary schools participated in the evaluation. All four primary schools were schools that the *Mission Transition* programme targeted during the two-year pilot phase of this initiative. Two of the post-primary schools were target schools, while three additional non-target schools were included in the sample¹⁹. Survey questionnaires were administered to the eleven participating primary school teachers, and structured interviews were conducted with the eleven post-primary school teachers (see Appendix D for sample questionnaire). Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to all participating teachers. All interviews were recorded to allow further analysis and verification at a later date, and recordings have since been destroyed. Certain elements of the post-primary interview related specifically to the experiences of the students who had previously engaged with *Mission Transition* in primary school. Given that the post-primary school students had, at the time of the evaluation, only recently commenced their post-primary

¹⁹ Given that the vast majority of students transferred to non-target post-primary schools, it was deemed necessary to include the three main non-target schools to which the students transferred. The evaluation team considered this necessary for two reasons: (i) it would increase the post-primary school student sample population, and (ii) it allowed the team to compare the perspectives of both students and teachers in target schools against those in non-target schools.

school careers, the principals of the participating schools provided the evaluation team with access to teachers with the greatest level of contact with the identified students.

6.3 Primary Teachers' Perspectives

The following section has been sub-divided in to the following headings:

1. Participant profile;
2. Moving to post-primary school; and
3. *Mission Transition*.

Participant Profile

Of the participants who completed the teachers' questionnaire at primary level, two were male (18.2%) and nine were female (81.8%).

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Principal	4	36.4	36.4
	Class teacher	5	45.5	81.8
	Home School Community Liaison	2	18.2	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	

The majority of respondents were class teachers (45.5%), all of whom were female. Four principals (36.4%) completed the questionnaire (one male and three females), while two HSCLs (18.2%) took part in the evaluation (one male and one female).

		Participant's post in the school			Total
		Principal	Class teacher	Home School Community Liaison	
Gender	Male	1	0	1	2
	Female	3	5	1	9
Total		4	5	2	11

The primary schools involved in the evaluation included:

- An all-boys school catering for pupils from 2nd class to 6th class;

- A full stream all-girls school;
- A full stream mixed school; and
- A full stream school catering for both boys and girls from Junior Infants to 1st class, and girls only from 2nd class to 6th class.

All schools placed a heavy emphasis on the holistic experiences of the child in their school and sought to provide an education that placed the child at the centre of everything that happened within the school:

“Friendly, warm, welcoming, caring, nurturing, interested in the whole child – academic, social, emotional, aesthetic, moral etc. It’s generally a good place – fun!!”
(PT1)

“A very positive caring atmosphere – emphasis very much on the well-being of pupils.” (PT6)

“A place where every child is valued and nurtured, where everyone is encouraged and enabled to reach his/her full potential. A place of learning through fun, child-centred culturally appropriate activities - home away from home.” (PT7)

All participants felt that their pupils liked being in sixth class. However, one respondent felt that education may not necessarily have been top priority for some students. 45.5% of participants identified friends as the main reason why pupils enjoyed school so much, while almost three quarters (72.7%) of participants felt that homework was the least liked aspect of primary school. There were mixed views as to whether or not pupils would stay in 6th class if they had the opportunity.

Table 34: Primary Teachers - How would you rate the average 6th class attendance in this primary school?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Good (1 – 9 missed days)	7	63.6	63.6
	Average (10 missed days)	3	27.3	90.9
	Very Poor (20+ missed days)	1	9.1	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	

Seven out of eleven respondents classed their pupils' attendance as 'good' (1-9 days missed between September and May), while another three respondents described attendance as 'average' (10 days missed). The main reason given for pupils' absence from school was illness (81.8%). If pupils were having difficulty at school, most respondents (63.6%) felt that the pupils would speak to their mother, while one respondent (9.1%) felt the pupils would speak to a teacher.

Most respondents (90%) felt that they had positive dealings with their pupils and parents, which they felt was characterised by a sense of: openness, fairness, co-operation, support and approachability:

"I think we have fostered a good relationship with parents based on respect and the awareness that by working together we can do what is best for the children." (PT11)

Some respondents highlighted concerns about the amount of personal contact they had with their pupils' parents, particularly in relation to pupils with challenging behaviour:

"There is some absenteeism during parent teacher meetings and it can be difficult contacting parents of children with challenging behaviour." (PT9)

In general, good communication levels existed between teachers and their pupils, regardless of the participating teacher's role i.e. principal, class teacher or HSCL. All respondents stated that, at some stage, they talked to pupils in their school about how well they were doing at school, how happy they were at school, what they did after school, who they were friends with, which post-primary school they intended to go to, and their expectations (hopes/challenges) for post-primary school.

Moving to Post-Primary School

As detailed in Figure 12 below, six out of eleven respondents (54.5%) felt that primary school was preparing sixth class pupils for post-primary school, with formal programmes such as *Mission Transition*, and informal approaches such as chats, circle time, increased independence and visits from past pupils, all being highlighted as beneficial.

Primary Teachers - In your opinion, are 6th class pupils prepared for the demands and expectations of post-primary school?

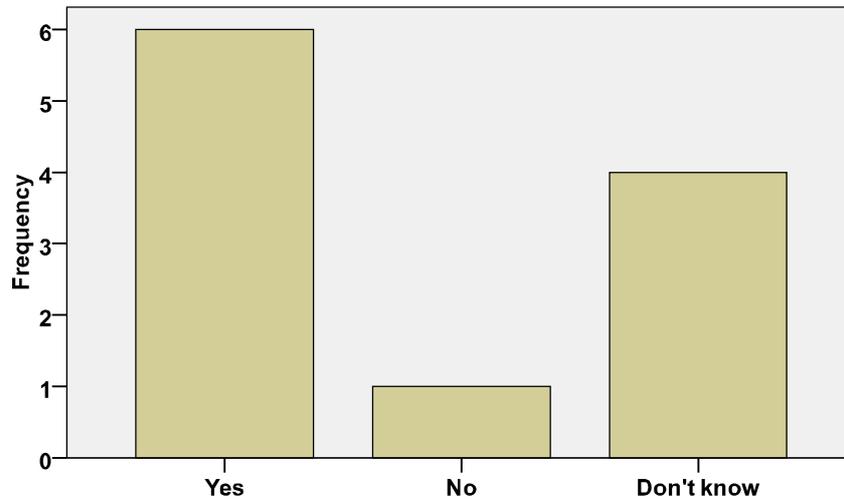


Figure 12: Primary Teachers – In your opinion, are 6th class pupils prepared for the demands and expectations of post-primary school?

All respondents, regardless of school post, rated attending post-primary school as “*very important*” and all (100%) expected pupils to find post-primary school to be very different from primary.

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very important	11	100.0	100.0
Total		11	100.0	

Respondents felt that the most pronounced change for students would be the school structure and operational procedures i.e. timetabling, subjects, variety of teachers, changing classes and study skills. Teachers were concerned that the transition from a child-centred focus at primary level to an exam focus at post-primary would prove difficult for their pupils. Respondents identified that the switch from a nurturing environment (at primary level) to academic performance (at post-primary level) might result in a number of pupils “*slipping through the net*”:

“A major difference I would see is primary school education being very child centred whereas secondary school education is very exam focussed. Many children struggle with this change and all it entails.” (PT8).

Despite the concerns outlined above, all respondents had hopes for their pupils in post-primary school. These ranged from: “*doing the Leaving Certificate*” (90.9%), “*making new friends*” (81.8%), “*doing well with schoolwork*” (72.7%), “*staying out of trouble*” (63.6%), “*getting on with teachers*” (63.6%), to “*sporting success*” (54.5%).

	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Doing the Leaving Cert	10	90.9%
Doing well in tests/exams	9	81.8%
Making new friends	9	81.8%
Do well with schoolwork	8	72.7%
Getting on with teachers	7	63.6%
Doing the Junior Cert	7	63.6%
Staying out of trouble	7	63.6%
Sporting success	6	54.5%
Other	2	18.2%
Total	65	590.9%

All respondents stated that they had links with some of the post-primary schools to which their pupils were likely to transfer. However, the respondents outlined that the decisions relating to choice of post-primary school were largely made independently of the primary school. The majority of participants outlined that most pupils make such a decision in conjunction with parents/family or on their own with location and reputation of the post-primary school being identified as key factors which influenced their choice of school. It was felt that primary schools played a secondary role in the decision.

Mission Transition

“Successful transfer is a child being able to form new healthy relationships with pupils and teachers, being able to engage with the curriculum at some level and being able to self-regulate to behave appropriately.” (PT2)

Respondents at primary school level defined a successful transition as that incorporating a number of different criteria – including knowledge, skills and attitudes. Areas of knowledge

conducive to a successful transition included: timetables, teacher recognition, subjects and academic success. Skills such as: learning to adapt to a new environment, settling in quickly to post-primary school, self-regulation, and an ability to form healthy relationships also featured predominantly. A sense of motivation, contentment, security, confidence and self-belief were also seen as important.

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	100 %	5	45.5	45.5
	75 - 99 %	5	45.5	90.9
	50 - 74 %	1	9.1	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	

More than half of the respondents (54.5%) felt that efforts being made at primary level were leaving pupils ill-prepared for the demands and expectations of post-primary school, while 36.4% of respondents were unsure about how well the students would be prepared. All respondents (100%) felt that more than half of the pupils from their own setting transfer successfully on an annual basis, and similarly less than half of the respondents (45.5%) felt that all of their students will transfer successfully to post-primary school in 2009. Specific areas with which teachers felt their primary pupils would struggle included: academic performance, self regulation and social preparedness. As evidenced in the quotes below, participating teachers identified pupils with special needs and learning difficulties, particularly Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) as being a particularly high-risk group:

“I would have concerns about children with particular behavioural difficulties and how they are dealt with by teachers in post-primary schools.” (PT3)

“Behavioural difficulties which may not be understood or handled appropriately. Personality quirks that could get in the way of their being accepted.” (PT1)

To overcome any challenges that may arise, all primary level respondents felt that help from parents (100%) and primary school projects such as *Mission Transition* (100%) were important for pupils when making the move to post-primary school:

“... a pupil who is well supported by family, who has a sense of self and performs steadily at school both academically and in the area of sports or music. Family support is very important or a link with a significant adult who will encourage and guide as necessary.” (PT11).

Specific areas which participants identified as being important were: seeing a sample timetable (90.9%), information about new subjects (90.9%), an explanation of the new school rules (90.9%), friendly classmates (81.8%), and induction days at post-primary level (81.8%).

		Do you talk to children in your school about Mission Transition?		Total
		Yes	Sometimes	
Participants role in the school	Principal	1	2	3
	Class teacher	3	2	5
	Home School Community Liaison	2	0	2
Total		6	4	10

There was a more mixed response among evaluation participants as to whether or not teachers spoke with pupils specifically about *Mission Transition*. In cases where *Mission Transition* was not mentioned, it was felt that pupils did engage in discussion with teachers around areas such as timetables, subject areas, entrance exams and school rules – all of which are covered in the *Mission Transition* programme. Bullying and friendships were also highlighted as featuring highly among discussions between respondents and their students.

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	11	100.0	100.0
Total		11	100.0	

All respondents (100%) felt that *Mission Transition* currently provided primary school pupils with a comprehensive transition programme to address the issue of transition. They also felt that it helped to sufficiently prepare pupils for post-primary school. Justification for such responses articulated the belief that *Mission Transition* had: demystified post-primary school by preparing pupils for the practical aspects of post-primary school, provided them with time

to think about their expectations of post-primary school, and allowed them to ask questions in a comfortable and supportive environment. Elements of the programme that concentrated on practical issues, such as work around timetables (very good=100%), subjects (very good=71.4%) and discussion of expectations (very good=85.7%) were singled out for particular attention e.g.:

“I am extremely impressed by the Mission Transition programme. It has the components necessary to inform the pupils and ease this most important transition in the lives of sixth class pupils. I am not familiar with other such programmes.” (PT11).

“It has given the pupils a clear, concrete understanding of timetables, new subjects, and general expectations in secondary school. I feel that it took a lot of mystery away from secondary school.” (PT6).

“Mission Transition has taken lots of the fear out of starting secondary school for the children. They feel a lessened sense of the unknown and are more confident about their first day.” (PT7).

Respondents at primary level were particularly pleased with the efforts of *Mission Transition* staff (very good=72.7%) and the importance of having someone with experience of Irish post-primary schools was also acknowledged e.g.:

“...the programme co-ordinators were fantastic, the pupils responded very well to them and certainly benefited from the experience.” (PT6).

Areas of improvement for *Mission Transition*, as identified by the primary level respondents included: the involvement of parents, timing of the programme, and changes relating to programme content. While some respondents identified that more parental involvement was desirable, they were unsure as to how to improve such involvement (respondents were heartened to learn that parental involvement was an issue being considered by the *Mission Transition* / NLH team) e.g.:

“I’d like to see parental involvement developed more i.e. parent in class with child perhaps (even a few sessions)...” (PT2).

There was also some ambiguity in terms of the timing of the programme, particularly with regard to the entrance exams – with some respondents outlining that it was necessary for the

programme to begin earlier in the academic year. More dynamic approaches to the delivery of the programme were suggested by the teachers, examples included: more activity-based interactive frameworks, and a “...*more robust and important looking booklet*” (PT1). Respondents also added that they would be pleased if content relating to developing relationships and bullying could be incorporated into the programme. However, one respondent was not sure that relationship building was the role of the *Mission Transition* programme:

“I think [Mission Transition] met its brief. There’s a world of work to be done on relationships and conflict resolution but I think that’s most appropriately done by the class teacher.” (PT1).

It was also suggested that *Mission Transition* activities should try to incorporate visits to the primary school from past-pupils who had made a successful transition to post-primary school or visits to particular post-primary schools by primary pupils (pre-transfer) for fun activities.

Overall, despite some suggested areas for improvement, respondents were keen to stress their satisfaction with the programme and felt that both teachers and pupils had benefited from their involvement in it e.g.:

“...the programme co-ordinators were fantastic, the pupils responded very well to them and certainly benefited from the experience. I hope that our school continues to facilitate Mission Transition.” (PT6).

“I think this is a fantastic programme for the children to help them make the transition to post-primary. I hope it continues.” (PT9).

“I commend all involved in the Learning Hub with the development of a truly excellent support for both teachers and pupils as they prepare for post-primary school.” (PT11).

6.4 Post-Primary Teachers Perspectives

This section is structured in a similar format to the preceding section i.e. under the headings:

1. Participant profile;
2. Moving to post-primary school; and
3. *Mission Transition*.

Participant Profile

72.7% of the post-primary level respondents were derived from *Mission Transition* target schools, while 27.3% represented non-target schools. Four teachers were male (36.4%), five were female (45.5%) and two were unspecified (18.2%).

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Principal	3	27.3	27.3
Class teacher	1	9.1	36.4
Home School Community Liaison	1	9.1	45.5
Support Teacher	2	18.2	63.6
Deputy Principal	1	9.1	72.7
Year Head	1	9.1	81.8
Missing Answer	2	18.2	100.0
Total	11	100.0	

Three participants (27.3%) were post-primary principals, while the remaining respondents fulfilled a variety of posts within their school, such as deputy principal (9.1%), two support teachers (18.2%), one Year Head (9.1%), one class teacher (9.1%) and one HSCL (9.1%). Two respondents were unspecified.

A wide variety of schools were involved in the evaluation at post-primary level, including:

- a non-denominational, co-educational VEC school;
- a single-sex girls school;
- a privately endowed, co-educational, boarding and day school;
- a mixed ability single-sex girls' school; and
- A single-sex boys' school.

Post-primary Teachers - In your opinion, how much do students like being in post-primary school?

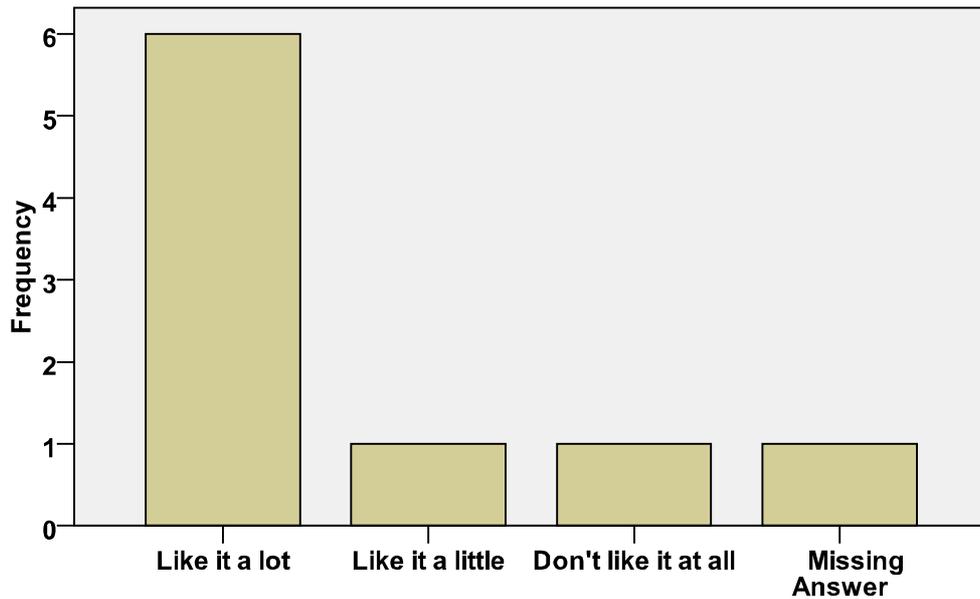


Figure 13: Post-primary Teachers – In your opinion, how much do students like being in post-primary school?

The majority of respondents (54.5%) at post-primary level felt that their students liked being in post-primary school a lot; one respondent (9.1%) felt they liked it a little, while one respondent (9.1%) felt that students did not like it at all. One respondent did not answer.

Table 41: Post-primary Teachers - What do students like most about post-primary school? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Friends	8	88.9%
Sport	7	77.8%
Teachers	5	55.6%
Schoolwork	1	11.1%
Homework	1	11.1%
Other	4	44.4%
Missing Answer	1	11.1%
Total	27	300.0%

The respondents felt that friends (88.9%), sport (77.8%) and teachers (55.6%) were key factors for the enjoyment of post-primary school. Other contributing factors mentioned were: extra-curricular activities and moving around the school amongst students. Some of the

challenges that respondents felt students find difficult included: schoolwork (77.8%), homework (66.7%) and teachers (66.7%).

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Good (1 - 9 missed days)	6	54.5	66.7
	Average (10 missed days)	2	18.2	88.9
	Missing Answer	3	27.3	100.0
Total		11	100.0	

Six of the eleven respondents (54.5%) classed their students' attendance as 'good' (1-9 days missed); while another two respondents (18.2%) described attendance as 'average' (10 days missed). Four respondents (44.4%) felt that the main reason for students missing a day in post-primary school was due to illness. Other reasons for absence from school included: holidays, family situation, and a lack of parental emphasis on education. If students were having a difficulty at school, four respondents (36.4%) felt that they were most likely to talk to their mother, two (18.2%) felt they would speak to a friend, and one respondent (9.1%) felt they would talk to a teacher.

All respondents (100%) felt that they had positive dealings with their students' parents. They characterised those positive dealings as being transparent, cordial and supportive. However, one respondent did acknowledge that:

"...there can be anxiety/dread on the side of parents – particularly repeat offenders."
(PPT11).

Moving to Post-Primary School

88.9% of post-primary teachers felt that students recognised the importance of going to post-primary school, while one respondent (9.1%) felt that students rated post-primary school as "not at all important".

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	9	81.8	100.0
	Missing Answer	2	18.2	
Total		11	100.0	

Nine of the eleven post-primary level respondents (81.8%) felt that post-primary school was different from primary - both at an organisational and a personal level. Organisational differences highlighted by participants included: a change in school systems (one teacher and one classroom), an increase in the number of teachers, the increased volume of students, lockers, timetables, new rules and a variety of new subjects. On a personal level, respondents identified that post-primary school required students to: display increased self-management skills, have an ability to make new friendships, and to adapt to changes in routine, expectations and demands. It was also acknowledged that first year students had to cope with the fact that they “...were now the youngest in the school” (PPT9).

Table 44: Post-primary Teachers - In your opinion, are 1st year pupils prepared for the demands and expectations of post-primary school?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	1	9.1	11.1
	No	7	63.6	88.9
	Other	1	9.1	100.0
	Missing Answer	2	18.2	
Total		11	100.0	

Seven (63.6%) out of eleven respondents at post-primary level felt that first year students were not prepared for the demands and expectations of post-primary school. One respondent (9.1%) felt that they were prepared, while another (9.1%) suggested that it depended on the primary school from which the student had transferred. Areas where it was felt that students were generally unprepared or lacking included: organisational skills (book, lockers, and timetables), academic ability (literacy and numeracy) and social skills (making friends and behaviour).

Despite the general perception of unpreparedness of primary pupils for post-primary school, which was held among post-primary teachers, over three quarters (77.8%) of post-primary level respondents felt that their first year students were settling in to post-primary, while all respondents (11 (100%)) acknowledged that they had hopes for first year students in post-primary school.

Table 45: Post-primary Teachers - What are your hopes for 1 st year students in post-primary school? (Multiple Response)		
	Responses	
	N	Percent of Cases
Making new friends	9	100.0%
Doing well in tests/exams	8	88.9%
Staying out of trouble	7	77.8%
Getting on with teachers	5	55.6%
Doing the Junior Cert	5	55.6%
Do well with schoolwork	5	55.6%
Sporting success	4	44.4%
Doing the Leaving Cert	3	33.3%
Other	2	22.2%
Total	48	533.3%

All respondents (100%) had hopes that 1st year students would make new friends, while hopes such as: doing well in tests/exams (88.9%), staying out of trouble (77.8%) and doing well with schoolwork (55.6%) were regularly mentioned.

Although just over three quarters of respondents (77.8%) stated that they had links with the primary schools from which their students were likely to transfer, six respondents (54.5%) felt that there were aspects of primary school that they would like to be more familiar with. Particular areas highlighted were: curriculum content (particularly in 6th class), as well as individual standards of ability that students had reached prior to transferring to post-primary school.

Mission Transition

Definitions of a successful transition were varied. However, the majority of post-primary school respondents felt that the elements necessary for a successful transition included:

- “...a happy child...” (PPT1).
- “[a child] ...who gets on with achieving academic potential” (PPT4).
- “[a child] ...making new friend” (PPT11).

Organisational issues such as: an awareness of different subjects, an acceptance of new rules and regulations, and an ability to read the timetable were also highlighted as important. A willingness to try new things and adaptability to change were also cited.

Table 46: Post-primary Teachers - Are you concerned about any of your 1st year students that you feel are/will have trouble settling in to your school?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	6	54.5	66.7
	No	2	18.2	88.9
	Missing Answer	3	27.3	100.0
Total		11	100.0	

Almost two thirds (6 (54.5%)) of teachers outlined that they had concerns that their 1st year students are/will have trouble settling in to their post-primary school. On further expansion, respondents suggested that areas such as: attendance, behaviour, academic ability, social skills and poor support could prove problematic and may be contributing factors e.g.:

“One student is absent for a long period of time, he does not like school and this is compounded by a difficult home life.” (PPT8).

Table 47: Post-primary Teachers - In your opinion, how many of your students transfer successfully to this school on an annual basis?				
		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	100 %	1	9.1	11.1
	75 - 99 %	5	45.5	66.7
	50 - 74 %	1	9.1	77.8
	25 - 49 %	1	9.1	88.9
	Missing Answer	3	27.3	100.0
Total		11	100.0	

Given these difficulties, the majority of teachers (45.5%) felt that somewhere between 75 – 99% of students transferring to their school would negotiate the transition successfully. One respondent (9.1%) felt that all students will transfer successfully to his/her school, while another (9.1%) felt that less than half of the students transferring to his/her school would do so successfully.

Although three of the five participating post-primary schools were not specifically associated with the NLH (i.e. were not considered *Mission Transition* target post-primary schools), two of those three non-target school representatives were aware of the *Mission Transition* programme prior to the evaluation. That said, prior to being contacted by the evaluation team,

none of the non-target post-primary schools were aware that a number of their 1st year students had engaged with the programme before attending post-primary school.

Table 48: Post-primary Teachers – Type of School BY Do you feel that those students who did engage with the transition programme were better prepared for the transition from primary to post-primary than their peers who didn't engage? (Crosstab)						
		Do you feel that those students who did engage with the transition programme were better prepared for the transition from primary to post-primary than their peers who didn't engage?				Total
		Yes	No	Don't know	Missing Answer	
Type of School	Target	4	0	0	1	5
	Non-target	1	1	1	0	3
Total		5	1	1	1	8

80% of the teachers working in target schools felt strongly that students who did engage with *Mission Transition* were better prepared for the transition from primary to post-primary than their peers who did not engage. Results of the non-target schools were less conclusive, with one respondent feeling that students were better prepared, one stating that students were not better prepared, while the final respondent was undecided. All three non-target respondents felt that a transition programme would benefit all students transferring from primary to post-primary school. Non-target respondents felt that a post-primary transition programme implemented in their school could help to promote student confidence, particularly if the programme incorporated areas such as: organisational skills, study skills and practical discussions, as well as specific content areas such as friendship. Open communication between primary and post-primary schools was also seen as pivotal to the success of a transition programme.

Specific elements of the programme that target schools felt were worthwhile included discussions about expectations (good=100%), work around school timetables (good=100%), information on the structure of the school system (good=100%) and school rules (good=100%) e.g.:

“The practical aspects were most beneficial i.e. timetabling, moving classrooms, different teachers etc.” (PPT6).

Target post-primary school respondents were particularly pleased with the effectiveness of *Mission Transition* staff, with 100% of respondents describing them as ‘very good’. The

following quote also highlights the benefit of the positive relationship that the *Mission Transition* staff had with the pupils:

“It provides a forum for students to openly discuss any problems, anxieties that they may have re transition to secondary. It reassures them that help is available if they get lost, upset, lonely or just mesmerised re change.” (PPT5).

The least beneficial aspect of the programme, as identified by post-primary level respondents, was that of parental involvement. Other suggested improvements included: the incorporation of areas such as homework, study skills and friendship, e.g.:

“Something general on friendship/making new friends – make new friends but keep the old, one is silver, one is gold.” (PPT4).

Respondents also felt that the journal required some aesthetic changes, changes to the content and to the structure, namely: an increase in the number of pictures, a more extensive subjects section, and a wider variety of teaching approaches.

Overall, all respondents acknowledged that transition from primary to post-primary school was a key area and that while it was good to have a transition programme in operation, *“...it would be better if all students could partake in Mission Transition – [at present] only some students participated in primary school” (PPT6).*

In an effort to ascertain whether or not *Mission Transition* was meeting its objectives the participating post-primary teachers were asked to rate how well the group of students that previously engaged with *Mission Transition* were dealing with a number of areas in post-primary school. Table 50 below, outlines their responses.

Table 49: Post-primary Teachers – How competent do you feel the group of students who engaged with Mission Transition are with regard to each of the following areas in post-primary school?						
	Very Good (N (%))	Good (N (%))	Fair (N (%))	Poor (N (%))	Missing Answer (N (%))	Total (N (%))
Realistic expectations of post-primary school	5 (33.3%)	2 (13.3%)	4 (26.7%)	-	4 (26.7%)	15 (100%)
Ability to use the timetable effectively	2 (13.3)	7 (46.7%)	1 (6.7%)	1 (6.7%)	4 (26.7%)	15 (100%)
Knowledge of a typical post-primary school day	6 (40.0%)	4 (26.7%)	1 (6.7%)	-	4 (26.7%)	15 (100%)
Knowledge of the structure of the post-primary school staff system	5 (33.3%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20.0%)	1 (6.7%)	5 (33.3%)	15 (100%)
Ability to access post-primary school support network	3 (20.0%)	3 (20.0%)	4 (26.7%)	-	5 (33.3%)	15 (100%)
Knowledge of entrance exams	4 (26.7%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (20.0%)	-	7 (33.3%)	15 (100%)
Understanding of new subjects	5 (33.3%)	3 (20.0%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.7%)	4 (26.7%)	15 (100%)
Ability to make accurate subject choices	3 (20.0%)	4 (26.7%)	3 (20%)	-	5 (33.3%)	15 (100%)
Knowledge of extra-curricular activities	5 (33.3%)	4 (26.7%)	2 (13.3%)	-	4 (26.7%)	15 (100%)
General preparedness for first day of post-primary school	5 (33.3%)	4 (26.7%)	2 (13.3%)	-	4 (26.7%)	15 (100%)
Acceptance of the importance of school rules	7 (46.7%)	3 (20.0%)	1 (6.7%)	-	4 (26.7%)	15 (100%)
Knowledge of the school journal and locker systems	4 (26.7%)	4 (26.7%)	2 (13.3%)	-	5 (33.3%)	15 (100%)
Ability to get to know classmates	4 (26.7%)	5 (33.3%)	2 (13.3%)	-	4 (26.7%)	15 (100%)
Parental knowledge of post-primary school	2 (9.1%)	5 (18.2%)	2 (18.2%)	1 (9.1%)	3 (20.0%)	15 (100%)
General ability to adapt to life in post-primary school	4 (26.7%)	6 (40.0%)	1 (9.1%)	-	4 (26.7%)	15 (100%)

The findings in Table 49 are not as definitive as pupil/student responses in the previous chapter. This table suggests that post-primary teachers felt the programme is meeting its objectives in areas such as:

- Providing pupils with a general ability to adapt to life in post-primary school (66.7%);
- Supplying pupils with a knowledge of a typical post-primary school day (66.7%);
- Developing an ability to use the timetable effectively (60%);
- Providing knowledge of extra-curricular activities (60%);
- Fostering an ability for pupils to get to know new classmates (60%); and
- Generally preparing pupils for the first day of post-primary school (60%)

Two particular areas where post-primary teachers felt that *Mission Transition* needed to be improved were:

- Developing pupil knowledge of the entrance exam (33.4%); and
- Parental knowledge of post-primary school (27.3%).

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the perspectives of the teachers (principals, deputy principals, class teachers, HSCLs and Support Teachers) at both primary and post-primary school level from *Mission Transition's* target and non-target schools. Twenty-two teachers participated in this strand of the research with the findings of both the primary and the post-primary school teachers presented under the following headings: participant profile, attitudes towards post-primary school and views of *Mission Transition*.

Both the primary and post-primary teachers expressed concerns about their students' abilities to cope with the (predominantly operational, structural and social) changes that they faced in post-primary school. However, they were confident that the vast majority of their students would transfer successfully and settle in to their new surroundings within a specified period of time. Support around attendance, behaviour, academic ability and social skills were identified as areas requiring development. All respondents were in agreement that *Mission Transition* is meeting its objective of providing pupils/students with knowledge through explicit teaching and prior preparation (primarily accomplished through discussion) and that the content being delivered is new and is something that the pupils/students require. All respondents were familiar with the programme, understanding that the core focus of the programme was to prepare pupils for post-primary school by providing them with knowledge and information about post-primary school. Areas covered in the *Mission Transition* programme such as: discussions about expectations, explanations of subjects, work around timetables, structure of the school system, discussions around new subjects and information on extra-curricular activities were all well received. Although the majority of respondents felt that the content covered in *Mission Transition* was appropriate, some felt that improved methodologies for delivery of that content needed to be explored.

Chapter 7 - The Transferability of Mission Transition – A Case Study

7.1 Introduction

The transferability of the *Mission Transition* programme to other contexts emerged as part of the current evaluation. While the findings of previous chapters have discussed the successes and challenges of *Mission Transition* as perceived by a variety of stakeholders directly associated with/supported by the NLH (pupils, teachers and NLH staff), this chapter relates to the independent implementation of *Mission Transition* by *youngballymun*, an organisation jointly funded by Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). The mission of *youngballymun* is to deliver measurably improved well-being and learning outcomes for children and young people in Ballymun, Dublin 11, and to inform national and international practice and policy. It is a community-based strategy that is taking place in parallel with the regeneration of Ballymun's built environment, and is seen as a key milestone in the social regeneration of Ballymun. *Youngballymun* (2007-2016) is being rolled out in two five-year phases, and is now in the second year of the first five-year programme of work.

7.2 Methodology

The method of data collection utilised during this element of the evaluation was qualitative in nature i.e. a semi-structured telephone interview that was conducted with a representative of *youngballymun*. Given the unique position of the representative of *youngballymun*, anonymity could not be guaranteed. The interview was digitally recorded to facilitate analysis and verification, but the recording was later destroyed. Data relating to three central themes was gathered, those themes were: knowledge of *Mission Transition*, the implementation of *Mission Transition* in the Ballymun context, and *Mission Transition* programme outcomes in that same context. This chapter is presented thematically under those three themes.

7.3 Knowledge of Mission Transition

During initial planning phases, the service design team within *youngballymun* identified transition to post-primary school as a key concern that needed to be addressed within the Ballymun area. A project group comprising a variety of different stakeholders (e.g. Ballymun Education Support Services, HSCLs, primary teachers, principals etc.) was established to advance the issue of transition within the Ballymun context. Initial discussions amongst the group highlighted key areas relating to transition that required consideration i.e. social skills, curriculum, knowledge of subjects, timetables, use of lockers, uniforms, homework etc. A review of independent programmes commenced e.g. Movin' On Up, SESS Seminars, OK Let's Go and *Mission Transition*. *Mission Transition* was later identified as an appropriate programme to meet their needs. Following discussions between the manager of NLH and a representative of the *youngballymun* service design team, the *Mission Transition* pupil programme was presented to the group. It was felt, following that presentation, that the *Mission Transition* pupil programme addressed the majority of transition needs identified by the *youngballymun* project group. Permission was subsequently sought from the NLH by *youngballymun* to implement the *Mission Transition* pupil programme in its entirety, with the stipulation that the content could be supplemented with additional material where appropriate.

7.4 Implementation of Mission Transition in the Ballymun Context

Implementation of the *Mission Transition* programme by *youngballymun* has, to date, largely been focussed at primary school level. Eleven primary schools within the Ballymun area (two of which are Gaelscoileanna) have been involved in the programme. Each school is represented at the service design team meetings. In 2009, there were 320 pupils engaged with *Mission Transition*. The *Mission Transition* pupil journals were distributed to each of the 6th classes and the programme was implemented by the class teacher. The *Mission Transition* primary programme was also supplemented by a Teacher Resource folder of supplementary materials which included information on topics – Myself, My Friends, My School, My New School and My New Subjects. It was felt that extra materials around the areas of self-esteem, valuing and developing friendships and social skills were needed. Resource packs with appropriate post-primary school journals and twenty-question quiz sheets were also collated and distributed. Costs associated with the printing/supply of the *Mission Transition* pupil

journals and other supplementary resources was borne by *youngballmun*, while 6th class teachers themselves deliver the programme, which eliminates the costs associated with delivery staff.

The *youngballymun* participant outlined that the post-primary pupil programme was also presented to the two post-primary schools within the geographical area, but (as with the Northside of Limerick), a large majority of pupils do not attend target post-primary level schools within Ballymun²⁰. However, *youngballymun* are working closely with a post-primary school in the Ballymun area and are addressing its need to put a structure in place for 1st year students. *Youngballymun* are exploring the possibility of delivering/facilitating the delivery of *Mission Transition* programme with incoming 1st year students.

7.5 Mission Transition Outcomes for Ballymun Pupils/Students

The Ballymun service design team reviewed the *Mission Transition* programme in September 2009. Feedback suggested that the pupil booklet was appropriate to the needs of *youngballymun* and its target pupils/students, but that the timing of the delivery of the programme had not afforded schools sufficient time to conduct in-depth work in areas pertaining to transition. Overall, it was felt that sometime between Christmas and Easter was the most appropriate time to deliver the programme. It was felt that schools associated with *youngballymun* were very open to the *Mission Transition* programme and that it filled a gap in the school curriculum. It was also indicated that primary school teachers were more than happy to implement the *Mission Transition* primary programme/supplementary support folder and found the content easy to deliver and that SPHE/Religion were the most appropriate subjects for the delivery of such a programme. Furthermore, the *youngballymun* participant felt that the overriding success of the programme was the *Mission Transition* journal which ensured that dedicated time was given to the transition from primary to post-primary within the 6th class curriculum. At the time of contact, *youngballymun* were unable to comment on the post-primary section of *Mission Transition* because they had not been involved in the delivery of this element of the programme.

²⁰ Although *youngballymun* found that the pupils transferred to fourteen different post-primary schools in 2009, it is *youngballymun*'s intention to link in with these schools to explore their practices in relation to transition and ascertain whether or not they would be interested in delivering the *Mission Transition* programme.

While the *Mission Transition* programme contains good core material, *youngballymun* felt that the programme needed to be supplemented with additional material, including information on topics such as Myself, My Friends, My School, My New School and My New Subjects. It was felt that extra materials around the areas of self-esteem, valuing and developing friendships, social skills and practical exposure to post-primary journals were needed.

Youngballymun identified the introduction of a parent programme as a key area of work for 2010. However, *youngballymun* felt that the *Mission Transition* Parent Programme did not address their particular needs and have begun to explore other avenues e.g. the National Parents Council publications. *Youngballymun* anticipate that a parent programme, in their context, may have a low level of parental engagement.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the independent implementation of *Mission Transition* by *youngballymun* with a view to exploring the transferability of the programme to additional educational settings. Data relating to three central themes was gathered, these were: knowledge of *Mission Transition*, the implementation of *Mission Transition* and programme outcomes. *Youngballymun* felt that the programme had strong core content and addressed a number of key areas pertaining to transition. Implementation of the programme in Ballymun has, to date, been focussed at primary level, and although *youngballymun* and their associated schools have no direct input from NLH, it was felt that the programme is easy to deliver and is something that the local schools require. *Youngballymun* felt that having a programme such as *Mission Transition* ensured that dedicated time was given to the topic of transition during 6th class. It was also felt that in order to further improve the programme, content areas within the pupil programme need to be expanded and that, although not currently being implemented by *youngballymun*, the successful implementation of the post-primary elements of the programme would prove difficult given the transfer of pupils to a wide-variety of post-primary schools. It was also felt that the parental element of the programme did not fully address the needs of the *youngballymun* project.

Chapter 8 - Conclusions & Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

All the projects developed by the NLH aim to increase the capacity of the local community to overcome barriers that prevent full social inclusion (such as low levels of educational attainment) by gathering and organising members of their local community and key stakeholders around an activity of common interest i.e. “*the healthy and positive development of children*” (NLH, 2008). Following a public invitation to tender (by the NLH) for the evaluation of the *Mission Transition* programme, the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU), Mary Immaculate College, Limerick was awarded the contract to examine, in detail:

- (i) The perspectives of the participating pupils/students, their parents/guardians, school representatives/teachers, and any other stakeholders associated with *Mission Transition*, and
- (ii) The perspectives of the NLH staff involved in devising and delivering the programme.

Key methods employed included documentary/desk research, interviews and focus groups with programme staff and programme participants, whilst questionnaires were designed to survey school principals, teachers, pupils and students, their parents and guardians and other relevant stakeholders. A telephone interview was also conducted to explore matters relating to the transferability of *Mission Transition* to other educational settings non-specific to NLH.

The current report presents the findings of the evaluation of the *Mission Transition* programme. The evaluation was anchored in a set of six objectives, which were determined prior to the commencement of the study. Those objectives were to:

- Explore the rationale for the development of a transition programme through analysis of local, national and international studies;
- Provide a summation of the *Mission Transition* programme, how it was developed, managed and implemented, and how it has evolved i.e. what has worked, what has not and why;

- Determine the degree of effectiveness of *Mission Transition* in meeting its own objectives, as perceived by all stakeholders involved in the programme as well as identifying any unanticipated outcomes;
- Evaluate methods of in-school delivery that facilitate the programme and identify possible barriers to the effectiveness of the chosen methods of delivery;
- Elicit the extent to which the content of *Mission Transition* addresses pupil, teacher and parent concerns in relation to transition, and in turn eases the integration of pupils into post-primary schooling i.e. clarify if the objectives meet the current needs of the client group and whether the objectives are still relevant; and
- Make recommendations to inform future development and the practice of the programme based on findings.

This chapter provides a summation of the *Mission Transition* programme and the main conclusions which can be drawn from the evaluation, as well as providing a set of recommendations to inform future development of the programme.

8.2 Development, Management, Implementation and Evolution of Mission Transition

Mission Transition is a programme which was developed by the NLH and aims to prepare students and their parents/guardians for the next stage in children's education i.e. the transition from primary school to post-primary school. The programme originally anticipated the inclusion of both a student element and a parent element – both of which would aim to help students and their parents to understand that a new post-primary school can provide an opportunity for a fresh start, as well as many enjoyable experiences. The evaluation has revealed that, although an expression of its necessity exists among the evaluation participants, to date the parental element of the programme is very much at its inception stage²¹. The overarching aim of *Mission Transition* is to “*ease the transition process from primary school to post-primary school for students and parents*” (NLH, 2007). The programme is managed by the NLH but relies heavily on the co-operation and support of participating school management and staff, particularly during the implementation period. The *Mission Transition* Project Worker is responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of the *Mission*

²¹ As previously mentioned (see footnote 4 on page 19), although the parental element of the programme has been designed, the implementation of the parent-focussed element is still in its infancy.

Transition programme during the pilot phase, in association with the HSCL Co-ordinators within the NLH's geographical target region.

Between 2007 and 2009, *Mission Transition* was implemented in four primary schools and two post-primary schools in the northside of Limerick City. Ordinarily, the primary phase of the programme was administered within the latter eight-week period of the primary school calendar and the post-primary phase was delivered within the initial eight-week period of the post-primary school calendar. The evaluation has uncovered that the delivery of the second phase of the intervention is most appropriate when delivered within the students' first month of their post-primary education. This is supported by research evidence, which suggests that pupils/students are at heightened risk of "dropping out" of post-primary school around the time of making the transition (Smyth et al. 2004) and is compounded by the fact that 43.8% of the primary level cohort of students of the current study outlined that they were not ready to move to post-primary school (see Chapter 5) until after the *Mission Transition* intervention (91.5% of students stated that they felt better prepared for post-primary school post-*Mission Transition* intervention). However, the evaluation also revealed that the delivery of the first phase of the intervention i.e. the primary phase, as evidenced by the primary research findings, is not appropriately timetabled. Consistencies were found between the perspectives of the NLH management and staff, the pupils/students themselves, and the teachers – all of whom felt that the primary phase of the programme would be more appropriate to the needs of the pupils/students if it were delivered prior to the students selecting their post-primary school and sitting their entrance exam. It was felt that implementation at this stage would also allow for visits to post-primary schools, which would permit the pupils/students (and their parents/guardians) to make a more informed choice of a post-primary school.

Upon visiting the participating schools, the *Mission Transition* Project Worker employed a variety of approaches to implement the programme e.g. journal activities, group discussions and student/parent presentations. In 2009, the *Mission Transition* Project Worker went on personal leave from her post. At this stage, a number of NLH staff became involved in the delivery of the programme, while a number of local HSCL Co-ordinators adopted the responsibility of delivering the parent-focused element of the programme. As outlined previously, the parental element of the programme is very much in its infancy; however, there was agreement amongst all evaluation stakeholders about the necessity of such a component. This is grounded in research, which also suggests that parental involvement is paramount in a

child's academic career (Anderson et al. 2000). Suggestions to increase parental engagement, as supported by the research, include effective communication procedures with parents, recruiting and organising parent support, including parents in decision-making and increased collaboration/discussions with parents to identify possible barriers to *Mission Transition*.

8.3 Strengths of Mission Transition

The main strengths as outlined in the report suggest that for the most part *Mission Transition* is meeting its objectives, particularly in relation to pupils and students. Pupils and students involved in the programme found the content new and useful, have increased levels of confidence and were helped to settle in to their new surroundings.

All respondents (NLH staff, pupils, students and teachers) were in agreement that *Mission Transition* is meeting its objective of providing pupils with knowledge and skills to enable them to make a successful transfer from primary to post-primary school through explicit teaching and prior preparation programmes/activities (primarily accomplished through discussion). The research participants agreed that the content being delivered is new and is something that pupils require. This is highly pertinent given that less than half of the teachers at primary level felt that all of their students would transfer successfully to post-primary school, while more than half of teachers at post-primary level felt that primary school was not sufficiently preparing sixth class pupils for post-primary school.

A particular success of the programme is that individual pupils realised that they were not alone in their knowledge deficiencies relating to post-primary school, which helped to provide a heightened sense of confidence amongst those pupils/students. All pupils/students expressed a good knowledge of the *Mission Transition* programme, understanding that the core focus of the programme was to prepare pupils for post-primary school by providing them with knowledge and information around post-primary school. Both the primary and post-primary teachers expressed concerns about their students' abilities to cope with the (predominantly operational, structural and social) changes that they faced in post-primary school. However, both primary and post-primary teachers were hopeful that pupils/students would (for example) do well in their Leaving Certificate, school exams and schoolwork, as well as make new friends, get on with their new teachers and stay out of trouble. They were confident that the majority of their students would transfer successfully and settle in to their

new surroundings. However, they felt that support around attendance, behaviour, academic performance and social skills were seen as areas requiring further development.

Following the intervention of the *Mission Transition* programme, primary pupils expressed increased levels of confidence about moving to post-primary school while the number of pupils who felt unprepared decreased. Four fifths of primary pupils believed that *Mission Transition* had helped them to get ready for post-primary school, with most of the pupils believing that *Mission Transition* covered all fundamentals necessary for preparing them for post-primary school. The participating post-primary teachers agreed that those students who had previously engaged with the *Mission Transition* programme were better prepared for the transition from primary to post-primary, than their non-engaging/engaged peers. There was also agreement that open communication between primary and post-primary schools eased the transition period, and ensured that the post-primary schools were prepared, in advance, for the individual needs of their new cohort of first year students.

Areas covered in the *Mission Transition* programme such as: discussions about expectations, explanations of subjects, work around timetables, structure of the school system, discussions about new subjects and information about extra-curricular activities were all well received. Engaging in activities in their *Mission Transition* journal was also mentioned regularly by both primary and post-primary pupils and students as a foundation for smooth transitions. Teachers and NLH staff also agreed that engaging with exercises that allow the students to explore the operational, structural and social arenas of the new post-primary school environment were beneficial and simplified the transition from primary school to post-primary school.

The pupil respondents of the non-target post-primary schools outlined that they would have liked to have continued working with *Mission Transition* in the 1st year of post-primary school, while the vast majority of those students believed that they made an easier transition between primary and post-primary school, in comparison with their peers who had not previously engaged with *Mission Transition*. All respondents (NLH staff, pupils, students and teachers) agreed that a programme like *Mission Transition* would benefit all students moving from primary to post-primary.

Another identified success of the programme was the relationship/rapport that NLH staff built up with the pupils, students and teachers. It was felt that this rapport was particularly evident when the NLH staff returned to visit the participating students in post-primary school. A sense of mutual respect and acceptance has also developed between NLH staff and teachers at each of the target schools as a result of the implementation of the *Mission Transition* programme. This could be utilised to the advantage of the *Mission Transition* programme, which NLH participants felt would be better if implemented in the future (at a classroom level) by the class teachers, thus allowing NLH to redefine their role as primarily a supportive agency with particular responsibilities for administration, training and development of the *Mission Transition* programme.

8.4 Challenges for Mission Transition

The main challenges as outlined in the report include the poor level of parental engagement, as well as logistical difficulties for NLH in relation to timetabling, delivery and differing levels of teacher engagement.

One of the more significant challenges to *Mission Transition*, similar to many initiatives throughout the education system, is the poor level of parental participation. The majority of respondents agreed that the parental element of the programme would greatly benefit and enhance *Mission Transition* and its aim to ease the transition for students between primary and post-primary school. However, while respondents acknowledged that parental involvement would be beneficial, they were unsure how to enhance/encourage parental involvement.

The *Mission Transition* programme works specifically with four primary schools and two post-primary schools. This presents a difficulty for *Mission Transition* in terms of programme implementation i.e. not all pupils who receive the programme at primary level receive the follow-up element at post-primary level as they attend non-NLH target schools. A recent migration of families from target areas associated with NLH is also seen to compound this challenge.

A logistical difficulty of the *Mission Transition* programme which was identified related to the methods and times for delivery of the programme. While the content of the programme

follows a specific structure across all schools, methods of delivery are very much tailored to suit the needs/requirements of each individual school. As a consequence, the timing of the programme tends not to suit some elements of the programme e.g. the programme would be more appropriate to the needs of the students if it were delivered prior to the post-primary entrance exams.

Additionally, given that the delivery of the programme was implemented by individuals external to the participating schools (except in the case of *youngballymun*), it is reliant on the flexibility of individual teachers and class timetables. While NLH programme delivery staff outlined that they are conscious not to clash with subjects that the pupils enjoy e.g. Art and/or PE, this was not always feasible. This difficulty was further complicated by the fact that the participating pupils themselves expressed concern around the scheduling of *Mission Transition* at times when they were due to be taking Art/PE classes. Where this occurred, pupils tended to have a perception of intrusion on their fun time. This, in turn, generated a negative attitude (on the students' behalf) towards the programme. Areas such as timetabling and operational procedures in schools also posed a challenge. In terms of timetabling, it was felt that the practice of withdrawing pupils for support teaching during *Mission Transition* time needed to be avoided. Other logistical issues that arose at post-primary level included difficulties relating to the timeframe for delivery i.e. the number of weeks required to run the programme and the number of delivery session visits. Participants generally felt that a “*short-sharp*” programme consisting of three weeks (with two visits per week) was the most effective model of operation.

Overall, while it was acknowledged that all teachers did engage with the programme at varying degrees, it was felt that the successful continuation of *Mission Transition* was dependent on an increased level of engagement from teachers in schools. Although the majority of respondents felt that the content covered in *Mission Transition* was appropriate, some felt that improved methodologies for delivery of that content needed to be explored. Suggestions included more innovation, interactivity, school-specific tasks, videos and ICT-based elements, as well as a more robust-looking journal. NLH also recognised the potential for increased interactivity within the programme but have been somewhat restricted by funding levels. It was also suggested that the content could be made more dynamic, and should incorporate areas such as homework, study skills and friendship skills. It was

acknowledged that some work around the area of relationships and bullying would be desirable.

Three of the five post-primary schools included in the evaluation were schools that did not engage with the *Mission Transition* programme. It became evident during the evaluation that (i) none of the non-target schools were aware that a number of their 1st year students had previously engaged with *Mission Transition* prior to their attending post-primary school and (ii) that these schools were open to the possibility of working with NLH in the future.. This draws to mind the expressed necessity of open and greater communication between transferring students' primary and post-primary schools.

8.5 Conclusions & Recommendations

The analysis of literature (local, national and international) has indicated a sound rationale for the development and provision of a transition programme. Through analysis of the development, management and implementation strategies for the *Mission Transition* programme, coupled with the perspectives of relevant stakeholders (NLH staff, pupils, students, teachers and principals), this evaluation has demonstrated what has worked, what has not and (in so far as possible) ascertained why not.

The main aim of the evaluation was to determine if the programme has met its objectives, which can be inferred from the evaluation objectives above i.e. the extent to which *Mission Transition* addresses pupil, student, teacher and parent concerns in relation to transition – which in turn eases the integration of the pupils into post-primary school. Based on the preceding analysis of both primary and post-primary data, it can be concluded that, overall, the programme has met its objectives. However, there are a number of outstanding issues and challenges that were identified through the evaluation, which require consideration and will ultimately support the achievement of positive change for pupils and students making the transition from primary to post-primary schooling. The recommendations detailed below are intended to inform the future development of the programme.

1. The NLH should explore funding options to support the employment of a Research and Development Officer to further develop the *Mission Transition* programme as a resource to publishable standard. The published 'pack' should incorporate a

formalised delivery model including the beneficial elements of the programme as identified through the evaluation (e.g. a parental pack; a facilitator's guide (to support those implementing the programme at classroom level); and an interactive student journal). The development of such a pack will require an in-depth review of:

- a. The content (considering the inclusion of support mechanisms for students around the operational, structural and social dimensions of post-primary schools);
- b. Appropriate methodologies for the delivery of the content; and
- c. Increased innovation, interactivity and school-specific tasks, videos, ICT-based elements, as well as a more robust-looking booklet.

As per the evaluation findings, consideration should be given to including content relative to homework, study skills, friendship and relationships, and bullying/conflict resolution.

2. The participation of pupils and students, as primary users of the *Mission Transition* programme, should be promoted in the drawing up of any revisions or amendments to the current programme.
3. The NLH should approach the DES and NCCA with the view to assessing the value and merit of piloting the *Mission Transition* programme at a citywide and/or national level. The transferability of the programme will require consideration during such a pilot-phase and can be advised by the findings contained in Chapter 7 of this report. The current evaluation has identified that all students (regardless of socio-economic status) would benefit from a programme that eases the transition from primary to post-primary school.
4. The NLH should assess the merits of local schools adopting the role of delivering of the programme, and subsequently reassess their own role regarding the co-ordination of the *Mission Transition* programme in areas such as administration, training and programme development. Such an approach would provide for a more cost efficient programme.
5. In light of recommendation no. 4 above, the newly appointed Research and Development Officer should explore the feasibility of teachers being supported to

implement the class-based programme, as well as resources and supports required by teachers to encourage their assuming responsibility for the delivery of the programme at classroom level. Possible avenues for support should draw on existing structures/expertise within NLH (e.g. ICT, online learning etc.), as well as exploring the appropriateness of outside agency structures (e.g. Education Centre Network) as a vehicle for teacher training.

6. Given the evaluation findings, NLH in conjunction with other relevant educational bodies, should explore the suitability of integrating *Mission Transition* into the current SPHE 6th class curriculum.
7. A more coherent strategy for parental involvement should be developed by the NLH team, in conjunction with relevant others, to explore a more structured approach to the involvement of parents. Suggestions for the successful engagement of parents include effective communication procedures with parents, recruiting and organising parent support, including parents in decision-making and increased collaboration/discussions with parents to identify possible barriers to *Mission Transition*. The revised parent element of the programme should be central to any review of *Mission Transition*, as well as being included as content in a published pack.
8. Until such time as necessary levels of funding are secured, NLH, in conjunction with target schools and local agencies, should explore suitable and alternative mechanisms for the smooth implementation of the *Mission Transition* programme:
 - a. Individual target schools to be supported and encouraged to take ownership of the programme at both primary and post-primary level;
 - b. This implementation should be cognisant of such issues as timetabling and scheduling of the *Mission Transition* programme within the school day i.e. not to impinge on students creative and sporting lessons and must incorporate a mechanism for teacher and school support with regard to the programme; and
 - c. Consideration must be given to the delivery of the programme at a time that is appropriate to the needs of the students i.e. prior to students selecting a post-primary school and sitting an entrance exam (at primary level), and within the first month of the student commencing his/her post-primary education.

9. The NLH should review the value of encouraging and supporting more open and authentic relationships between primary and post-primary schools (target and non-target). The findings of this review should be incorporated into any discussions that the NLH has with the DES, and/or the NCCA about integration of the programme at a curricular and school level. This recommendation is further supported by an expressed openness, on the part of non-target schools, to engage with Mission Transition in the future.

10. Prior to any internal review of *Mission Transition* being conducted, the management at the NLH should communicate with educational bodies such as the DES and the NCCA to gain a greater understanding of proposed policy advancements relating to transition in the Irish educational context.

11. The newly appointed Research and Development Officer should explore possibilities for programme expansion to a greater number of primary and post-primary schools. This would ensure that children are accessing both pre- and post-transition programme elements.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Programme Co-ordinator

Background Information

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your CAREER background?
2. When did you begin your work with NLH? Explain your role.
3. Does your experience of working with NLH match any initial expectations you had?
4. What aspects of your role have you most enjoyed?
5. Have there been any challenges in your role that you would like to discuss?

Mission Transition Development

6. What made you/NLH first feel that transition was an issue in schools?
7. Tell me a little bit about the background to the development of Mission Transition?
8. Who was involved in the initial development of the programme?
9. How was the initial programme content decided upon?
10. How was the initial method of delivery decided upon?
11. Was the content/delivery based on research?
12. Has the programme undergone any changes since it was first developed? What brought about these changes?
13. What would you say are the CURRENT aims and objectives of Mission Transition?
14. Overall, do you feel that Mission Transition is currently meeting its objectives? Elaborate.
15. Who are the CURRENT target group for Mission Transition? How was this derived?
16. In your opinion, does the current method of delivery enable Mission Transition to access its target group?
17. Do you feel that Mission Transition has been effective in meeting the needs of the target audience involved with Mission Transition? Elaborate.
18. How would you define a successful transfer from primary to post-primary school?
19. What do you feel are the necessary criteria to encourage a successful transfer?
20. Can you provide a brief description of the programme and how it operates currently? How is the programme structured in terms of staffing, work process, policies, procedures etc.?

Programme Implementation

21. What are your views on the current implementation of Mission Transition?
22. Does the programme follow a similar structure in all schools?
23. Who is involved in the delivery of the Mission Transition programme?
24. Are school staff involved with the delivery of the programme? How so?
25. Is there a mechanism available whereby staff-training is provided to delivery staff?
26. Are you happy that delivery staff are properly able to carry out their roles?
27. Have there been/is there any difficulties with the implementation of Mission Transition?
28. Are there any specific areas where you feel the implementation process could be improved going forward? Explain.
29. Is there currently a mechanism for regular review of the Mission Transition programme?
30. Do you hold regular meetings to discuss the implementation of Mission Transition? How often do they take place? Who attends these meetings?
31. How do you feel the content of the programme addresses the transition needs of the target group?
32. Are there any changes that you might like to see in relation to programme content?
33. What would you see as the positive outcomes of the programme for young people involved with Mission Transition?

34. Can you think of any negative outcomes?
35. Have there been any unexpected outcomes from the programme?

Professional Relationships

36. Do you enjoy working on the Mission Transition programme?
37. How would you describe your relationship with key stakeholders associated with Mission Transition?
38. Do you feel that these relationships could be improved in any way? How so?
39. How do you think that schools involved with NLH view Mission Transition?
40. How do you feel that pupils involved with NLH view Mission Transition?
41. How do you feel that associated parents view Mission Transition?
42. Do you feel that all key stakeholders recognise/understand the value of Mission Transition?
43. How many NLH staff are currently involved with the Mission Transition programme?
44. How would you describe your relationship with these staff?

Programme Outcomes

45. What do you perceive have been the successes of Mission Transition over the years?
46. Can you identify any specific challenges which have arisen in relation to Mission Transition over the years? How have these challenges been overcome?
47. What has been learned since the programme's inception that could inform the Mission Transition programme?
48. How do you see the Mission Transition programme developing in the future? What else do you see the programme doing?
49. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B
Focus Group with Delivery Staff

00.0 Welcome, Introductions, Intro. to Mission Transition & Housekeeping

- Introduction – clarification of roles
- Rationale for workshop i.e. Discussion re: Mission Transition is it working & if anything needs to be improved
- Structure of workshop i.e. 45 minutes in total.
- Respect for others i.e. when one person talking, respect them and allow them to finish before you talk.
- Anonymity guaranteed
- Option to withdraw at any stage during the workshop
- Outline that 4 topics will be discussed throughout the workshop
- Staff introduction – name, NLH role, background

00.05 Topic 1: Knowledge & Awareness of Mission Transition

- Could you share what you know about Mission Transition with the group? Particularly in relation to:
 - o Rationale?
 - o Aims and objectives of Mission Transition?
 - o Target group for Mission Transition?
 - o Programme content?
 - o Description of how the programme operates currently? (Methods of delivery, staffing, work process, policies, procedures)

00.15 Topic 2: Thoughts on Transition

- How would you define a successful transfer from primary to post-primary school?
- How, in your opinion, does Mission Transition support smooth transitions?
- Do you feel that Mission Transition has been effective in meeting the transition needs of the target audience (as described earlier) involved with Mission Transition? Elaborate.

00.35 Topic 3: Programme Implementation

- What are your views on the current implementation of Mission Transition? (successes/ challenges/ areas for change/improvement)
- Do you think Mission Transition is working as it should? (Why? / Why not?)
- Do you know if Mission Transition is regularly reviewed? (How? Is that review formal / informal in nature?)
- Do you feel the programme addresses the transition needs of the target group?
-

00.25 Topic 4: Professional Relationships

- How may NLH staff are currently involved in MT? How would you describe the dynamic of that group?
- Is there anything you would change about internal Mission Transition relationships to improve them? (Remind the participants that they will remain anonymous in the report)
- How do you think that stakeholders involved with NLH view Mission Transition? (Pupils, teachers, schools, parents, NLH staff/management)

00.26 Topic 5: Programme Outcomes

- What would you see as the positive outcomes of Mission Transition for the young people involved?
- Can you think of any negative outcomes? How were they overcome / challenged? How would you challenge/overcome them in the future?
- Have there been any unexpected outcomes from the programme that you can think of?
- How do you see the Mission Transition programme developing in the future? What else do you see the programme doing?

Any further comments

Thanks & End.

Appendix C
Focus Groups with 6th Class Pupils

- 01.0 Welcome, Introductions, Intro. to Mission Transition & Housekeeping**
- Closest toilets & rules for leaving the room i.e. tell adult first, length of workshop
 - Respect for others present i.e. when one person talking, respect them & allow them to finish before you do)
- 00.03 Small Groups:**
Break larger group in to 2 smaller groups (every second child A & B).
- 00.04 Icebreaker (musical chairs / apples & oranges / ball game)**
- 00.07 Circle time**
Facilitator to explain the following while children design their own name badge:
- Rationale for workshop i.e. to see if Mission Transition is working & if anything needs to be improved – young people have a very important task i.e. to decide what is fed back to Mission Transition.
 - Structure of workshop i.e. 45 minutes in total that will start with discussion, then activities and finally back to discussion.
 - Respect for others i.e. when one person talking, respect them and allow them to finish before you talk.
 - Outline that 3 topics will be discussed throughout the workshop and that the young people will need to come up with solutions themselves to these themes.
 - The activities will include (i) Build a Story, and let them choose between (ii) Role-Play OR Arts & Crafts.
- 00.10 Topic 1: Knowledge & Awareness of Mission Transition**
- Discussion Group** (the main points from each question below to be recorded on flip chart. The children will decide themselves on their collective response to each question):
- Have they heard of Mission Transition?
 - What do they know about Mission Transition?
 - Do they know why Mission Transition was working with them?
 - What did they think of the Mission Transition Staff?
 - What do they expect when they start post-primary school?
 - Do they think Mission Transition helped them to get ready for post-primary school? Did it help to build their confidence and make them more ready for it?
- 00.20 Topic 2: Mission Transition Activities (in school & at home)**
Drama OR Arts & Crafts:
- The types of activities they did
 - Whether they thought they were useful/useless activities/games etc.
- 00.28 Circle Time:**
Feedback to their small group about their play OR artwork i.e. what the activities were. Children to agree, collectively, on the main activities and record them on flip chart.

00.30 Topic 3: Mission Transition Improvements

Build a Story:

- "I am the new boss of Mission Transition and will make it better by..."

00.33

Circle Time:

Feedback to their small group about the main things that would make Mission Transition better. Children to agree on the main findings and record them on flip chart.

00.34

Democratic election:

- Going around in a circle, ask the children to state whether they would/wouldn't be happy to feed back to the larger group.
- Write the names of those children that would like to feedback on the flip chart.
- Ask each child to write the name of one of those children on a piece of paper and place it in a bag.
- The 2 children with the most votes will feedback to the larger group.

00.37

Feedback to larger group:

2 nominated children to feed back to larger group.

00.45

Thanks & End.

Appendix D

Sample Questionnaire

Mission Transition

Evaluation Questionnaire



Young People

6th Class

Please fill in your name: _____

What is your date of birth? _____ day _____ month _____ year

School name:

Young People

May 2009

Section 1: Personal Information

1.1 Please tick to show whether you are a boy or girl:

Boy Girl

1.2 Who do you live with the majority of the time? (Please tick as many as needed)

Mother Grandmother Foster parents
 Father Grandfather Brother
 Stepmother Uncle Sister
 Stepfather Aunt Other

If other, please explain _____

1.3 Do you talk to your parents/guardians about any of the following –

	Yes	No	Sometimes
What you do after school			
How well you are doing at school			
Who you are friends with			
How happy you are			
How you spend your money			
What you do with your friends			
Which post-primary school you are going to			
Hopes for post-primary school			
Challenges for post-primary school			
Mission Transition			

Section 2: Primary School

2.1 What primary school do you go to? _____

2.2 Have you attended any other primary school(s)?

Yes No..... Don't know ...

2.2.1 If so, please name them -

2.3 How much do you like being in 6th class? (Please tick one)

Like it a lot Like it a little Don't like it at all Don't know Other

If other, please explain _____

2.4 Would you stay in 6th class if you were allowed? (Please tick one)

Yes ... No Don't know ...

2.5 How many friends do you have in this school? (Please tick one)

Three or more One
Two None

2.6 How many friends do you have in your class? (Please tick one)

Three or more One
Two None

2.7 Thinking of your friends, are they – (Please tick as many as you like)

Friends you've had since before primary school
New friends you've made in primary school
Friends from outside of school
Other

If other, please explain _____

2.8 How often do you meet with friends? (Please tick one)

Everyday	2 – 3 days a week	Once a week	Less than once a week	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>				

If other, please explain _____

2.9 Which of the following do you do with friends? (Please tick as many as you like)

Play sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	Play video games.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talk about boys.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	Watch TV	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talk about girls	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do homework	<input type="checkbox"/>		

If other, please explain _____

2.10 What do you like most about this school? (Please tick one)

Teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Schoolwork	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homework	<input type="checkbox"/>	Friends.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sport	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

If other, please explain _____

2.11 What do you like least about this school? (Please tick one)

Teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homework	<input type="checkbox"/>	Schoolwork	<input type="checkbox"/>
Friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sport	<input type="checkbox"/>
Art	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

If other, please explain _____

2.12 Can you remember how many days you've missed from school this year?

(Please tick one)

0 days	1 – 9 days	10 days	11 – 20 days	20+ days
<input type="checkbox"/>				

**2.13 If you were to miss a day of school, what would the main reason for doing that be?
(Please tick one)**

- | | | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Sick | <input type="checkbox"/> | Homework not done | <input type="checkbox"/> | School work | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | Avoiding other pupils | <input type="checkbox"/> | Bored..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other | <input type="checkbox"/> | | | | |

If other, please explain _____

2.14 Did any of your classmates leave school before finishing 6th class?

- Yes.... No.... Don't know....

2.15 Have you ever considered leaving school before finishing 6th class?

- Yes.... Sometimes.... No.... Don't know..

2.16 Do you ever get into trouble with your teacher in school?

- Yes.... Sometimes.... No.... Don't know..

2.16.1 Which of the following get you into trouble with teachers in your school? (Please tick as many as you like)

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Talking in class | <input type="checkbox"/> | Late for classes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Forgetting books | <input type="checkbox"/> | Skiving off/mitching | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Fighting | <input type="checkbox"/> | Never get in trouble | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not paying attention in class... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If other, please explain _____

2.17 If you had a problem at school, who would you most likely talk to? (Please tick one)

- | | | | | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Mother | <input type="checkbox"/> | Grandmother | <input type="checkbox"/> | Brother | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Father | <input type="checkbox"/> | Grandfather | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sister | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Stepmother | <input type="checkbox"/> | Uncle | <input type="checkbox"/> | Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Stepfather | <input type="checkbox"/> | Aunt | <input type="checkbox"/> | Friend | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> | Foster parents .. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If other, please explain _____

2.18 Here are some views about being in primary school. Please tick a box for each statement to show whether you agree or disagree with these views.
THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS.

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
I feel safe in this school			
I understand the rules in this school			
I manage to keep the rules most of the time			
I find school-work in this school very interesting			
I think I am doing well in this school			
I am worried about being at this school			
I get too much homework at this school			
I think the work is quite easy in this school			
I like being at this school			
I would prefer to be in another school			
I think most of the teachers are friendly			
Nobody at this school notices me			
I usually feel relaxed about school			
I look forward to coming to school most days			
I don't have many friends at this school			
I am looking forward to post-primary school			
I'm afraid that I'll make a fool of myself in class			
I'm happy with how my school-work is going			
I am liked by most of the pupils in my class			
I am good at sports			
I have trouble keeping up with my schoolwork			
I will miss primary school			

Section 3: Post-primary School

3.1 Do you have any brothers or sisters in post-primary school?

Yes ... No ...

3.2 Which school are they in?

St. Nessian's Ard Scoil Rís...
Salesians Other

If other, please explain _____

3.3 How are you feeling about moving to post-primary school? (Please tick one)

Excited Nervous ... Confident
Sad Happy Don't know ..
Worried Confused .. Other

If other, please explain _____

3.4 Who decided which post-primary school you should go to? (Please tick as many as you like)

Mother Grandmother.. Foster parents ..
Father Grandfather ... Brother
Stepmother .. Uncle Sister
Stepfather Aunt Principal
Teacher Myself Other

If other, please explain _____

3.5 Why did the person in the last question (3.4) above choose that post-primary school? (Please tick as many as you like)

My parents went there Friends going to that school
Relatives going to that school Nice school with good facilities...
Close to home Other

If other, please explain _____

3.6 Which of the following, in your opinion, are important when making the move to post-primary school?

(Please tick as many as you like)

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Help from parents | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nice teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Friendly classmates | <input type="checkbox"/> | Entrance exams | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Talking to people | <input type="checkbox"/> | Induction days | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Tour of post-primary school | <input type="checkbox"/> | Post-primary teacher visits..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Primary school projects | | Subject choice in | |
| e.g. Mission Transition | <input type="checkbox"/> | post-primary school | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Home visits from post-primary | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If other, please explain _____

3.7 Are you looking forward to any of the following in post-primary school?

(Please tick as many as you like)

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Making new friends..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Learning new things..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Doing practical subjects..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Being with older relatives..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More freedom | <input type="checkbox"/> | More responsibility | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Greater variety of subjects | <input type="checkbox"/> | Having more teachers..... | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Greater variety of activities..... | <input type="checkbox"/> | Finding my way around school .. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not looking forward to anything .. | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If other, please explain _____

**3.9.1 Are you concerned about any of the following challenges in post-primary school?
(Please tick as many as you like)**

Getting lost	<input type="checkbox"/>	Getting picked on	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not knowing anyone	<input type="checkbox"/>	Having more teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doing PE and Sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	Being in a bigger school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning/keeping the rules	<input type="checkbox"/>	Doing more subjects.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doing practical subjects	<input type="checkbox"/>	Being the youngest in school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Entrance exams.....	<input type="checkbox"/>	Having new classmates.....	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>		

If other, please explain _____

**3.9.2 How well do you expect to cope with these challenges in post-primary school?
(Please tick one)**

Very well	Well	Not so well	Not well at all	Don't know	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>					

If other, please explain _____

3.10 How do you feel you will get on with teachers in post-primary school? (Please tick one)

Very well	Well	Not so well	Not well at all	Don't know	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>					

If other, please explain _____

3.11 How do you feel you will get on with other pupils in post-primary school? (Please tick one)

Very well	Well	Not so well	Not well at all	Don't know	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>					

If other, please explain _____

3.12 What do you think the post-primary school will be like in schoolwork terms? (Please tick one)

A lot more work than primary	A little more work than primary	Same work as primary	A little less work than primary	A lot less work than primary	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.13.1 Do you have hopes for yourself in post-primary school?

Yes No Don't know

3.13.2 Which of the following hopes do you have for yourself in post-primary? (Please tick as many as you like)

Doing well in tests/exams	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staying out of trouble	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sporting success	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do well with schoolwork	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting on with teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Doing the Leaving Certificate ...	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doing the Junior Certificate ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Making new friends	<input type="checkbox"/>		

If other, please explain _____

3.14 How do you feel your schoolwork performance will be in post-primary? (Please tick one)

Much improved	Improved	No change	Worse	Much worse	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>					

3.15 Do you think that any of the following pressures will exist in post-primary school? (Please tick as many as you like)

To take sides	<input type="checkbox"/>	To dress in a particular way ...	<input type="checkbox"/>
To behave in a particular way	<input type="checkbox"/>	To talk in a particular way	<input type="checkbox"/>
To take part in certain activities ..	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

If other, please explain _____

Section 4: Moving/Transition to Post-primary School

4.1 Do you feel that your primary school is preparing you for post-primary school?

Yes No Don't know ...

4.2 In your opinion, how well do you feel your primary school is preparing you for post-primary school? (Please tick one)

Very well Well Not so well Not well at all Don't know Other

If other, please explain _____

4.3 Which of the following do you feel are important when going into post-primary school? (Please tick as many as you like)

Seeing a sample timetable	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meeting new teachers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting the Year Head	<input type="checkbox"/>	Meeting the Principal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having an entrance assessment ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	Information about new subjects ..	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information about extra-curricular activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Explanation of the new school rules	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having a familiar face	<input type="checkbox"/>	Getting a tour of the school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Open Night	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

If other, please explain _____

4.4 Do you know what Mission Transition is?

Yes No Don't know

4.5 Has Mission Transition helped you to get ready for post-primary school?

Yes No Don't know

4.6 How do you feel about the amount of time Mission Transition has spent preparing you for moving to post-primary school?

Too long Just right Not long enough Don't know Other

If other, please explain _____

4.7 How would you rate the following activities in Mission Transition?

	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Discussions about expectations					
Work around school timetables					
Work around structure of school system					
Work around entrance exam					
Work around new subjects					
Work around understanding the subjects					
Work around extra-curricular activities					
Work around my 1 st day of post-primary school					
Certificate					
Mission Transition staff					
Other (Please explain)					

4.8 Did you receive a Mission Transition certificate after working with the Mission Transition programme?

Yes No Don't know

4.9 If yes, how did you feel when you received your Mission Transition certificate?

4.10 How would you rate the Mission Transition people that you met?

Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>					

4.11 How confident did you feel about your move to post-primary school before you worked with Mission Transition?

Very confident	Confident	Not confident	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.12 How confident do you feel now that you've worked with Mission Transition?

Very confident	Confident	Not confident	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.13 How ready did you feel for post-primary school before you worked with Mission Transition?

Very ready	Confident	Not ready	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.14 How ready do you feel now that you've worked with Mission Transition?

Very ready	Confident	Not ready	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4.14.1 Was there anything missing from Mission Transition that you felt would have been helpful in preparing you for your move to post-primary school?

4.15 In your opinion, what was the BEST thing about Mission Transition?

4.16In your opinion, what was the **WORST** thing about Mission Transition?

4.17Can you suggest any changes that would make Mission Transition better for next year's 6th class?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

Mission Transition Evaluation



What will happen to the information?



All information that the researchers collect through discussion with students, parents and other people will be held by the researchers and stored in a safe place. This information will be used to help write up a final report, which will be given to the [Northside Learning Hub](#).

What do I need to give consent for?

Any person who decides to take part in the research will be asked to sign a form to say that they want to be involved. Parents will also need to give consent before young people can take part.

What exactly does giving my consent mean?

Giving your consent, or consent on behalf of your son/daughter, means that you are willing to take part in the evaluation of *Mission Transition*, that you are willing to talk to a member of the research team and share any information that might help with the evaluation of *Mission Transition*. You can choose if you want to take part in every part of the research, or just some parts of the research.

What happens at the end of the research discussion?

At the end of the discussions, the researcher will quickly run through the main things that were talked about and check that you are feeling all right about the discussions. Once information from all parents, young people and other individuals involved has been gathered and compared, a final report will be written up.

Will I be able to see the final report?

Yes, the final report will be available to anyone who would like a copy.

What do I do now if I want to help out?

If you think you would like to be involved, or that you would like your son/daughter to be involved, then you need to sign a consent form. Dedicated teachers within each school will have these forms and they will help you to fill one out.

Can I contact the researcher if I have any questions?



Yes, the researcher can be contacted at any time during the research on 061-774712.

Research Information Leaflet

For further information contact:

Rory McGann
Mary Immaculate College
South Circular Road
Limerick

061-774712

Mission Transition Research

What is Mission Transition?

Transition between primary and secondary school is a key area of concern for people in the [Northside](#). As a result, [Northside Learning Hub](#) designed a programme called *Mission Transition*. *Mission Transition* helps to prepare students who are moving to secondary school and their parents for the next stage of their education by helping them to understand that, although secondary school is a time of great change, it also represents an opportunity for a fresh start.

Who is involved in Mission Transition?

Over 100 children each year are involved in the *Mission Transition* programme with their Home School Liaison Co-ordinators and Class Teachers/Year Heads. Home School Liaison Co-ordinators are also involved in working with the parents of pupils involved with this programme. The project is managed by the [Northside Learning Hub](#).

Why is the evaluation being done?

The evaluation is being carried out so that the [Northside Learning Hub](#) can see how well

[Mission Transition](#) is working and to make improvements if necessary.

Who is doing the evaluation?

The [Northside Learning Hub](#) have asked researchers at [Mary Immaculate College](#) to carry out the work on their behalf.

What will be involved?

The research team at [Mary Immaculate College](#) want to talk to the parents, young people, teachers, Home School Community Liaison teachers and [Mission Transition](#) staff to see what they think about [Mission Transition](#).

Is participation in the evaluation voluntary?

All participation in the evaluation is voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not feel comfortable doing so.

Is the information I give confidential?

All information that you talk to the researchers about is completely confidential and will not be discussed with anyone else. So, if you mention something about [Mission Transition](#), an individual school, a teacher or a [Mission Transition](#) staff member, the researcher cannot and will not talk about it with anyone.

Is the information I give anonymous?

All information that you talk to the researchers about will remain completely anonymous. The information in the final report will not include any individual names and nobody will know anything you said or anything about you as an individual.

Do I have the right to withdraw at any time?

Any person who takes part in the research can stop taking part at any time.

How will the information be recorded?

The researchers will tape-record the discussions with students, parents and staff so that they can listen to the tapes later and make a note of anything important that was said. After that the tapes will be destroyed.

How will I benefit from taking part in the evaluation?

Taking part in the research may not benefit you directly. However, it is hoped that the [Northside Learning Hub](#) would benefit from this evaluation, which will in turn benefit families, young people and schools.

Appendix F



lockers*

* Make sure you take good care of your locker key



Where is your locker?



When should you go to your locker?



Who is in charge of the lockers in your school?



What should you do if you lose, break or forget your locker key?

Appendix G

SCHOOL KUDZ

Why, do you think, does a school have rules?

Look at your school rules and write out the 5 most important rules:



What is the purpose of your school journal?

What do you write into your school journal?

What should you not write into your school journal?

Write the following important dates into your school journal:

- a) Mid term break October
- b) Christmas Holidays
- c) Mid term break February
- d) Easter Holidays
- e) End of school years - Summer holidays begin
- d) Parent - Teacher meetings

Why is it important for your parents to sign your journal each week?

On which page in your journal would you find:

- a) The school rules?
- b) Your school's Mission Statement?
- c) Information about your uniform?