

**Supporting the Transition from Primary School to
Secondary School for Children who are Looked
After.**

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Abstract

The transition from primary to secondary school is a very important but potentially difficult time for all children. However, theory and statistics at local and national levels indicate that for children who are 'Looked After' this transition is likely to be particularly challenging, although there appears to be little current published literature on the subject. The present study aimed to find out the key factors that support children Looked After through this transition, as perceived by the main stakeholders: children Looked After who had recently gone through, or were about to go through the transition; their carers; their teachers; and other professionals involved in supporting them. This qualitative study took place within a semi-rural borough in Wales. Data were gathered in two parts, using semi-structured interviews. These were analysed using thematic analysis and within this, framework analysis. Analysis of the results indicates that a range of factors are perceived as supporting or hindering the transition, including within-child factors, supports within children's immediate environments, the way those supporting children work together, and wider systemic factors. Four key principles emerged from the results. Support for children in public care going through the transition from primary to secondary school should: 1. be holistic; 2. be individualised; 3. seek to minimise children's differences; and 4. have an emphasis on information sharing and planning. These principles, along with a series of recommended actions, may be used to inform tailored transition packages to support children in this vulnerable group through transition.

I hereby declare that, except where attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Chapter 1: Background and Literature Review

The present chapter introduces the study and considers relevant legislation, government drives and initiatives, as well as the current body of literature related to children 'Looked After' and primary/secondary transition. Issues related to eliciting the views of stakeholders will also be explored.

1.1 The Problem

There is an extensive body of literature indicating that children in public care are significantly more likely than other children and young people to perform poorly on a range of educational outcome measures (Berridge, 2007; Jackson & McParlin, 2006). The gap between the performance of this group and other young people continues to widen, following the transition from primary to secondary school. This transition process can be a difficult time for all children but theory and statistics at local and national levels indicate that children who are 'Looked After' by local authorities are likely to find this transition particularly challenging. However, there appears to be very limited literature on this subject.

While most educational and welfare based systems have been designed and evaluated by professionals, there is now increasing awareness of the importance of listening to the voices of the recipients of services and the acknowledgement that they deserve opportunities to shape it (e.g. as discussed by King & Ehlert, 2008).

The present study aims to increase knowledge about primary to secondary transition of children in public care, and to provide a voice for those involved in the process.

1.2 Definitions

The present study focuses on 'children Looked After', 'transition' and 'views of stakeholders'. It is therefore important to define these terms to ensure that the author and the reader have a shared understanding of what the terms represent in this study.

1.2.1 Children Looked After

The term 'Looked After' was introduced in section 22 of the Children Act (1989). A child can be described as 'Looked After' if placed in the care of a local authority by a court (under a Care Order) or provided with accommodation by Social Services for more than 24 hours (Dent & Cameron, 2003). Children may become 'Looked after' for a variety of reasons, for example if they have suffered from abuse or neglect within the family, because of the death of a parent, or if in other ways it is deemed that their family are unable to provide adequate care for them. It should be noted that for the purposes of this study the terms 'Children Looked After', 'Looked After Children' and 'Children in Public Care' will be used interchangeably. Also the word 'child' will refer to all young people under the age of 18.

1.2.2 Transition

Due to the way the state education system is organised in Britain, almost all children will experience a transition between schools during the course of their statutory education. The vast majority of education authorities within the UK organise school systems into primary schools (key stages 1 and 2 for children up to 11 years old) and secondary schools (key stages 3 and 4 for children aged 11 years upwards), meaning that at age 11, children are required to change schools. For the purposes of the present study, the term 'transition' refers to the processes involved in effecting the change between primary and secondary school. It does not refer to a one-off event or a set timescale, as it is acknowledged that what is

judged to be the 'transition period' varies between individuals and contexts.

1.2.3 Views of Stakeholders

The current study is based on the perceptions of those most involved in the transition of children who are Looked After when moving from primary to secondary school. The basis for this is discussed later in this chapter and the practical considerations involved in the current study are outlined in chapter 3. In this study, 'those most involved' were judged to be the children themselves, their foster carers, school staff concerned with their transition and various other professionals involved with the transition of children Looked After. The justification for these choices can be found in chapter 3.

1.3 Current Legislation, Government Drives and Initiatives Associated with Children Looked After and Transition

1.3.1 Policy and Guidance Surrounding the Education of Children Looked After

There are now higher than ever numbers of children in public care throughout the developed world (Walker-Gleaves & Walker, 2008). This is reflected in the UK: the numbers of children in public care in England has been rising since 1994, although more recently there has been a levelling off or slight decline (Rowlands & Statham, 2009) but in Wales the number of children Looked After over the last decade has continued to rise (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a). As a result, there are increasing concerns as to how international, national and local policy and practice relating to their education impacts on their lives.

Internationally, article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) emphasises that all children have a right to education. In England and Wales, and specifically in relation to children in public care, the 'Children Act' (1989; 2004) places a duty on all local authorities to ensure that all the identified needs of children are met when they are

accommodated by the local authority, including a duty to promote the educational achievement of children who are Looked After. The new 'Children and Young Person's Bill' (2008) sets out legislation around children in public care and applies to both England and Wales. It aims to enable those children and young people who enter the care system to be able to achieve the same aspirations that parents have for their own children. One of the key elements is an aim to "improve the experience children in care have at school and increase their educational attainment"(DCSF, 2008 p. 2).

There is also a range of UK guidance available about children in Public care. Some of the most relevant include 'Guidance: Education of young people in public care'(DfEE, 2000); 'Supporting Looked After Learners. A practical guide for school governors' (DfES, 2006c); and 'DfES Statutory guidance: Duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children (2005b).

1.3.2 Transition Policy and Guidance

While there is much published research and best practice evidence around the primary-secondary transition (see later in this chapter), there is limited national statutory guidance in this area. In England the Self Evaluation Form for secondary schools, completed as part of OFSTED inspection, specifically directs schools to comment on their transition arrangements (Ofsted, 2007). Guidance around transition includes 'A condensed Key Stage 3: Improving Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 transfer'(DfES, 2006b) 'Tracking for Success' (DfES, 2005d) and 'Curriculum Continuity: Effective transfer between primary and secondary schools' (DfES, 2004).

1.4 Literature on Children Looked After

1.4.1 General

There is increasing awareness that children and young people who are, or have been, in the care of the local authority are one of the most likely

groups in our society to exhibit evidence of social exclusion such as; “joblessness, homelessness and friendlessness”(Dent & Cameron, 2003 p.3). Care leavers are over-represented in some of the most vulnerable adult groups including young parents, the homeless and prisoners; one quarter of people in prison today have spent some time in our care system (DCSF, 2008).

1.4.2 Children Looked After and Education

In addition to, and firmly linked to, more general long term negative life outcomes, there have been ongoing concerns about low achievement in education by children and young people in public care since the 1980s (Jackson 1987) and despite government policy guidance, these concerns remain. Recent UK government statistics indicate that children Looked After are five time less likely to achieve five good GCSEs, nine times more likely to be excluded from school, and six times less likely to go on to higher education than their peers (DCSF, 2008). This underachievement is an increasing concern to politicians. In 2006, the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was reported as saying that it is appalling that we spend £2 billion on children in care, yet only 8% gain five good GCSEs and only 1% go on to university (Wintour, 2006).

These poor school outcomes are not only of concern in themselves, but it is clear that low educational achievement is linked to longer term life outcomes (DfES, 2005c). Government statistics for England indicate that children who leave care with no qualifications are less likely to be in education, employment or training than those that leave with some qualifications, and are five times more likely than those with qualifications to be in custody at age19 (DfES, 2006a). Overall, the picture for those who do not access appropriate education is bleak; “unprecedented levels of non-participation in education at age 16 and post -16 means that they [children Looked After] have significantly curtailed life chances” (Walker-Gleaves & Walker, 2008 p.466). Evidence from Jackson and Martin (1998) also indicates that recipients of the care system who have

experienced success in later life attributed their success to earlier positive educational outcomes.

1.4.3 What causes these poor outcomes?

There are many explanations as to why children in public care perform poorly compared to their peers. Research indicates that pre-care experiences, the process of going into care itself and life in care, are all likely to impact on educational participation and subsequently attainment.

1.4.3.1 Pre care experience. Much of the research cites pre-care experiences as strongly influencing attainment, as children who become Looked After are likely to have a history that puts them in a group already vulnerable to low educational achievements.

Children Looked After are more likely to have experienced psycho-social adversity (Berridge, 2007). Berridge (op cit) argues that factors related to disadvantage, such as lack of parental support, social class and poverty are all associated with low educational achievement and in themselves increase risk of educational failure before these children even enter care.

The events that lead to a child being placed into public care are likely to have an effect on their well-being and educational attainment levels. Rutter (1999) argues that the social risk factors associated with family breakdown and entry to care are closely linked to educational failure. Many children in public care have experienced abuse prior to becoming Looked After. In 2004, 62% of all Looked After children were placed in care primarily because of neglect or abuse (DfES, 2005a). This is likely to have effects on achievement. An overview of research undertaken for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (Mills, 2004) concluded that maltreated children are at much greater risk of academic failure, even when controlling for social class and other background factors, leading the author to conclude that “Much of the poor school performance of Looked After children may be explained by histories of maltreatment” (p.4).

There is much evidence indicating why children who have been abused or neglected have poor educational outcomes. 'Attachment theory' (Bowlby, 1969) proposes that the sense of safety provided by a parent forms the roots of emotional attachment in children, and that having a secure base encourages exploration of the wider world. Bowlby believed that securely attached children appear to be more curious about the world and therefore keener to learn, leading in turn to better participation in education. The importance of this link between early attachment and learning is supported by more recent work on brain development. This indicates that early relationships are of central importance in the organisation, development and growth of prefrontal executive functions, such as memory, emotion, and representation (see Balbernie, 2001), all of which are vital for educational achievement. Deficits in these areas are linked to lower academic achievement, difficulties sustaining attention, language impairments and auditory processing difficulties (Trevvarthen & Aitken, 2001). Greig et al. (2008) argue that whilst IQ remains the best general predictor of achievement, early attachment is almost as strong a predictor.

The wealth of evidence associated with children's pre-care experiences and the effect on their educational achievements leads Berridge (2007) to conclude that

"Looked-after children originate from the most disadvantaged social groups, characterized by family breakdown, parental poverty, low parental support, maltreatment and, consequently, a high level of special educational need – all of which are strongly linked to low educational attainment...Therefore, it is not obvious that the care system necessarily jeopardizes children's educational chances, as is often alleged. The factors that cluster to predict entry to care are also associated with educational failure". (Berridge, 2007 p 8 - 9)

While few would dispute that children in public care are more likely to come from groups at risk of low educational achievement, this view that the care system does not influence educational outcomes is strongly contested. A range of studies, in which the attainments of children in care are matched with those of other at-risk groups, indicate that being Looked After has a huge effect on children's achievements, even when other factors, such as those Berridge cites, are controlled for (e.g. Christofferson, 1996; Vinnerljung et al., 2005). This strongly indicates that simply being in the care system has a huge effect on children's educational chances and a range of research, such as Borland et al. (1998) and Jackson and Sachdev (2001) concludes that although the family background of children in public care plays a part, the care system itself must accept a large responsibility.

1.4.3.2 Factors that cause low achievement in care. While it must be acknowledged that every child's circumstances are different, research indicates that there are a number of factors that may act as barriers to children's achievement and school participation whilst in public care. Those cited as adverse factors include: the care environment where children are placed – for example there may not be adequate resources or conditions for study (Gilligan, 2007), or the carer themselves may have no, or few, qualifications, which in turn may have a negative effect on the child (The Fostering Network, 2006); the stability of the placements a child experiences (e.g. as discussed by Peake, 2006); a lack of ambition from those responsible for the education of children Looked After (Francis, 2000); lack of information or inappropriate information sharing (e.g. Fletcher-Campbell & Archer, 2003); and time spent out of school (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003).

While evidence indicates that there are a number of factors that may contribute to the educational outcomes of children who are Looked After, it may be that each of these factors on their own does not necessarily lead to poor outcomes for every child. Instead it is likely that all of the factors interact with each other (Dent & Cameron, 2003) and that it is an

accumulation of stressors or *multiple adversity factors* that cause poor outcomes. Gilligan (2000) suggests that children may be able to cope with some adversity in life, but it is when there are multiple stressors that they may 'buckle under the strain' (p.38). While this picture may seem bleak, there is evidence that reducing this accumulation of problem areas may reduce the risk of later problems: Gilligan (2000) argues that reducing the number of problem areas in a child's life, even by one, may have a disproportionate impact, because adversity seems to be most difficult to manage when it comes in multiple forms. It may therefore be that an intervention to support children facing all these adversity factors could have a greater effect than for children facing only one or two particular difficulties.

1.4.4 When Children Do Well.

While there is much research indicating why children who are Looked After have poor outcomes, "there may actually be much to learn from finding out why those children who do well actually do well, despite having difficult home or other circumstances" (Gilligan, 2000 p.37). Many researchers are now investigating protective factors for children Looked After, aiming to understand how some children succeed despite adversity. A number of studies have identified factors associated with educational success for children Looked After. Jackson and Martin (1998) followed up a group of young people who had been Looked After and who had experienced success in life. They found a number of factors that may promote better outcomes: the young person having an internal locus of control, someone taking an interest in their education, learning to read early and being in an educationally rich living environment where education is valued. In a review of the literature on the subject Dent and Cameron (2003) outline protective factors as including: secure attachment relationships, good cognitive ability, social competence, positive self-perceptions, a supportive teacher, family's socio-economic status, family members having a reasonable level of education and positive factors in the wider community. Previous studies have not always taken into account variables such as the child's developmental level or

stage of education, which are likely to affect how they can be supported. One could argue that there is now the need to look more specifically at what factors could support the education of children in public care at certain ages and stages, and in particular risk times. One identified time of risk is during the transition from primary to secondary school.

1.5 Transition Literature

A range of research exists indicating a variety of factors that may promote successful transition for children. However, in order to maintain an inductive stance in the research, these are deliberately not focussed on in detail in the present literature review, as the current study aims to base findings on participants' perceptions as opposed to pre-existing literature. However, the value of pre-existing literature in this area is recognised and findings will be related to this literature in the discussion section.

Transition is regarded as an important time in a child's school career and can have ongoing effects even after the transition itself, both academically and socially. There is much research on factors influencing successful transitions from primary to secondary school. A recent report by Evangelou, et al.(2008) found that a successful transition for children was associated with a number of factors: developing new friendships and improving their self esteem and confidence; settling so well into school life that parents had no concerns; showing an increasing interest in school and school work; getting used to new routines and school organisation with great ease; and experiencing curriculum continuity. In addition, children who felt they had a lot of help from their secondary school to settle in were more likely to have a successful transition.

However, many children do not experience such a positive move to secondary school. The DfES admitted that "The failure to make a good transition from primary school is one of the biggest causes of poor achievement in secondary school" (2004 p.61). It is understood that

school transition is also crucial in terms of wider development: “Failure to establish appropriate behaviour, learning styles and friendships in the first year of secondary school may have potentially serious consequences for children’s broader psychosocial development” (Thompson et al., 2003 p 92.).

While the transition from primary to secondary school is a crucial time in children’s lives, it can also be a very difficult time. Zeedyk et al. (2003) assert that “This period is regarded as one of the most difficult in pupils’ educational careers and success navigating it can affect not only children’s academic performance, but their general sense of well-being and general health” (p.68). Indeed a range of research indicates that transitions are associated with negative consequences for young people, both academic and emotional. Galton et al.(2000) indicate that around 40% of pupils in England and Wales experience a hiatus in progress during school transfer; Mullins and Irvin (2000) report negative effects on academic performance and perceptions of school after the change from elementary to middle school; and Fenzel (2000) found that the transition can have negative effects on pupils’ self concept.

A complex range of factors are likely to contribute to difficulties during the time of transition. Rice (1997) suggests that pupils have to cope with both ‘organisational discontinuities’ (such as changes in school size, being put into streams or sets, changes in academic expectations) and ‘social discontinuities’ (such as changes in the diversity of the student population, relationships with teachers). In addition to changes related directly to school, the primary–secondary transition comes at a time when many children are experiencing the biological changes of puberty, and the beginnings of changes in cognitive capacity, emotional development and personal identity (Thompson et al., 2003). There are also developmental tasks associated with this stage of a child’s life, including increasing independence, gradually breaking away from families and becoming more dependent on friends and peers (Madge, 2000).

1.6 Transition and Children Looked After Literature

There appears to be a dearth of published literature specifically examining school transitions for children who are Looked After. However, Haslam (2004) conducted research specifically in this area, considering risk and resilience factors for children Looked After moving to secondary school, by interviewing children before and after their transition. The results identified risk factors including having no friends, not being able to do the work set, and organisational factors such as getting lost. Resilience factors for children were considered to be having friends from primary school at their new school, making new friends, knowing older children, being able to complete work successfully, 'being in a good group' and organisational skills. Familiarity also emerged as a key protective factor: the more familiar children were with the people and systems of the secondary school they were transferring to, the more successful they believed their transition had been. Haslam suggests that future research arising from the study should include an exploration of the views of carers, Social Workers and teachers about how Looked After children manage the transition process and indicates that "unless these groups of adults are actively involved in supporting Looked After children through the transition process there is little real hope of changing the situation" (Haslam, 2004 p. 70).

Evidence indicates that the move from primary to secondary school is a challenge for all groups of children. However, although there appears to be very little published research specifically in this area, there is much evidence that could lead to the hypothesis that children who are Looked After are at greater risk than most, of struggling with the environmental, academic and social challenges involved. Children in the care system are far less likely to have developed secure attachments due to having experienced more than one set of carers. "Without secure attachments, many of life's ordinary stresses may become serious threats" (Dent & Cameron, 2003 p.6). Indeed children who are insecure seem to be at

greater risk to a range of problems encountered at times of change such as bullying, accidents, delinquency, depression, and difficulties with relationships (Dent & Cameron, 2003).

Children who are Looked After are also more likely to fall into other vulnerable groups associated with experiencing difficult transitions. The study by Evangelou et al. (2008) indicates that experiencing bullying is a key inhibitor in a successful transition, yet evidence indicates that children Looked After are up to twice as likely to experience bullying as other young people (Daly & Gilligan, 2005). Children in public care are more likely to have lower academic attainment at primary school than other children (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003), yet children who have lower attainments are likely to have difficulties making systemic transitions (Anderson et al., 2000). As stated earlier, children in public care are more likely to come from deprived backgrounds, and this is another group of pupils at higher risk of experiencing difficulties adjusting to secondary school (Reyes et al., 2000). Finally, children from this group are more likely to present with challenging behaviour (Dent & Brown 2006) and hence more likely to struggle in the transition (Berndt & Mekos, 1995).

In addition to transition being more *difficult* for some children Looked After, it is arguably a more *critical* time for this group. Smokowski, et al. (2000) found that transitional events appeared to be crucial times when vulnerable young people were particularly susceptible to changing their behaviour positively or negatively. Gilligan (2000) emphasises the importance of pathways and turning points in development for children suffering from multiple disadvantages: "One favourable experience may be a turning point in a child's or young person's trajectory of development" (p.39). Finally, there is evidence to suggest that positive educational experiences may contribute to the more general resilience of children in care (e.g. Gilligan, 2007), indicating that positive experiences, such as successful transition could have positive effects on children's abilities to deal with other challenges in life.

1.7 A gap in the research

The literature discussed above indicates that transition can be a time of risk for all children, but that children Looked After may be at much higher risk. However, there appears to be no published research on the subject, despite the education of children in public care being a government priority. The present study aims to contribute to filling this gap in the literature by conducting research in this area.

The single piece of research emerging from literature searches is by Haslam (2004). In this the author suggests that future research should incorporate the views of those involved in the primary–secondary transition of children Looked After. In response to this, and also in response to current thinking around the importance of involving stakeholders, and the author's own interests and beliefs about its importance, the present study aims to research the views of the stakeholders involved.

1.8 Literature on Stakeholder Perspectives

The present study is based on the views of those most involved; the main 'stakeholders'. Historically the voices of the people receiving services have been overlooked (Golding et al., 2006). Although attitudes have now largely shifted there continues to be a 'medical model' of intervention for service users in which 'experts' treat 'patients' who are not always asked for their views. Psychological services for children and families are moving away from this 'expert' model, towards a collaborative approach to intervention, placing an emphasis on the views of those receiving services (Golding et al., 2006). This change of attitude is not only prevalent within psychology, but throughout society; there is now increasing emphasis on the importance of listening to the voices of the recipients of services and an appreciation that people associated with a service "those who administer it, work for it, participate in it, and care

about it – deserve opportunities to shape its evaluative inquiry” (King & Ehler, 2008 p.194).

1.8.1 Children’s Participation in Research

There has been a historical neglect of children’s perspectives and for some time children have been seen simply as sources of data (e.g. Fielding, 1999). Indeed, most social exclusion initiatives were (and are still) designed, delivered and evaluated by adults (Hill et al., 2004). However over time it is becoming accepted that children are ‘experts in their own lives’ (Langsted, 1994) and there has been greater importance placed on involving them in issues that affect them. Hill (1997) emphasises that it is particularly important to have children’s views well represented within research, otherwise “research, like practice, risks misperceiving the wishes, needs and interests of children. Information from children can only give their one perspective...but it is a particularly important perspective given that services are meant to have as their aim the furtherance of children’s welfare” (p.172).

Hill et al. (2004) summarise the arguments in favour of greater consultation with children to facilitate positive outcomes. From the perspective of policy makers, consultation embodies an important principle of children’s rights to participate (as set out by the United Nations, 1990). It improves policy, it contributes to democracy and it helps policy makers better understand the lives of children and young people. From children’s perspectives the *process* of being consulted may enhance their skills and confidence as well as providing them with the opportunity to help shape outcomes.

While there are clear benefits to children participating in research, there are also essential issues to consider. There are important ethical issues involved (see chapter 3 for the issues considered to be pertinent to the present research). There is also the possibility that children may not feel that their involvement has resulted in the outcomes or impact they expected, which may result in them becoming disillusioned (Hill et al.,

2004). Some people also consider that giving children rights and a power to change things undermines adults' authority and rights (e.g. Pupavac, 2001 cited by Hill et al., 2004) or are afraid that children will exercise their rights in an irresponsible or self-centred way (Borland et al., 1998). However these views are strongly refuted; it could be asserted that issues referred to in these arguments could only arise as part of unethical practice. While it is of utmost importance that children's views are listened to and acted upon, this should not mean that adults fail to carry out their responsibilities. Children's views are not an alternative to considering what is best for the child, but part of a wider picture (e.g. as discussed by Golding et al., 2006). For this reason, it is equally important to involve responsible adults in consultation processes regarding issues that affect children.

1.8.2 Adults' Participation in Research on Issues Affecting Children

While the importance of eliciting children's views must be emphasised, it is also acknowledged that the views of the adults responsible for children are of vital importance. Those adults who care for children and who are responsible for their education, not only have certain responsibilities towards children in their care, but may also have an understanding of aspects of children and their needs that others do not possess; their insights and experience may give a perspective that is not possible to obtain from other sources.

In relation to gathering information about the education of children Looked After, Hill (1997) cites the use of 'perspective triangulation'; with more than one kind of informant. Hill (1997) emphasises that in terms of education and other day to day issues, the carers of children Looked After are likely to be particularly well informed. There is a range of literature setting out the advantages of involving parents in education (e.g. Squires et al., 2007), and although there appears to be relatively little literature about the benefits of involving foster carers in children's education, one could hypothesise that many of the benefits of involving parents would also apply to foster carers. There is also much evidence to

support the assertion that teachers are key contributors to the successful education of children in public care (e.g. Gilligan, 2000) and it can therefore be argued that in terms of contributing to consultation about children's education, the views of school staff are an important part of 'perspective triangulation'.

As well as being a source of useful information, the *process* of involving service providers may be instrumental. For example foster carers often report feeling undervalued (Warren, 1999): this may lead to disempowerment, which can affect carers ability to contribute to the effective care of children (Golding et al., 2006). Golding et al. (2006) stress that finding time to consult with carers, being willing to listen to their views and including their ideas about service planning and development, can lead to carers feeling listened to, understood and valued. In addition, involving adults with responsibility in research can mean that the individuals or groups who may be expected to make changes as a result of a study feel a sense of ownership in the project and its outcomes (Simm & Ingram, 2008).

1.8.3 Policy

A range of policy and practice reflects current perspectives on the benefits of consulting with children and other stakeholders about issues affecting them. Internationally, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) enshrines the rights of young people to express their views and have them taken seriously. In the UK, Section 52 of the Children Act (2004) extends local authorities' duties to ascertain and give due consideration to the 'wishes and feelings' of children in need.

There is a range of policy relating specifically to the importance of gaining the views of children who are Looked After and there is an increasing expectation they will participate and be involved in the planning, design and delivery of services that affect them. This is reflected in documents and initiatives such as 'Listening, hearing and responding' (DoH, 2003)

and the 'National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services' (DfES & DoH, 2004) and the green paper 'Care Matters' (DfES, 2006a). The 'Joint working party on foster care' (NFCA, 1999), which applies throughout the UK sets out a partnership approach to foster care which includes embracing the views of children themselves and carers.

In Wales, the document 'Stronger Partnerships for Better Outcomes' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006c) sets out the duties of local authorities to encourage partnership and to develop effective and integrated services for all children and young people. Central to this is strengthening cooperation amongst those in public services (such as teachers and Social Workers) and between public service agencies and families (in the document the term 'families' refers to those who take responsibility for bringing up children and young people, which can include foster carers and grandparents). The document emphasises that local authorities must ensure that children, young people and families are able to participate in the planning process with opportunity to make their voices heard.

These principles are not necessarily translated into good practice. A study from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Stuart & Bains, 2004) concluded that children are still not being properly consulted about decisions that affect their lives. Hill et al. (2004) concur, and assert that frequently children's views are not sought or, if sought, still disregarded within institutions, local government settings and national government processes. They cite a number of reasons for this for example, lack of funding, pressures of performance indicators, lack of staff training and lack of commitment by senior managers.

In particular 'hard to reach' children who are frequently in greatest need of good services, have tended to be marginalised in enquiries about those services (Hill 1998 cited by Curtis et al. 2004). Curtis et al. (2004) ask why so little attention is paid to the practical difficulties of engaging

excluded groups of young people and suggest that “frankness about some of these problems is the first step towards building better research practice” (p. 168).

It is clear that there are enormous benefits in consulting with stakeholders when conducting research, both in terms of the results and the process, and a wealth of legislation reflects this. However, evidence indicates that often stakeholders’ views are not sought on relevant issues and in particular some marginalised groups, such as children in public care, may be neglected. This suggests a need for more research to include the perspectives of such groups. The present research aims to do this and the specific methods used will be discussed in chapter 3.

1.9 Conclusions from Chapter 1

This chapter has set out a rationale for conducting further research into the transition from primary to secondary school for children Looked After and doing so by eliciting the views of the main stakeholders involved. The following chapter considers the specific context for the present study undertaken in Wales and part of the requirement for a professional doctorate in Educational Psychology. It outlines the rationale for conducting the research within this context, and for it being carried out by the author.

Chapter 2: The Context

The previous chapter outlined aspects of current international and UK government legislation related to children Looked After, and research about transition to secondary school and eliciting stakeholder perspectives. It also discussed relevant literature, and exposed a clear niche for further research about the transition from primary to secondary school for children who are in public care. The current chapter focuses on the present study and the context in which it takes place. The chapter will outline the policy frameworks and context, and more specifically, the Welsh 'Borough X' in which the present study was commissioned and is based. The population in question in the authority, children who are in public care, will then be described. Finally, the rationale for the study will be presented.

2.1 Policy Framework in Wales

The present study has been undertaken in Wales. Within the context of international and UK-wide legislation, there is a range of guidance and legislation in Wales specifically relating to the education of children in public care and to transition. It is therefore important to outline some of the most influential aspects, as they form an important part of the context in which the study has taken place.

2.1.1 Policy relating to the Education of Children Looked After

'Rights to Action'(Welsh Assembly Government, 2004) is a set of seven core aims, based on the UN convention on the rights of the child, relating to all children in Wales being enabled to 'meet their potential' (the document bears a resemblance to 'Every child Matters' in England). One of these core aims is to provide 'A comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities' which includes as part of it, the specific aim to improve educational outcomes for children who are Looked After. The document outlines that the success of this aim will be

measured by indicators including attainment at ages 7, 11, 14 and GCSE, and exclusions.

The 'Children First' programme (National Assembly for Wales, 2001a) aims to improve the quality and management of children's services in Wales by exercising corporate responsibility for children who are vulnerable or Looked After in the way that natural parents typically do. One of the key objectives is 'To ensure that children Looked After gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care'. 'Children First' also includes national targets to improve outcomes for Looked After children.

The National Assembly for Wales Circular 2/2001: Guidance on the Education of Children Looked After by Local Authorities (2001b), highlights the difficulties faced by this population of children and provides guidance to help local authorities in their role as 'corporate parents'. It contains details of 'BetterWales.com' in which the National Assembly sets targets to ensure that children leaving care have one GCSE or GNVQ, that school absences are reduced and that all excluded pupils have full time education provision.

Other documents relating to the education of children Looked After in Wales, published by the Welsh Assembly Government include 'Toward a Stable Life and Brighter Future' (2007), 'Safeguarding Children in Education' (2008b) and Inclusion and Pupil Support' (2006b).

It should be noted that unlike England, where children in public care must be prioritised for places in school, even if they are oversubscribed (DfES, 2007), there is currently no all-Wales policy relating to the allocation of school places for children Looked After. However, a recent consultation document from the Welsh Assembly Government (2008c) indicates that regulations to give this group of children priority for school admissions are being considered.

2.1.2 Policy and guidance relating to transition

In Wales, section 198 of the Education Act (2002) provides powers for the National Assembly for Wales to impose a requirement on governing bodies of maintained secondary schools and the feeder primary schools to draw up plans to facilitate the transition of children from primary to secondary school in the form of 'Transition Plans' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006a). Secondary schools and their 'partner' primary schools are expected to formalise their arrangements to work together on curriculum, learning and assessment issues that relate to the 7-14 phase of education (Estyn, 2008). A recent review of the initial impact of the legislation (Estyn, 2008) indicates that while most plans met Welsh Assembly Government requirements they varied significantly in quality. The review recommends that schools should give more attention in transition plans to meeting the needs of specific groups of learners and to formalise arrangements to take full account of the views of pupils, parents and governors, when they review those plans.

There is a range of guidance for schools and local authorities to support them in realising their statutory duties and carrying out good practice relating to children's transition from primary to secondary school. Some of the most relevant documents include: 'Moving On...Effective transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3' (Estyn/Welsh Assembly Government/ACCAC, 2004a); 'Moving On...Improving learning' (Estyn/Welsh Assembly Government/ACCAC, 2004b); and 'Recommendations on implementation of transition provisions in the Education Act 2002' (Estyn, 2004).

2.2 Children Looked After in Wales

Within Wales as a whole, the rate of children Looked After and of children subject to care orders is higher than in most parts of England (National Assembly for Wales, 2007). There has been a continuing rising trend in

the number of Looked After children in Wales over recent years. In 1997 there were just under 3,300 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a) and recent figures published by Data Unit Wales (2008) indicate that on 31st March 2008 there were 4,633 children in Wales who were Looked After. The Welsh Assembly Government (2008a) suggests that this rise could be related to a number of different factors, including increased need and/or local authority policies and practices.

2.2.1 Population characteristics

The Welsh Assembly Government (2008a) has produced statistics for the year 2006 – 7 and at the time of writing, this is the most up to date information found to be available. This information indicates that within the population of children who are Looked After in Wales, there are more boys than girls, which has been the case for many years. The highest fraction of children Looked After are those aged between 10 and 15 years old and the majority (87%) are white. In 2007 the most common reason for the need for care was neglect or abuse, which was cited in half of all cases. The incidence of mental health problems amongst children Looked After in Wales is much higher than for children in the general population; in 2002/03, almost half (49%) of 5 to 10 year olds who were being Looked After were recorded as having a 'mental disorder' compared with 6% of the general population. For 11 to 15 year olds, the proportion was 40% compared with 12% of the general population (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008a).

2.2.2 Educational indicators

In line with the rest of the UK, a range of data indicate that children Looked After in Wales perform poorly on educational indicators, when compared to the population as a whole (see figure 2.1). Recent data (Data Unit Wales, 2008) indicate that in the academic year 2007-8, nearly three quarters (74%) of all children achieved 'core subject indicator' (reaching the expected level in Maths, Science and their first language of English or Welsh) at Key stage 2. However just over one third (38%) of children in public care reached the same level. Statistics indicate that as

this group of children go through the education system, the gap continues to widen: by the end of Key Stage 3, well over half of all children (58%) achieve 'core subject indicator', yet under one fifth (18%) of children who are Looked After do so. By the end of formal schooling the gap is even wider: the average qualification point score (points are given for qualifications and added together, for example a GCSE 'C' grade is worth 40 points) for young people across Wales is 342; however, for children in public care the average score is only 123 points.

As well as lower attainments, pupils who are Looked After have a high level of non-attendance compared to their peers. Research by the Audit Commission found that 1 in 4 children aged over 14 who are Looked After by the local authority did not attend school (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006b). Young people who are Looked After by the local authority are also overrepresented in exclusions. In the academic year 2004 to 2005, Looked After children were excluded at a rate of 7.9 per 1000, compared to a rate of 1.0 per 1000 across the total school population (Welsh Assembly Government, 2006b).

2.3 Borough X

2.3.1 Overview

The present study was commissioned by, and set in Borough X. Information from Estyn in 2007 ¹ describes the authority as a mainly rural borough with some urban centres. There is a predominantly white population, with most of the residents born in Wales, and a very low representation of residents from ethnic communities. There are higher than average levels of deprivation with a high proportion of areas being in the 10% most deprived in Wales in terms of employment, health, education and physical environment domains and the overall index of multiple deprivation.

¹ To protect the identity of 'Borough X' documents published by, or naming the authority will not be referenced.

Authority X has a school population of 29,754. There are 15 secondary schools, 74 primary schools, 1 pupil referral unit and 1 special school. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is 3.23%, which is broadly in line with the Wales average of 3.21%. The proportion of pupils of statutory school age entitled to free school meals in January 2006 was 20.6% which is above the Wales average of 17.4%.

2.3.2 Children Looked After in Borough X

The current study was commissioned by 'Borough X' in response to local and national figures indicating that the levels of educational success of children in public care, as measured by attendance and attainment levels, diminished as children went through the education system. In particular attendance, attainment and inclusion levels for children Looked After in the authority had been found to worsen following the move from primary to secondary school. This work was commissioned based on information and statistics from the borough for the year 2005 – 6 and part of the initial stages of the research involved examining relevant statistics within the authority.

2.3.3 Initial Evidence

Attendance: Statistics from Borough X for the year 2005-2006 indicated a large discrepancy in attendance levels between children Looked After in their final year of primary school and their first year of secondary school with Year 6 attendance levels being 93.86%, compared to 77.83% for children in Year 7, a fall of 18%.

Attainment: In line with the national picture, information about attainment levels from the authority indicated that the discrepancy between the achievement levels of children in public care and the target that children of their age would be expected to achieve widened as children went through the school system. In the year 2005-6, 56% of children Looked After at the end of KS1 met the government target of attaining a National Curriculum 'level 2' in English, Maths and Science. By the end of KS2, 30% of children Looked After met the standard of gaining a National

Curriculum 'level 4' in all 3 subjects and by KS3 after the move to secondary school only 21% achieved the target of gaining a level 5 in all three subjects. This picture continued throughout secondary school: in the year 2005-6 not a single child Looked After by the local authority met the target of gaining grades A-C in English, Maths and Science.

Exclusions: Official exclusion data indicate that in the year 2005-6, no Looked After pupils in Year 6 received an exclusion, and 3 pupils in Year 7 had been excluded. However anecdotal evidence indicates that exclusion levels are far higher than this, but most exclusions are not formally recorded which makes it difficult to extrapolate from official figures.

Local and national information together with an awareness of local Looked After children's experiences, prompted the local authority 'Inclusion Services' (comprising of the Educational Psychology Service, Behaviour Support Service, Safeguarding Team and Educational Welfare Service) to respond in a number of ways. For example, there has been the creation of additional 'Looked After Children' support officer posts, including a role coordinating transition arrangements for children moving from primary to secondary school. Another response was commissioning the present study, with the aim of finding out ways of refining and improving systems currently in place to support children through transition.

2.4 Current Information on Borough X

2.4.1 Local Authority Policy and Guidance

There is a range of policy and guidance in the borough related to the present study, which indicates that children with additional needs, including those who are looked after, should be a priority group. The 'Single Education Plan' states that a key task for the borough in terms of education is 'providing for the additional learning needs of Looked After Children' and aims to do so within the all-Wales 'Children First' plan.

With regards to transition, the Local Authority policy on allocating school places for children Looked After indicates that this group of children have priority over other potential pupils in a school, once children from the catchment area have a place. This indicates that while this group have some preferential treatment over other children who are out of catchment, they do not have automatic rights to the school considered to be most suitable for them in the borough.

2.4.2 Children Looked After

Recent information from Borough X (2008) indicates that the numbers of children Looked After in the borough has increased over recent years. In 2003-04 there were approximately 287 Looked After children and by 2006-07 there were 324 Looked After children.

Information in December 2008 indicated that there were 322 children on the local authority 'Looked After' register. Around half (156) of those also attend school within the authority. It should be noted that these numbers significantly fluctuate. The present study included child participants who were in school Years 6 and 7 at the start of the study in September 2007 (see methodology section). As can be seen in table 2.1, the number in Year 7 (the original Year 6 cohort followed in the current study) is a smaller cohort than average.

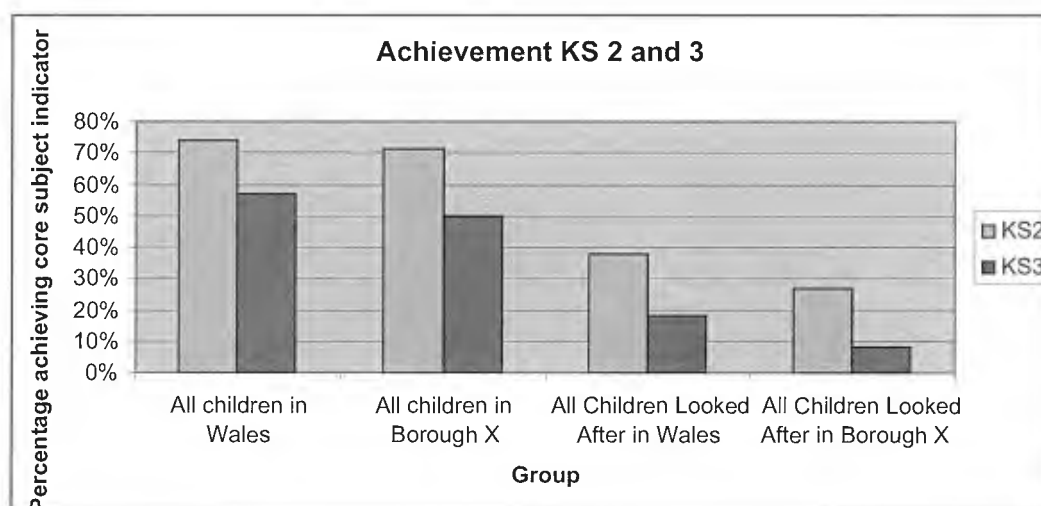
Table 2.1. Number of Children Looked After in Borough X, and the Number of Those who also Attend School Within the Authority.

Year group	Pre school	N	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
No. of CLA	52	12	7	8	9	12	15	11	22	22	24	34	24	37	17	15
No. who also attend school within the local authority	NA	8	6	6	7	11	10	7	16	8	17	14	14	19	9	4

2.4.3 Educational Achievement of Children Looked After in the Borough

Figure 2.1 illustrates the below-average overall educational performance of children in Wales and Borough X, and among children Looked After in particular. Their achievement is not only significantly lower than that of children across Wales and all children in the authority, but of other children Looked After in Wales. Following the move to secondary school (KS3) the picture is even starker, as discussed earlier.

Figure 2.1 Achievement in KS2 and 3 for All Children and Children Looked After Across Wales and Borough X for the year 2007-8.



2.4.3 Attendance

As of the end of July 2008, the Year 6 attendance levels for all children in Borough X stood at an average of 92.9% and the Year 7 levels were at 92.5%. For the children Looked After included in the study, the levels stood at 95% for the Year 6 and 94% for Year 7. It is interesting to note that these levels are higher than the borough average, although the sample is too small to show significant difference.

2.5 Rationale

2.5.1 Potential benefits from the study

The wealth of legislation and guidance about children Looked After, combined with a growing awareness of the difficulties faced by this group and ongoing research and statistics demonstrating poor educational outcomes, has resulted in mounting pressure on local authorities to work towards increasing inclusion levels and improved educational outcomes. The current study focuses on the factors supporting this vulnerable group of children through a specific part of their educational experience: their transition from primary to secondary school. Not only has this period been identified as a time of risk for children more generally, but Borough X has identified this period as being influential in relation to Looked After children's attainment and attendance levels, as a time when the gap between children Looked After and their peers noticeably widens.

The present study aims to identify the experiences of the main stakeholders. Not only does research indicate that this group can provide valuable insights into issues and events affecting them, but local, national and international government legislation also emphasises the importance of consulting with stakeholders.

It is hoped that the present study will be beneficial in a number of ways:

- To add to the field of knowledge about issues relating to children Looked After who go through the transition between primary and secondary school.

Literature searches identified little published research on this topic (see chapter 1). The current study may therefore represent an original contribution to the field.

In addition, it is hoped that the present research could add to the knowledge base about secondary school transition more generally. Children in public care are a particularly vulnerable group of children and it is likely that many of the factors that promote a positive secondary school transition for this group would also apply to other vulnerable young people. In the document 'Guidance: Education of young people in public care' the DfEE (2000) states that

"Getting it right for young people in care is about getting it right for all children. ... The ways in which children in public care are supported is a test of the effectiveness of the general policies and practices of a local authority. This is not simply because they have difficult problems to resolve, but because their experiences highlight how robust and inclusive policies and practice really are"
(p. 3)

- To inform the development of systems to support children in public care through transition.

The present study aims to directly inform systems at a local authority level, to improve the transition arrangements for children Looked After. It is hoped that this study will enable enhanced monitoring, evaluation and further development of transition processes.

- To enable those involved, including children themselves, to have their views, experiences and opinions heard and taken into account and to contribute to the development of systems affecting them.

The issues and benefits of this are outlined in chapter 1.

- To form a valuable part of Educational Psychology professional training and practice.

In particular, the research has enabled the author to develop skills in conducting and reporting research, eliciting the views of children and adults, and increasing expertise and understanding in the fields of children Looked After and the primary–secondary transition.

2.6 Personal Rationale

2.6.1 Children Looked After and the Role of the Educational Psychologist

While the rationale for the study has been established, the author considers it important to outline why it is relevant for the profession of Educational Psychology.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) have been working with children in public care since the 1970s (The British Psychological Society, 2006b). This work has been driven by the increasing recognition of the impact of abuse and neglect on children's learning and behaviour. A draft protocol for Educational Psychology Services (The British Psychological Society, 2006b) with respect to work with children Looked After indicates that EPs have an important role in promoting the education of children who are Looked After. This includes working with other agencies to help children and carers cope with transition points in education, such as starting school and secondary school transfer, providing a service to contribute to

appropriate educational opportunities for children. The report also recommends that EPs take a systemic approach to developing and implementing local authority policy in relation to Looked After children.

Such protocol is endorsed by the work of a range of practitioners and researchers. Peake (2006) argues that EPs' extensive training on children's development, learning and behaviour, combined with detailed knowledge and experience of different settings and school systems and a unique insight into the process of teaching means they are ideally placed to promote the educational opportunities of children who are Looked After. She also suggests that the most important contribution that a psychologist can make with regard to the education of children in public care is the collection of data. This would indicate a clear role for EPs to engage in research about this population of children, and provide data at a local and national level. Bradbury (2006) also emphasises the role of EPs in working for better outcomes for children in public care and indicates that there is:

"a very valuable corporate parenting role for educational psychologists, who are well placed to use their psychological knowledge and skills... to facilitate more joined-up care and education for one of the most vulnerable group of children and young people in our modern society" (p.157).

EPs may have specific skills relevant to conducting research in the area. For example, Golding et al. (2006) emphasise the importance of possessing a good understanding of child development in order to successfully elicit the views of individual children; skills inherent in the role of the EP, which lends further support for such involvement

However, there are issues to be cautious about. For example, Golding et al. (2006) describe difficulties when working with participants who may perceive the psychologist as an 'expert' offering answers, which may limit the amount of collaborative problem solving that can take place.

2.6.2 Professional Interest

In addition to being a trainee EP, I have developed a professional interest in the education of children Looked After and transition, which has led to this research being carried out by myself. I therefore consider it important to alert the reader of my background, as it is likely to affect the way I conduct the research and the constructions of meanings I attribute during the analysis of data.

I became interested in the area of school transition during my time as a class teacher working with Year 6 pupils preparing to make the move to secondary school. I considered that many vulnerable children, who had managed well at primary school, struggled academically and socially following the transition, alerting me to a need for changes in transition processes to better support them.

My interest in the education of children Looked After developed during the first year of my Educational Psychology Professional Training course. I became aware of the multiple disadvantages and difficulties this group of young people face. I believe that identifying factors that support this group of children, who are arguably the most vulnerable of all children, will enable us as professionals to better support children Looked After, and potentially other vulnerable children too.

2.7 Conclusions from Chapter 2

This chapter has outlined the legislative and population context in which the present study takes place. Statistics at a local and Wales-wide level indicate that children who are Looked After perform poorly compared to other children, on a range of educational outcomes, indicating a clear need to investigate the factors contributing to this. The rationale for investigating one particular aspect of Looked After children's education, the transition to secondary school, has been outlined and it has been argued that the present researcher, as a trainee EP, is well placed to

conduct such research. The following chapter goes on to set out how the present research was conducted.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapters one and two set out the theoretical and contextual information relating to the present study, along with its rationale. The present chapter outlines the methodology used and considers some of the methodological, ethical and practical issues that were raised as part of the process of gathering information, obtaining consent to carry out the study, recruiting participants and collecting and analysing data. Issues around validity at the different stages of the research process will also be considered throughout the chapter.

It should be noted that there were time constraints on the study, and the methodology used was not necessarily that which would have been chosen given longer to undertake the study. The original intention of the study included the aim of implementing and evaluating a transition package to support children Looked After moving from primary to secondary school. This is an aim that remains part of the project and continues to be worked towards. However at the time of writing, this part of the project has not yet been realised so it has not been possible to include it here.

It should also be noted that, in advance of carrying out the study, I was aware from my own practice, and from research, that marginalised children, such as those in public care may be particularly difficult to engage (McLeod, 2007) and of some of the difficulties associated with gaining access to children Looked After for research purposes, as highlighted by other authors (e.g. Heptinstall, 2000; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998).

3.1 Aim, Objectives and Approach

3.1.1 Aim

The aim of the present study is to elicit factors that stakeholders perceive as supporting or hindering the transition from primary to secondary school for children Looked After, to inform the development of a transition package for this group.

3.1.2 Specific Objectives of the Study:

- To elicit the views of Year 6 children who are Looked After, their carers and teachers about the impending transition to secondary school.
- To elicit the transition experiences of Year 7 children Looked After, their carers and teachers.
- To identify what these groups, and other stakeholders, consider to be barriers to a successful transition and any additional support that might be helpful.
- To use the information gathered to identify principles that can inform the development of a transition package to support children in public care when they move from primary to secondary school.

3.2 Overview

The present study involved interviewing children Looked After, their carers and teachers, about their forthcoming, or recently experienced, transition to secondary school. The views of 'LAC' (Looked After Children) support officers and Social Workers were also sought.

The study was split into two parts:

- The first stage involved interviewing a Year 6 cohort of children Looked After and their carers and teachers, about the forthcoming

transition to secondary school. Year 7 children who had recently been through the transition were also interviewed, along with carers and teachers. LAC support officers were interviewed and a Social Worker focus group was held.

- In part two of the study, following the transition, those in the original cohort of Year 6 children, their carers and teachers were interviewed about their transition experiences.

The results of the study were analysed using thematic analysis and a set of guiding principles and recommendations were formed from the results.

The timescales of the methodological processes are set out in appendix A.

3.3 Research Approach

3.3.1 Qualitative design.

The aims and objectives of the present study pose questions that are exploratory in nature and endeavour to elicit the views of the main stakeholders concerned with the transition of children Looked After from primary to secondary school, taking in to consideration their individual and unique experiences. The information gathering process was therefore guided by the principles of qualitative research, which enables collection and analysis of these experiences. As discussed by Henwood and Pidgeon (1992), qualitative research places an emphasis on the discovery of information (as opposed to proving or disproving hypotheses), which is in accordance with the aims of the present study.

3.3.2. Epistemology.

The word *epistemology* refers to the philosophical concern about the theory of how knowledge is created through investigation (Willig, 2001). Over time, a number of epistemological positions have developed, each with its own view of “how and what we can know” (Willig, 2001 p.2).

The present study is based on a broadly 'social constructivist' approach. This approach is based on the idea that what we perceive and experience is not a direct reflection of environmental conditions, but must be understood as an interpretation of these conditions (see Willig, 2001). Rather than the existence of 'one truth', many truths are acknowledged and accepted within a social constructionist epistemology. The present study aims to elicit stakeholder perceptions and descriptions of events and to acknowledge and reflect on the experiences of the participants. In accordance with a social constructivist standpoint, the study did not aim to discover one 'objective' truth of what it is like for children in public care to go through the process of moving from primary to secondary school, but instead to allow for the different experiences and perceptions of all of the participants to contribute to the data.

3.4 Participants

3.4.1 Overview of Participants

The study involves the following groups of participants:

- Children Looked After who had recently been through, or were about to go through, the transition from primary to secondary school
- Carers
- Teachers
- 'LAC support workers'
- Social Workers

3.4.2 Validity and Triangulation

It was considered that using different groups of stakeholders as sources of data not only gave information about the views and perceptions of different groups, but also contributed to validity by allowing triangulation of evidence. Cho and Trent (2006) emphasise the importance of 'transactional validity' in qualitative research. This refers to the validity of the data collected and to what extent the data are an accurate reflection

of reality, or, as in the present study, participants' constructions of reality. Cho and Trent indicate that one method of increasing transactional validity is through triangulation. Triangulation refers to the combination of different methods, groups, settings or perspectives when studying a phenomenon (Flick, 2006). Flick (op cit) cites Denzin (1989) who distinguishes four types of triangulation, one of which (that used in this study) is the use of different data sources. It is argued (e.g. by Mathison, 1989, cited by Cho & Trent, 2006) that triangulation may lead to a more consistent, objective picture of reality.

However, the quest for validity through triangulation has limitations in the context of the present study. While this technique may be useful to determine facts (for example which transition activities actually took place for a child), it could be argued that each participant's construction of meaning will be different (for example how transition activities were perceived), both between participants and over time, resulting in multiple meanings, as opposed to one shared meaning. As such, attempts to ascertain the overall validity are somewhat futile within a constructivist standpoint that proposes there is no 'overall truth' in participant's perceptions. However, triangulation may still serve as a useful tool by permitting the researcher to be more sure of certain findings. It is unlikely to bring negative effects; as Newman and Benz (1998, cited by Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) assert, the more sources one examines, the more likely the researcher is to have an adequate representation of the underlying phenomenon.

3.4.3 Inclusion Criteria

Participants in the study consisted of children in the Borough X who fulfilled the following criteria (according to a local authority database), and their carers and teachers:

- At the start of the study they were 'Looked After' by Borough X and also on roll at a school within the local authority;

- They were in Year 6 and about to make a transition to secondary school from primary school or they were in Year 7 and had recently moved from primary to secondary school.

Six Year 6 children and thirteen Year 7 children met the inclusion criteria according to local authority records. Because of the relatively small number of children who fulfilled these criteria it was decided that permission would be sought to invite all of them to participate in the study, along with their carers and their 'most concerned' teacher.

It was considered that foster carers and the teachers 'most concerned' with each child's transition (those who had day-to-day contact with, and responsibility for, the children involved), would be likely to know most about the transition of the children because they had so much contact with them in their main environments of home and school. Interviews with each child's Social Worker and birth parent(s) were also considered. While this would have brought additional information to the study, it was felt that these two groups of people, while clearly important in the child's life, were likely to be less involved with transition arrangements and the day-to-day aspects of the child's life at the point in time which the interview took place

While Social Workers were not interviewed individually, it was considered that the Social Worker perspective was very important, as they have responsibility for children in public care. A focus group of Social Work managers was held to elicit the views of this group. In addition the four LAC Education Support Officers in Authority X were interviewed. Their professional role is to give academic support to children in public care, both at an individual and strategic level, and it was felt that their more in-depth knowledge of the education of children Looked After within the authority more generally would be a valuable contribution to the study.

3.5 Obtaining Ethical Approval and Consent

It was necessary to go through a series of processes prior to obtaining consent to carry out the research and to work with individual children. These included considering ethical issues that may arise as part of the study, and obtaining consent from both a university ethics board, and at a local authority level.

3.5.1 Ethical Considerations

As stated by Hill (1997) there are many important ethical issues, which need to be considered when carrying out research that directly involves children. The British Psychological Society's 'Code of Ethics and Conduct' (2006a) contains a set of ethical principles for carrying out research with participants. The guidelines specify the responsibilities of the researcher including the need to:

- Obtain informed consent from participants,
- Ensure participants are not deceived in any way,
- Debrief participants after the research,
- Ensure participants are aware of their rights to withdraw from the research at any time,
- Protect participants from potential risk,
- Ensure confidentiality of information provided by the participants.

Each of these guidelines was adhered to in both parts one and two of the research process. In addition, an ethical approval board judged that the study met the ethical guidelines set out by the Institute of Education, University of London (see appendices C and D for approval form and conformation ethical approval).

3.5.2 Gaining Consent to Conduct the Study Within the Borough

The project was commissioned by the local authority Educational Psychology service. However, it was still necessary to obtain ethical

approval and consent for the project from the Education Department as a whole and Children's Services (part of Social Services) in the borough. This process was time demanding and more difficult than anticipated.

3.5.3 Obtaining Consent to Invite Children to Participate

Following permission to conduct the study, it was then necessary to obtain consent to work with individual children. To obtain consent to work with any child under 16, it is necessary to obtain consent from those who have legal responsibility for them, as children under this age in England and Wales are not presumed to be legally competent (Wiles et al., 2005). I was aware that the process of obtaining consent to work with children in public care may be lengthy and time consuming, as the experience of fellow professionals and literature (e.g. Heptinstall, 2000) indicates that this is the case. I wanted to ensure that participants who consented, did so on an informed basis. However, as Wiles et al. (2005) assert "decisions about informed consent are increasingly driven by legal, ethical and regulatory frameworks in which social research takes place" (p.21). This was certainly reflected in recruiting participants in the present research; at each stage of the recruitment process it was necessary to work within such frameworks applying to local and national regulations and procedures.

Gaining permission from individual Social Worker to include children took much longer than expected, and involved making contact with Social Workers and their managers on a number of occasions. As well as the process taking more time than expected, a number of potential subjects were prevented from being included in the study by the child's Social Worker. The reasons given for this were that the children were currently experiencing difficult feelings or life situations so it would not be appropriate to ask them to consider another difficult process, such as transition. It is of course admirable that Social Workers are concerned about the well-being of the children they have responsibility for, but it could be argued that the exclusion of children from the study who may have been more vulnerable and may not have experienced a positive

transition resulted in a population for the study that was not fully representative. Literature indicates that these issues are increasingly causing problems in research; increased regulation of research in relation to informed consent and groups commonly identified as 'vulnerable' can have a negative effect on the research process (Wiles et al., 2006). In addition to this contributing to an unrepresentative sample, it is considered that there are ethical issues associated with not asking children directly whether they would like to participate. Tymchuk (1992) distinguishes between 'consent' and 'assent' as two concepts which are part of a parallel process. As such, "the child may not participate without parental consent and the parent may not volunteer the children without the child's approval" (p128). While it is important to protect children, it could be argued that by stipulating that the consent of those with parental responsibility is necessary, as was required in the present study, children were deprived of their rights to make their own decisions about their participation in research and whether their voices were heard.

3.5.4. Inviting Children to Participate

Once permission had been granted to invite children to participate in the research it was essential to obtain informed consent from each child themselves to participate in the study. An adult with whom it was deemed they felt comfortable discussed the research with each child. The role each adult had in the child's life was different and the most appropriate person to discuss the matter with the child was decided on a case-by-case basis. Those who talked to the child initially were either a carer, a teacher at school, a LAC support worker or a Social Worker. The designated adult brought a letter written to the child, from myself as the researcher (see appendix F) and went through the letter with them, answering any questions they may have had. On the basis of this, the child was asked if they would be happy to participate, and asked where they would like the interview to take place.

It should be noted that at this stage, a number of children declined to be interviewed as part of the study. For ethical reasons, it was felt that they

should not be pressured or further encouraged to take part. This made quite a difference to the overall sample size in the case of the younger cohort, as the group happened to be a very small one. It could be anticipated that children from this group did not participate for varying reasons. Of the 6 children identified, one was an elective mute, and therefore talked to very few people at all; one child who found it very difficult to form relationships with adults chose not to participate; and one child had recently had negative experiences with the media, as his biological family had been involved in a story that made national news, and he chose not to be interviewed. This left three Year 6 children participating in the study. For part 2 of the study the child who was an elective mute consented to be interviewed by her carer. Although it is acknowledged that this may have affected the answers given, it was considered that it was preferable to her complete non-participation and was the best way of eliciting the voice of this child.

3.5.5 Inviting Adults to Participate

Including the adult participants was less problematic. Ethical approval to invite their participation was granted by the university and the local authority. Interviewing carers and teachers involved sending a letter and project information sheet to each of the participants (see appendices G and H), followed by a telephone call, to ascertain whether the carer or teacher would be happy to take part. If the participant agreed to be included the study, arrangements were made to conduct an interview, which took place face to face, or over the telephone if preferred.

3.5.6 Reflections on the Consent Process

As originally anticipated there were difficulties gaining consent at each level of the process. This has been a valuable learning experience for me as a researcher; I am now more aware of the importance of allowing plenty of time for each stage of the research process. I am also more aware of the particular difficulties that may be faced when working with children in public care, in terms of obstacles to access.

3.6 Interviews

3.6.1 Choice of Data Collection Tools.

Interviews are designed to 'tap lived experience' (Madill & Gough, 2008). It was decided, after considering a number of options, that interviews would be the best ways of 'tapping into' the experiences of the participants. It was felt that interviews would allow each individual case to be explored further and in more depth, than the other options considered.

Semi-structured interviews in particular were considered to have clear advantages. This method enables interviews to be loosely structured in a way that allows participants to talk about their experiences quite freely, but at the same time be guided by the questions so that information relevant to the research question could be gathered. Semi-structured interviews can also be flexible and allow opportunities to clarify complex issues with participants. However, it was also acknowledged that they can create potential difficulties: the success of the interview depends on the skill of the interviewer in presenting appropriate questions to enable participants to express themselves; establishing rapport with participants is of great importance for eliciting relevant information; the interviewer may give unconscious signals to the participant, indicating the type of answer expected; and they take longer to administer than other forms of data collection. However, it was considered that these potential disadvantages were outweighed by the advantages of using this method of data collection.

Other options considered for eliciting the views of children, carers and teachers included focus groups and self-completion questionnaires. However, it was considered that focus groups may potentially inhibit individual participant responses. It was also thought that questionnaires could inhibit participants with poor literacy skills, and provide less opportunity for participants to elaborate answers.

3.6.2 Designing the Interviews

Interviews were designed to contain a number of open-ended questions. In addition, it was considered important to have prompts on the interview agenda that could be used if needed. These prompts were based on the researcher's knowledge of the issues that may be involved. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews and prompts ensured that questions could be appropriately adapted to suit each participant's needs during the interviews. Different types of questions were included in the interview, following recommendations such as those of Spradley (1979 cited by Willig, 2001). These included questions to elicit factual information (such as 'How long have you looked after X?'), 'descriptive' questions that prompt participants to provide accounts of what happened (e.g. 'Have you found out anything about your new school?' 'How?'), 'evaluative' questions to explore the participant's feelings towards someone or something (e.g. 'Are you looking forward to going to secondary school in September?') and questions designed to encourage participants to think hypothetically about the future and possible alternative events (e.g. 'have you got any ideas for how these difficulties could be avoided?').

The interviews were designed with advice from an experienced EP supervisor and an academic supervisor, both specialising in children Looked After. Interviews for children, their carers and their teachers were designed and a number of draft versions were considered. Children's interviews were piloted on children of the same ages as those in the study, but who were not Looked After (due to the small sample size, pilots were conducted with children outside of the sample population). Adult interviews were piloted on teachers and carers. As a result of the pilots some small changes were made, to produce the final interview schedules (see appendix B for final part 1 interview schedules).

3.6.3 Interviews conducted

The following interviews were conducted out of a potential population of six Year 6 children, their teachers and carers and thirteen Year 7

children, their teachers and carers. Therefore 55 out of a potential 75 interviews about individual children were conducted (see table 3.1). A Social Workers' focus group and interviews with LAC support workers were also conducted.

Table 3.6 Interviews Conducted

	Children	Foster carers	Teachers	Other professionals
Year 6	3	6	6	1 Social Worker focus group (9 social workers) 3 Looked After Children support workers
Year 7	8	10 (about 11 children)	9	
Year 6 after transition	3 (plus one interviewed by her carer)	6	4	
Total interviews	14	22	19	4

Details of each of the children included in the study are outlined in appendix I.

3.6.4 Conducting Interviews

Interviews were conducted in two phases. In the summer term of 2008 Year 6 and Year 7 children, their carers and teachers were interviewed. In December 2008 – January 2009, Year 7 children who had previously been interviewed as Year 6 were re-interviewed, as were their carers and teachers.

A digital recorder was used to accurately record the participants' voices to ensure that the data were reliably collected and stored. As recommended by Willig (2001) an explanation was given to the

participant outlining the reasons for recording the interview and how the information provided would be used. Participants were asked whether they would be happy for the interview to be recorded. A small minority of participants chose not to be recorded for the interviews, and for these interviews, only hand written notes were taken.

3.6.5 Ecological Validity

Research can take place in a variety of settings, such as artificial, laboratory settings or real-life settings. It is anticipated that because the present study was carried out in the participants' natural school or home setting, this increased the ecological validity of the research as there was 'no need to extrapolate from an artificial setting' (Willig, 2001 p.17).

3.6.6 Interviews with Children

Children were interviewed at home or at school, depending on their preference. Children were asked whether they would like someone else to be present or if they were happy to do the interview on their own with the researcher. All of the children interviewed indicated that they would be happy to do it without another person present, except for one boy who asked for his support worker to sit in, and a set of twins who chose to be interviewed together. Prior to the interview, I took some time to chat to each child about themselves and build a rapport with them, in order to help them to feel comfortable and also to explain the project again.

Before being interviewed they were asked to sign a simple consent form, which has been piloted on children of the same age (see appendix J). The child was then interviewed which took between 10 minutes and half an hour.

Children were not given incentives to participate in the study as it was considered that this might entice children to participate who would otherwise not have felt happy to do so and may therefore be unethical. However they were thanked and debriefed verbally after the interviews and the interviews were followed up by a hand-written thank-you card

(see appendices K, L and M for thank-you letters). In addition, all the children Looked After who contributed have been nominated for recognition in forthcoming Borough X 'Looked After Children Achievement awards', in the 'contribution to society' section.

Potential and actual difficulties arose when interviewing children. The main barrier which was not unexpected, was the children's inhibition to being interviewed by myself as a stranger. I was aware of the importance of building up a positive relationship with children before interviewing them for research purposes (e.g. Irwin & Johnson, 2005). Personal, anecdotal, and recommended guidelines from organisations concerned with children, e.g. 'Save The Children' (2009), indicate that children are likely to be far more forthcoming in their answers if they have had the chance to get to know the interviewer beforehand and feel comfortable with them. Regrettably only limited opportunity was available for this due to the time constraints of the present study. There may be benefits in pursuing different approaches for eliciting children's voices and if conducting this study again I would aim to ensure that more time was given to get to know each child. However, one could spend significant amounts of time trying to find the 'perfect' research technique, but in the present study, as with all research, compromises needed to be made in order to gather information: "Awareness of the complexity, contingency and fragility of the practices we invent to discover the truth about ourselves can be paralysing...reflexively getting on with doing such work may be the most fruitful action we can take" (Lather, 2004 p. 215).

3.6.7. Interviewing Adult Participants

Adults were interviewed by telephone or face to face, in a setting of their choice. All the adults who chose to be interviewed chose to do so in the setting in which they saw the child (teachers at school, carers at home). They were asked whether they would be happy for the interview to be taped or not. The adult interviews lasted from ten to sixty minutes, depending on the conversational style and preferences of the participant, e.g. some welcomed the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences

and views. Participants were debriefed and thanked, both verbally immediately following the interview, and subsequently by letter.

3.6.8 Part 2 Interviews

The cohort of children who were in Year 6 at the start of the study was interviewed again, as were their carers and a teacher 'most concerned' with their transition at their new school. Social Workers were informed of the ongoing research by E mail (appendix N). All participants were invited to participate in part 2 by letter (appendices O, P and Q). Foster carers were asked to go through the child's letter with them, so that children with literacy difficulties were able to access the content and ask questions. Foster carers were asked to talk to the child on this occasion, because they had gained an understanding of the study in part one, and had built up some relationship with the researcher. Although permission had been gained from Social Workers to include children in both parts of the study, it was considered important to invite children to participate for a second time, to give them opportunity to remove themselves from the study if they wished.

Participants who consented to participate in part two of the study were interviewed under the same procedures as part one. The semi-structured interviews were different for part two as they were developed based on the analysis of data from part one of the study, with the aim of eliciting information arising from themes from this first stage of data gathering (see appendix R).

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis took place following parts one and two of the study. The following section sets out the methodology used to analyse the data and issues related to this analysis.

3.7.1 Inductive Approach and Researcher Bias

A broadly inductive approach to data analysis was chosen as the intention of the present study was to base it on the views, ideas and perceptions of stakeholders, as opposed to pre-existing theory. To conduct the study in this way, I tried to minimise my preconceptions. However, I acknowledge that my own perceptions, preconceptions and pre-existing knowledge of the subject inevitably affected the interpretation of the data. Willig (2001) asserts that the qualitative researcher needs to actively engage with the data, hence researcher knowledge and experience will influence data interpretation, and therefore the subjectivity of qualitative research. It is consequently important to acknowledge that a certain amount of 'researcher bias' is likely to have taken place throughout the research. Onwuegbuzie (2003) considers this occurs when the researcher has personal biases or assumptions that he/she is unable to bracket. This bias may affect research in a number of ways; it may be transferred subconsciously to the participants, which may influence their behaviours or attitudes; study procedures may be affected, such as leading questions asked in an interview; and it may also affect the data analysis and interpretation. However, this is arguably impossible to rectify. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe analysis as '...the interplay between researchers and data' (p.13), thus acknowledging that there is subjective selection and interpretation of all generated data.

3.7.2 Thematic Analysis

Interview data were analysed within the broad 'procedural category' (as referred to by Madill & Gough, 2008) of 'thematic analysis': a method for

identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or 'themes' within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A common criticism of thematic analysis is that it is too flexible and that too many different qualitative methods fall under this heading (Madill & Gough, 2008). The absence of clear and concise guidelines lead some to argue that 'anything goes', implying that the use of thematic analysis is vague and inconsistent (Antaki et al. 2002, cited by Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, others, such as Madill and Gough (2008) view thematic analysis as more of a 'procedural categorisation' within which there are many more specific analysis methods. Boyatzis (1998) also argues that thematic analysis should be used not as a specific method, but as a tool across different methods. This was the view taken by the author of the present study, and the approach was based upon the principles of 'framework analysis' within the broader procedure of thematic analysis

3.7.3 Framework Analysis

Framework analysis is an approach that involves developing a hierarchical thematic framework, used to classify and organise data according to key themes, concepts and emergent categories. It was developed in the context of applied research (Lacey & Luff, 2007), which is research that aims to meet specific information needs and provide outcomes and recommendations, often within a short timescale. The approach therefore seemed particularly suitable for the current project, as aims included the analysis of data and the formation of recommendations which had to be completed within a limited time.

Framework analysis has the advantage of being a structured process with clear stages. It is a common criticism of qualitative research that insufficient detail is given to reporting the process and details of the analysis, or that authors simply state that themes 'emerged' from the data (an argument discussed by Braun & Clarke, 2006). Attride-Stirling (2001) argues that if qualitative research is to produce meaningful and useful results, the material under scrutiny must be analysed in a methodical

manner, by recording, systematising and disclosing methods of analysis. Upon reviewing a range of analytical methods, it was considered that a particular benefit of framework analysis was the provision of systematic and visible stages to the analysis process, thus being clear and explicit about results obtained from the data.

Ritchie et al. (2003) describe the stages of framework analysis: familiarisation, identifying initial themes and concepts, indexing, charting and finally synthesising. These stages as applied to the data collected from the present study will be described step by step. It should be noted that while the following steps were broadly followed, the analysis was not treated as a linear process with each stage being separate and discreet and following on in order. Instead analysis was a more 'recursive' process with movement back and forth through the phases where needed (as suggested by Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.7.4.1 Familiarisation and identifying initial themes and concepts. The process of collecting the data, listening and re-listening to the recorded interviews, partially transcribing the interviews and re-reading the transcriptions formed the familiarisation stage. During this, not only were data actively being used, but the researcher was also 'noticing and thinking' about the content of the data, as described in the 'Noticing, collecting and thinking model' (Seidel, 1998 cited by Lewis & Gibbs, 2005). Thus, a level of analysis occurred concurrently with data collection (as described by Rabiee, 2004). Recurring themes and ideas were noted and considered while becoming familiar with the data.

3.7.4.2 Indexing and charting. This stage involved creating a chart and placing each piece of data into initial, very broad recurring themes. Although it is possible to use specialist software such as 'FrameWork' (produced by the National Centre for Social Research, 2009), or NVivo, it was decided that a simple spreadsheet programme could be used as a method of organising the data, as it enabled the researcher to cut, paste, sort, arrange and re-arrange the data.

Consideration of data in broadly similar themes (e.g. issues around choosing the school, difficulties in transition etc.) served a purpose similar to 'coding' in many qualitative approaches as it was essentially matching each piece of data to an initial textual code.

The chart enabled the whole dataset to be read across, with the name of each participant down the side and the broad themes along the top. The transcribed interviews were then re-read. As suggested by Ritchie et al. (2003), each phrase, sentence and paragraph was read and the question asked 'what is this about?' in order to decide where in the index it would fit. In some cases, the content was deemed to contain a number of important themes and was therefore inputted into the chart a number of times.

3.7.4.3 Synthesising. The chart was searched for patterns, associations and concepts. These formed themes, and sub-themes which were then put into a separate chart, which also included specific quotes that were considered to illustrate these themes.

The frequency, extensiveness and consistency of topics/ broad themes contributed to the formation of more specific themes and sub-themes. Themes were lifted from the initial table (formed in the 'indexing and charting' stage) and organised into themes in a second table. Each theme was supported by quotes in this table, so that it was linked as closely as possible to the language of the participants (as advocated by Ritchie et al., 2003).

The process took some time, as increasing familiarisation and time to consider the data led to the organisation, formation, reformation, refinement or abandonment of themes and sub-themes. However with increasing familiarisation of the data, more abstract themes emerged.

3.7.5 Consensual Validity. Consensual validation can be described as “an agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, and evaluation and thematics of an educational situation are right” (Eisner, 1991, p. 112, cited by Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). In the present study, the data were analysed by the principal researcher. To ensure that my interpretation of the data was a reliable one, steps were taken to ensure consensual validity of the data. Three ‘competent others’ who had experience of qualitative analysis (one fellow trainee EP, one experienced EP and one academic professor) reviewed the raw data to ensure that interpretation of the data was valid. It should be noted that they did not analyse the data themselves and it is acknowledged that the results of the analysis may have been different had another person analysed the data due to different interpretations. As Denzin and Lincon (2000) state: “qualitative researchers do not claim that there is only one way of interpreting an event. There is no one ‘correct’ interpretation” (p393).

3.7.6 Listing Improvement Ideas

As well as analysing the data into themes, participants had been asked for ideas as to how to improve the transition arrangements for children Looked After. These formed part of the analysis, but were also put into a list, whether the idea was suggested by one, or suggested by many. This was done so that each idea could be considered in addition to the analysis, in relation to the overall themes, to decide whether the idea was practical and compatible with the results of the analysis.

3.7.7 Presenting the Results

The presentation of the results was structured following the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006), which suggests that a thematic analysis write-up must provide sufficient evidence of the themes within data, with extracts being easily identifiable as examples of issues. However, as well as the explicit evidence of extracts from data being related to themes, they recommend the use of a narrative illustrating ‘the story’ being told about the data. In response to this, the present study

presents results in a table under each theme, with a narrative of the analysis following on from this. It should be noted that the presentation of the results was very much restricted by the word count limitations.

3.7.8 Drawing Together

The analysis resulted in a number of themes, sub-themes and ideas for improving the transition process. These were then interpreted and drawn together into 'main principles' from the data, and a set of guiding principles and recommendations (see conclusion), which may be used to inform the development of a transition package to support children in public care as they move from primary to secondary school.

3.8 Dissemination Plans

There are plans to disseminate the results of this study in a number of ways as described below, some of which are currently being realised.

3.8.1 Participants

Those involved in the study will be given feedback on the findings. The mode of dissemination will vary according to the group. For example there is likely to be a short presentation to Social Workers at a meeting, and children involved will be sent an age appropriate information sheet.

3.8.2 Local Dissemination

Practitioners in the local authority (Teachers, Support Workers, Educational Psychologists, Social Workers) are likely to be given feedback in the form of a presentation. This is designed to give information about the study, but also to prompt and encourage good practice in the light of the results. I will also write a briefing paper to share with the above groups.

3.8.3 Wider Dissemination Plans

I plan to write up the study for publication and submit an article to a peer reviewed journal. I also hope to discuss the research at a national 'Looked After Children' interest group.

3.9 Conclusions from Chapter 3

The present chapter set out the methodology used to gather data in the present study. As has been shown, the process was not as straightforward as anticipated. However, while there were many barriers to overcome, the process of doing so presented valuable learning opportunities. The following chapter presents the findings of the present study.

Chapter 4: Main findings

4.1 Introduction

As described in chapter 3, the data from interviews and focus groups were analysed for overarching themes, themes and sub-themes relating to the transition of children Looked After from primary to secondary school. Table 4.1 shows the six overarching themes and the main issues subsumed within each of these. The chapter addresses each overarching theme, identifying any differences in perceptions between children, their carers, teachers and other professionals. It concludes with the suggestions made by participants in the study for how the transition process could be improved.

Table 4.1: Overarching Themes and Main sub-themes

Overarching theme	Sub-themes
Structural factors	Information sharing and planning
	The role of Social Services
	Influences on the allocation of school places
The importance of relationships	Peer relationships
	The relationship between the child and school staff
	The relationship between stakeholders
	The relationship with the local community
Coping with change	Ongoing change
	Leaving people behind
	Change bringing back, or moving away from, previous issues
	Fear of change
Supporting factors	Current support systems
	Sport as a positive factor
Awareness of difficulties	Perceived within-child difficulties

	Difficulties provoked by transition
Minimising differences	

NB. Please note that when talking about LAC support officers and Social Workers as a group, they will be referred to as 'other professionals'.

4.2 Structural Factors

Adult participants made much reference to the structural factors that impacted upon children during transition, such as systems for sharing information between agencies and planning for transition, the role of Social Services, and systems relating to the allocation of secondary school places. Children themselves rarely referred to such issues, which operated at a level outside their daily experience.

4.2.1 Information sharing and planning

Table 4.2.1 Information sharing and planning

Sub-theme	Example quotes
The importance of sharing information between different agencies	<i>"Files go up, but it's the silly things that are important that teachers learn every day. That information needs to be passed on more, such as how the child is when they have a contact day."</i> (LAC support officer)
Good information sharing/ planning experiences	<i>"Because of the meetings, teachers from that school knew all about it and what they had to do when he moved into that school anyway, so they knew what to expect"</i> (Carer)
Need for improved information sharing	<i>"I didn't know she was looked after until she started. I didn't know much about her really at all.... I did e-mail the primary head and asked if there is anything I need to be aware of ... nothing came back".</i> (Secondary school teacher)

	<i>"I think the information that the high school had on the girls was nothing like what it should have been"</i> (Carer)
Timescales	<i>"Decisions should be made in Year 6 about where a child should be in Year 7 and the carers should be sent the decision. It's vitally important that children know as early as possible where they are going to school. We have had kids, end of August, early September we have been told that a child is coming and we say from where? They need to look at the bigger picture at what happens to these kids in Year 6 and 7 in relation to where they are placed. The LAC review in Year 5 should decide the long term plan in terms of 'what is their school?'"</i> (Secondary school teacher)

The importance of sharing information about the child and planning for the transition emerged as one of the strongest themes from the adults interviewed, with nearly all of them making some reference to this. It was important that information was shared between primary and secondary schools, and also between different agencies (mainly Social Services, schools and carers). Views about how well information-sharing and joint planning worked in practice were varied. Some participants reported positive experiences, which they felt had supported the child, however for many, information sharing had not been as good as it could have been.

Primary school teachers tended to be satisfied with the information sharing (3) or have mixed views about it (2). However, secondary school teachers were more likely to indicate that information sharing could be better (4) or had mixed feelings (4). Secondary school staff who had complaints, tended to focus on information sharing from social services and primary schools, as opposed to their own information gathering

procedures, which they indicated they regarded as good. In particular some secondary school teachers were not always aware in advance that they had a 'Looked After' child arriving: *"We often don't know we have a looked after child until we have a letter asking us how they are getting on."* Even when they were aware that a child was arriving, some secondary school staff considered that much of the important personal information about the child was not communicated and that primary staff were not always as realistic or honest as they could be about the difficulties a child presented with. Many carers indicated that they felt information sharing was good (12 interviews) although some (5) indicated that it could be improved. However, 2 carers who felt positive about information sharing in Year 6, felt negatively about it following transition. This information from carers and teachers may suggest that information sharing is generally considered to be adequate prior to transition, but following transition those involved with the child consider that more information is needed.

Many participants, especially school staff, made reference to longer timescales being needed for information sharing and planning, possibly starting the process as early as Year 5 and continuing into and throughout Year 7.

4.2.2 The Role of Social Services

Table 4.2.2 The Role of Social Services

Sub-theme	Example quotes
Perceptions that there should be greater continuity of Social Workers	<i>"Continuity of Social Workers is hugely important. I feel that a great deal of my time is taken up with repeating information. People don't retain information or lose files or somebody else comes in next time (Secondary school teacher)."</i>
Social Workers should be more	<i>"Social Workers should attend meetings, which they regularly fail to do." (Secondary school</i>

involved/ proactive	teacher) <i>"Sometimes Social Services will not talk to us until its time for a review. They should have more awareness that we are here and we need to know the children's problems."</i> (Secondary school teacher)
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Participants indicated that frequent changes of Social Worker impeded information sharing. Many indicated that the Social Services department had suffered from high staff turnover difficulties for some time. There was concern from carers and school staff that this lack of consistency of Social Worker had negative effects on children.

School staff also expressed the view that Social Workers were not as involved or proactive as they should be. Many teachers felt that they were forced to perform duties that they considered should be the role of a Social Worker, such as preparing paperwork for review meetings, and ensuring contact between Social Services and the school.

4.2.3 Influences on Allocation of School Places

Table 4.2.3 Influences on Allocation of School Places

Sub-theme	Example quotes
Catchment areas	<i>"It's often difficult getting a child into a school at all if they are out of catchment"</i> (Social Worker)
Stakeholder priorities	<i>"Social services also have their own issues and they might be worried about something that school may not be concerned about"</i> (LAC support officer)

	<i>"Foster carers may not have the same interest in choosing school; they might want them to go to the local school as opposed to the best school". (Social Worker)</i>
Type of foster placement	<i>"They don't necessarily go to their catchment secondary that they went to the primary in. It depends on whether the placement is long or short term. ... We are ruled by social services placement panel decisions". (LAC support officer)</i>
Lack of awareness of systems for allocating secondary school places to children Looked After	<i>"They wouldn't tell me - I'm only the [Looked After Children] coordinator"</i> (Secondary school teacher) <i>"I'm not aware of children being treated any differently."</i> (LAC support officer)

Most children transferred to either their local school in their home placement catchment area, or transferred to the secondary school of which their primary school was a feeder school. Participants indicated that there had been no difficulties gaining school places in these instances.

Social Workers and LAC support officers have wider responsibility for children in public care, and were not interviewed in relation to particular children. This was reflected in their answers which had a greater emphasis on systems and general experiences, than on specific individuals. They talked more generally about influences on the allocation of school places.

Like other participants, they emphasised the importance of information sharing and planning, but they also discussed the different systems that impacted on children transferring to particular schools. Respondents

talked about how catchment areas could be restrictive, and one suggested that the rules could perhaps be '*bent*' for 'looked-after' children: "*the school and what it can offer should be considered as opposed to where it is*" (LAC support worker).

Different stakeholders could have different priorities when choosing the school they wanted a child to attend. One Social Worker thought that foster carers tended to want the children they cared for to go to the local school as opposed to the one that Social Services thought might suit them best. Two LAC support workers noted that although children might express a preference, '*a lot of the time it is out of their hands*' and the decision was influenced by whether their care placement was intended to be short or long-term.

All adult groups appeared not to be aware of borough-wide systems for prioritising children in public care for certain schools. Some participants indicated that there may be some, but were not sure of the details. Most participants simply answered 'no' when asked if they were aware of special systems for allocating places perhaps reflecting inadequate information sharing.

4.3 *The Importance of Relationships*

All participants talked about relationships with others as being relevant to the transition process.

4.3.1 *Peer Relationships*

The influence of peer relationships was mentioned in some form by almost all participants and across all groups, making this a very strong theme to emerge.

Table 4.3.1 Peer Relationships

Sub theme	Example quotes
Friendships influencing choice of school	<p><i>"My friends went there and I wanted to be with my friends" (Sandy, Y7)</i></p> <p><i>"I wanted to go to St M because my old mates are there. I just wanted to see them again." (Simon, Y7)</i></p>
Easier transition with friends	<i>"Going with friends. This helped her more than anything. Not being the only one in a strange school." (Carer).</i>
Making new friends	<i>"She's got friends now. It makes a difference doesn't it when they've got friends? She's not on her own like she was at R (her previous school)". (Carer)</i>
Friends as a general resilience factor	<i>"She has had some flack which her friends have fended off for her. One of her friends is quite street wise and she has tried to make sure that Sarah is not taunted" (Secondary school teacher).</i>
Difficulties with peer relationships attributed to the child	<p><i>"He has trouble making friends in school... He falls out with people and gets himself into bother... I caught a boy constantly thumping Simon. Simon had said something about the boy's mother. He doesn't talk to other children in the right way. He does tend to wind people up and he tells a lot of porkie pies". (Carer)</i></p> <p><i>"His social skills around other children aren't very good and he will openly say a child's brown... he's not really racist, he's just saying it because the child is brown. It has caused some problems" (Carer).</i></p>
Children's difficult social experiences attributed to peers	<i>"The bullying started in September when he moved down there... they all met up again and the bullying started again...they were kicking him, throwing his</i>

	<p><i>things down the toilet” (Carer)</i></p> <p><i>“Getting bushed – getting pushed into a bush, or getting a swirly – where you get your head flushed down the toilet. It happens in secondary school” (Stuart, Y6)</i></p>
Behaviour to gain peer respect/ approval	<p><i>“she desperately wants to please. She also wants to impress her peer group – she’s got a battle really - to impress her teacher and look cool in front of her peer group” (Primary school teacher).</i></p> <p><i>“It was just typically Robert, he needed to be in control and establish himself in the pack”.(Carer)</i></p>
Importance of developing local friends	<p><i>“We want her to have friends locally when she gets home in the evening” (Carer)</i></p>

Carers, teachers and children indicated that friendships were an important factor in choosing a secondary school. Children in particular (8 out of 11) indicated their preference had been influenced by where their friends were going.

Some carers and teachers considered that primary school peers were so important that remaining with friends took precedence over other considerations when choosing a school, such as distance to travel to school or other conveniences. One carer described how he drove the girl in his care to an out-of-catchment school so she could stay with her friends from primary school.

Participants reflecting on transition considered that going with friends had helped the move (8 carers, 6 children and 4 teachers). Furthermore not going with friends was sometimes associated with difficulties following transition.

Keeping children with their peer group was not always straightforward. A strong theme for carers was the importance of enabling children to develop friends locally (described later in this section), which sometimes was incompatible with remaining with friends from primary school. This incompatibility was associated with 6 children in the study who had moved to a care placement in a new location, but remained in their primary school. In four of these cases, the child stayed with their peer group, and two moved to a local school, away from their primary peers. In all six cases participants indicated that the decision had not been easy.

Making new friends was considered to be a positive aspect of moving to a new school for most children. All Year 6 children interviewed indicated that they were looking forward to making new friends in secondary school, and when interviewed in Year 7, they considered that making new friends had been one of the benefits of moving.

Adults also recognised the value of making new friends. Half of all the children followed from primary to secondary school (3) were reported by their carers to have developed better friendships in secondary school than they had experienced in primary school. While it is possible that these children were still in a honeymoon period, as interviews took place after only a term in the new environment, this may indicate that having a wider choice of friends or a 'fresh start' was socially beneficial.

Overall, most participants recognised the value of keeping old friends, particularly immediately following transition, but also the value of making new friends. This was put succinctly by Sharon who provided advice for other children based on her own experiences.

"If you've got friends going up to the school then keep with them, and then when you've got used to the school go and find some new friends when you're ready"

As well as specifically supporting the transition process, peer relationships were perceived as positive for children more generally, both in primary and secondary school. A few adults indicated that the child had suffered some taunts or bullying from peers related to their 'looked-after' status, and in these situations, friends had supported the child, resulting in the difficulties stopping.

While most adults emphasised supportive peer relationships, around half of teachers and carers also indicated that the 'looked-after' child had difficulties making and maintaining friendships. Most attributed these difficulties to the child's inadequate social skills.

More than half the children (7) talked about peer relationship difficulties, identifying 'bullying' as a factor and citing other children or the situation as the cause of difficulties encountered. They did not indicate the possibility of their own role as a contributory factor. For example children indicated that bullying was a normal part of moving to secondary school and to be expected. Some children seemed almost resigned to being bullied: *"You do get beaten up sometimes but who doesn't get beaten up?...you have to expect that when you go to comp"*.

Adults discussed how children tried to gain the approval of their peer group, or assert themselves around the time of transition, often at the expense of relationships with staff. One child also made reference to this providing some insight into his behaviour.

"Just try and get along and try and be silly in class so you can get to be popular like I do. But now I try and work hard, but don't work too hard otherwise they think you're a geek". (Stuart, Y7)

As exemplified in this quote, some children were reported to behave in ways that helped them to gain peer acceptance but which alienated school staff.

4.3.2 The Relationship Between the Child and School Staff

Table 4.3.2 The Relationship Between the Child and School Staff

Sub theme	Example quotes
Feeling of responsibility/ concern for student	<p><i>"I have these chats to her. I'm really concerned - will she be taken under somebody's wing to have these chats to?"</i> (Primary school teacher)</p> <p><i>"he is vulnerable...you just want to hug him and say everything's alright."</i> (Secondary school teacher)</p>
The importance of talking to pupil regularly to find out how things are going and building up a relationship with them.	<p><i>"[I] try to see him a little bit more regularly. Try to see him most mornings, to see how school is going in general, how homework's going and just to engage him in conversation"</i> (Secondary school teacher).</p>

Teachers and LAC support officers talked about the importance of children building up positive relationships with individual adults at school. Most school staff indicated they felt that they, or another member of staff, had built up a positive relationship with the young person, or were in the process of building a relationship. These relationships were sometimes a result of formal systems within the school, although the language and descriptions participants used indicated that many had been influenced in part by concern about the child on a more personal level (see table).

This was not a theme arising from children's or foster carers' interviews which placed emphasis on the importance of peer relationships, possibly indicating that child-staff relationships were not perceived as being important or influential.

4.3.3 The Relationship Between Stakeholders

Table 4.3.3 The Relationship Between Stakeholders

Example quotes
<i>"In an ideal world, each school should have a designated Social Worker like we do with health and psychology". (Secondary school teacher)</i>
<i>"he's on his 15th Social Worker...consistency is the biggest issue" (Secondary school teacher)</i>
<i>"All I know is that I work really, really close with B High and Miss X and Mr H. To give my support that's what it's go to be" (Carer)</i>

Many adult participants talked about the value of building and maintaining relationships between themselves and other adult stakeholders, to support children. Personal relationships with school staff appeared to be particularly important for carers. 11 of the 16 carers made reference to the significance of this. Of the 5 that did not, 4 were carers who were related to the child, suggesting that this may have been less of an important issue for this sub-group.

4.3.4 The Relationship with the Local Community

Table 4.3.4 The Relationship with the Local Community

Sub theme	Example quotes
Confidence in school through informal links	<i>"All my children have been there. I've had a lot of dealing with it. It's a really good school." (Carer).</i> <i>"children off this estate go to that school. We knew it was a very good school." (Carer)</i>
Other children already	<i>"I have another foster child there and I feel</i>

attended the school	<i>that if the two of them go down together she will have support” (Carer).</i>
Locality/ local knowledge supports transition, in terms of non-school issues	<i>“he didn’t want to be hanging around the bus stop as that’s where trouble starts” (Carer)</i>
Local peer relationships	<i>“This is our local school – the majority of the girls from her school are going there. We want her to have friends locally when she gets home in the evening” (Carer)</i> <i>“We wanted him to go to St C’s school. Other boys in the house attend the school and he would make local friends. Now he doesn’t know his local friends” (Carer).</i>

A theme that appeared to be very pertinent to carers was a strong emphasis on the importance of family, neighbours and locality. Carers indicated that extended networks of people, relating to their locality, and forged over time, were important for the child they fostered, and to their own confidence as a foster carer. Almost all of the carers (14) emphasised this, and the small minority that did not fostered children who attended school outside their immediate locality.

Carers seemed more confident and knowledgeable of the school their child attended if they had prior family or community links to it. This knowledge from informal networks appeared to be strongly related to satisfaction with the school that the child attended.

Having older children, or foster children, who were at a school (or had attended it previously) was perceived as a factor supporting transition, either because of a familiar person’s presence in the school, or as a source of information about the school. Around two thirds of carers (11 out of 16) made reference to this.

The carer's local knowledge affected transition issues indirectly linked to school: for example their wish for children to feel part of the wider community, of which the school was part. Some carers indicated that they were aware of potential local risks that may affect children, and as a result prevented difficulties occurring by protecting their children from those risks. For example three carers cited the journey to school as a risk or protective factor for their child, and indicated this judgement stemmed from local knowledge.

Half of the carers interviewed (8) emphasised the importance of children having opportunities to develop local relationships, and attending school locally.

Local community was not a theme arising from any other group. For children this may reflect a lack of awareness of how locality impacts on their lives, or an inability to distinguish the local from things further away. Conversely it may be that children had not lived in a local area for long enough to feel part of the community. It may be that most teachers interviewed did not live locally, so had less awareness of this aspect than carers, who tended to live in the school locality. Carers' responses may simply reflect their role focus; while the teacher's role is to deal with life in school, carers deal with the child's life outside school.

4.4 Coping with Change

Many participants talked of change in the child's life in addition to the change of school.

4.4.1 Ongoing Change

Table 4.4.1 Ongoing Change

Sub theme	Example quotes
Possibility of placement change	<i>"I've got a couple in really settled placements, but even they can break down". (LAC support officer)</i>
Multiple changes of school	<i>"Not sure how many schools in total. He has moved round the country and spent some time in France, may have been to quite a few schools". (Carer)</i>
Children placed with relatives experiencing less change	<i>"He's only ever been to this school" (Grandmother).</i> <i>"[He's] been to this school and the primary school before" (Mother).</i>
Ongoing change impacts on school and transition	<i>"As I believe Sarah moved more than once, it must be very difficult to cope with the environment at home to come into the environment of a new school... I imagine that any unsettled or problems at home would impact on settling into a school this size" (Secondary school teacher)</i>
Ongoing change makes the move easier or no more difficult	<i>"I'd say the transition is easier for LAC. How many children get members of staff in some cases visiting their house before they start at the comp?" (Secondary school teacher)</i> <i>"It could be easier because she has been to so many schools" (Primary school teacher).</i>
Importance of	<i>"I fight for them to stay here – I hate this business</i>

stability in children's lives	<i>when they come, 3 weeks in they find a friend and then they leave. We have one girl coming from a long way away but its still stability for her to be here."</i> (Secondary school teacher)
Additional challenges at time of change	<i>"It's a time when they may want to conceal their LAC status...it's an age when children pick up on differences."</i> (Social Worker) <i>"The thing is it's a mixture of everything... its going up to the secondary, it adolescence. It's a tough time."</i> (Carer)

All groups of adults indicated that children had to cope with change in their lives generally. Many children were reported to have experienced numerous changes of care placements, some as many as 9.

In the first interviews around two thirds of carers (10 out of 16) reported the child they looked after had been with them less than 2 years, with length of time in placement ranging from 2 weeks upward. In particular children in Year 6 had experienced recent significant change with all six of them having been with their carers for 20 months or less. Information from those with much experience in supporting children Looked After indicated that this was a common picture.

Teachers and other professionals indicated that they were aware that children's placements could change very quickly and there was always the threat of change for children Looked After.

The amount of change children had experienced differed according to whether they were Looked After by relatives or not. Children living with relatives appeared to have experienced far less change, with 4 out of the 5 children being in their first placement. This comparative stability was reflected in the number of schools the child had attended: four out of the

five children living with relatives had been to just one primary school, and one child had attended two, indicating that even when children were taken into care, they remained at the school they were already on roll at. This suggests a possible further link with locality and community; children going to live with relatives tended to stay within their communities when becoming Looked After, and as a result experienced far more stable care and school placements.

Children placed with non-family foster carers experienced far more change. Records indicate that the study children in this sub-group had experienced an average of 3 or 4 adoption or foster placements. Lack of clarity and absence of information from some children's records together with anecdotal evidence from carers suggests that some children have experienced more placements than are officially recorded. Children who had experienced a number of foster placements had also attended many schools. According to carer reports three quarters (9 out of the 12) had been to three or more primary schools.

Some adult participants, in particular teachers, indicated that lack of stability had a negative impact on children's ability to cope with changing school. One secondary school teacher talked about a child who had moved to a new foster family over the summer (as had a few children in the study), who was finding it difficult to cope simultaneously with the change of school. Nevertheless some adults indicated that despite ongoing change, children Looked After may actually find the move no more difficult than other children. Some even suggested that the move may be easier for this group because they felt that the support for children compensated for the potential difficulties they faced, or that the child would be used to coping with change.

Adults talked of the value of providing stability and routine for children who had experienced change. Regular school attendance, home and school routines and consistent behaviour management were some of the ways that carers and teachers reported they provided stability. Some

participants indicated that children benefited from stability, in terms of their emotional well-being, behaviour and learning. One carer talked about their child regressing at the start of every school year following the long summer break: *"...the routine and structure of school are really important for him"*. Some participants considered stability so important that it overrode other issues considered to be important, such as having a local school placement.

4.4.2 Leaving People Behind

Other than school transition, children tended to mention change far less than adults, perhaps because change was so much part of their lives, or it was too difficult or confusing a topic. Some children were unclear about their personal history, indicating difficulties remembering previous changes. When children did talk about change, it tended to be about people they had left behind.

Table 4.4.2 Leaving People Behind

Sub theme	Example quotes
Leaving friends	<i>"My mate Jordan has been my mate since Year 3... since I've been here I haven't seen him"</i> (Simon, Y7)
Leaving family	<i>"you want to go home like, you always go to someone different. People miss their families. Can't always make it your way. It's been really tough for me"</i> (Simon, Y7)
Positive aspects about leaving people behind	<i>"Moving away from primary school, cos I just felt like a little kid there with all the little ones".</i> (Lewis, Y7)

Children indicated that they missed the relationships they had with friends from previous schools or neighbourhoods. Some children alluded to missing their families. For example 'Sandy' recognised that the move was a big milestone that was not shared with her parents and said that some

children might find it difficult: *“Cause like thinking your parents don’t see you grow up from children to teenagers”*. However, some children indicated that they welcomed the change, because there were things or people they would, or had, been happy to get away from.

Children’s previous relationships were rarely referred to by adults, particularly in terms of their value or benefit, possibly suggesting a lack of acknowledgement of a significant role that other adults may have played in a child’s previous settings.

4.4.3 Change Reviving, or Moving Away From, Previous Issues

Table 4.4.3 Change Reviving, or Moving Away From, Previous Issues

Sub theme	Example quotes
Revival of previous difficulties	<i>“He’s gone back to the crowd that he knew at the junior school when he was with his mother...They know the boy that he used to be in the other estate – the boy that gets into fights, the boy who doesn’t do his work, the boy that has somebody sat with him to help him. Not the boy that we’ve had here “ (Carer)</i>
A fresh start; getting away from past difficulties	<i>“when he went to the new school there was a whole different set of children who didn’t know his background so all that teasing wasn’t there any more. The fresh start most certainly helped him” (Carer)</i>

Some participants talked about transition bringing the child back into contact with people or memories from their past, which created subsequent difficulties. While not a theme associated with all participants, for those who were affected (6 out of 17 children) it was a significant issue, discussed by teachers, carers and children. As a result of becoming Looked After, or being bullied, three children had moved primary schools. Following the move to secondary schools which received children from a number of primary schools, these children came

into contact with peers who knew the child in a previous context and their association with being bullied, coming to school in a dirty state or behaving differently. Some participants reported that this resulted in children reverting to the kind of negative behaviours displayed previously.

For some participants the move was an opportunity to get away from the associations with the past. Many participants talked about the child having 'a fresh start' and having an opportunity to create a new image for themselves.

4.4.4 Fear of Change

Table 4.4.4 Fear of Change

Sub theme	Example quotes
Unfounded fears	<i>"Cos they thought it was easier in primary school but it's not as hard in secondary school."</i> (Geraint, Y7)
Being nervous about the threat of bullying before the move	<i>"there are rumours going about saying things like they are going to get pushed down the toilet like in movies, but it's not like that at all."</i> (Danielle, Y7)

Many children indicated that they felt fearful or anxious before transition. Much of this seemed based on rumours and children in Year 7 were able to recognise that some of the fear had been unfounded. Some of this fear related to work being hard, getting lost or having strict teachers, although the most commonly cited fear was that of bullying.

4.5 Supporting Factors

Participants talked about how children were supported during transition. In addition, many adult participants talked about the importance of minimising the child's differences as being an important supportive factor.

4.5.1 Current Support Systems

Table 4.5.1 Current Support Systems

Sub theme	Example quotes
Specific transition activities	<i>"They go on visits, lots of contact, staff come here, they have evenings there, they have a Christmas concert. They do projects and work down there"</i> (Primary school teacher)
Transition as a protracted process	<i>"We view transition as a process, not an event – it's something that is established within our professional life. As the receiving school we have full knowledge of the youngsters coming to us. We also feed back to the primary school to let them know how things are going"</i> (Secondary school teacher)
Satisfaction with current arrangements	<i>"I think what we do at the moment is pretty comprehensive – they get a good understanding of what the new school is like"</i> (Primary school teacher).
Dissatisfaction with current arrangements	<i>"I think there could be a little bit more done with the children... They go down to a visit and just chuck them in really"</i> (Carer).
Information sharing	<i>"myself and the LAC coordinator went to meet local primary heads and discussed matters – we specifically asked about LAC children and then we could contact the Social Workers"</i> (Secondary school teacher)
Extra visits	<i>"She will probably have a special visit with another boy in the class"</i> (Primary school teacher).
Familiarisation with staff prior to move	<i>"We sent our youth worker to meet with a group of them...to get to know them before they came"</i> (Secondary school teacher).
Role of Carer	<i>"probably with me actually going in through the door with him so he wasn't completely alone. I think that</i>

	<p><i>helped him to a certain extent" (Carer)</i></p> <p><i>"My role was to look out in the first couple of weeks to see if there were any changes in her behaviour and emotions." (Carer)</i></p>
Being bought equipment	<p><i>"My mother bought me stuff, pens and pencils and that. That was good cos instead of borrowing things you could use your own." (Geraint,Y7)</i></p>

All but two children had participated in organised transition activities, whether tailored to them, or as part of a more general transition programme. The two children who had not experienced this had only been informed which school they were going to over the summer holidays, after leaving primary school.

A range of general transition activities for all of Year 6 were cited as supporting children's transitions with the most common being visits to the new school, secondary school staff coming to primary school to teach lessons or meet individual children, meeting pupils already attending the secondary school, doing 'bridging' units of work or special projects, or sports days with other feeder schools.

Primary school staff, children and carers were more likely to identify transition in terms of specific activities that children were involved with. However, secondary school staff were more likely to describe transition in terms of processes. This may reflect their experiences: information from participants indicated that secondary schools organised transition activities, so subsequently those on the receiving end of these may have perceived them as separate activities, while those who were organising perceived activities as fitting into an overall process.

Views of the transition process varied. All children who had taken part in transition activities reported that they enjoyed them. Teachers considered

current transition activities to be good: *"I think we do a fantastic job and it works"*. However, some carers considered that more could be done to support children. This may reflect different levels of awareness of actual transition activities; while school staff were aware of the range of activities and their purposes, carers may have been less aware if uninformed by the child or school.

Most participants indicated that Looked After children as a group, did not experience different transition activities to other children. It was felt unnecessary, and important that children were not singled out. The only cited difference for this group (as opposed to individuals) was information sharing, which was mentioned by most adults (as discussed in section 4.2), and school staff getting to know children before they came to the school: *"they are introduced to us personally and very early"* (Secondary school teacher).

Some participants indicated that individual children had been offered additional activities, but this was uncommon and on the basis of individual needs as opposed to their 'Looked After' status. These seemed to be most successful when it was not made explicit to the child that they were being singled out for the extra support.

The importance of the carer in transitions was a strong theme emerging from carers, but mentioned little by other adults, who may have lacked awareness of the supportive nature of their role. Carer actions included going to visit the school with the child, accompanying them in on their first day, being available to listen to the child if they had concerns and monitoring their general well-being. The fact that this subject was only a theme for carers themselves may reflect that participants were more aware of their own professional roles than that of others.

Some children indicated that being bought equipment helped their transition. No participants from other groups mentioned this, possibly indicating that this was not viewed as important to other groups, maybe

because having the equipment, or importantly, not having it, would not be an issue for adults until it became an issue for the child themselves.

4.5.2 Sport as a Positive Factor

Table 4.5.2 Sport as a Positive Factor

Example quotes
<p><i>"I like PE but no other subjects."</i> (Nicole, Y6)</p> <p><i>"We knew that this school was more sporty so we thought this would be the best one for him. He went to visit the new school and the headmaster explained to him that he would need to prove his behaviour for the sports facilities – behave yourself you can stay."</i> (Carer)</p> <p><i>"He was involved in some bullying. But he's pulled himself away from this and got involved with the 5-60 I initiative – 5 sports a week for 60 minutes a day – he went to all the classes and it seemed to bring him out of bothering with these children"</i> (Carer).</p>

Sport emerged as a factor that was perceived to engage and support children. In particular it was mentioned by carers, with over half (9 out of 16) indicating that sport was enjoyed by their child. Some participants indicated that sport enabled success to be experienced in a way that was not easy in other areas of the curriculum: *"She likes football, cricket anything that doesn't involve sitting down and concentrating on work"* (Carer). Others indicated that sport supported children more generally. For example, one carer indicated that school sports facilities served as an incentive for their child to engage with school, and another carer indicated that involvement in sport prevented their child mixing with peers considered to be a negative influence.

4.6 Awareness of Difficulties

Many participants talked about difficulties, which may represent risks in transition. Some of these were perceived as within-child factors and some as the child's adaptation to environmental demands.

4.6.1 Perceived Within-Child Difficulties

Table 4.6.1 Perceived Within-Child Difficulties

Sub theme	Example quotes
Controlling behaviour	<i>"When I took him on he had complete control of the school and was stopping lessons going ahead". (Carer).</i>
Behaviour management tailored to individual child.	<i>"Rebecca doesn't respond if you shout – if you shout, she will shout back. She really needs to be handled in a different way to other children in the class" (Carer).</i>
Impact of past on emotion/ behaviour	<p><i>"He doesn't like being told what to do by the teachers. I think he spent so long as a youngster having to make decisions for his mother and himself" (Carer).</i></p> <p><i>"My experience is...the behaviour problems, the educational problems, are purely a result of attachment problems. I think as a general rule they seem to have low self esteem due to their past life." (Carer).</i></p>
Externalising / attention seeking behaviours	<i>"If she finds a weakness, if she has found it, she's in there. Once or twice she has had stand up rows with the teacher, raised her voice and gone for the jugular" (Secondary school teacher).</i>

Internalising behaviours	<i>"If he doesn't understand something he gets very frustrated and instead of saying that he is stuck he just sits there and it's almost as if he puts a wall up and then it's a struggle to get work done"</i> (Primary school teacher).
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Many adult respondents indicated that children presented behaviours which caused, or would cause, difficulties around the time of transition. Just under half of the children (7) were reported to present behaviours that may have been motivated by the desire to gain control of situations, particularly in the new setting of the secondary school. In the case of 4 children, their behaviour was perceived as more challenging following arrival at secondary school, attributed to efforts to establish themselves amongst their new peer group, with children described as needing to be 'top dog' or 'king of the castle'.

Many adults attributed children's behaviour as trying to gain attention, through externalising behaviour even if it was negative attention: *"he... just wants emotional response"* (secondary school teacher). However, a few children were described as displaying very withdrawn behaviour at times. Many adults linked the child's challenging behaviour and general emotional well-being to past experiences, although many made no reference to this at all.

There was a strong view, particularly from carers, that behaviour management should be tailored to children individually, because typical ways of managing behaviour may be ineffective. Some teachers referred to managing children's behaviour differently, such as not giving attention for negative behaviours: *"Staff have been told not to react"*, while others mentioned particular sanctions used with the child.

While children recognised that they got into trouble, they often considered this to be unfair, asserting that the difficulties were triggered by other children or circumstances beyond their control. In contrast adults often

attributed difficulties to within-child factors. ‘Sandy’ talked about how she reacted when other children taunted her: *“so I tell them to get out and I get angry and then we get the blame for it”*.

4.6.2 Difficulties Resulting from Transition

Table 4.6.2 Difficulties Resulting from Transition

Sub theme	Example quotes
Getting lost	<i>I got lost for the first couple of weeks and then it was OK” (Lisa, Y7)</i>
Not being able to meet the organisational demands of the new school context.	<i>“He loses everything. His personal things, his calculator, his pens and things. His pencil case is full of things but none his own”(Carer)</i>
Difficulties with peer relationships (see peer relationships section)	<i>“There were [difficulties with other children] the first few days, then it calmed down. Something about his mother” (Carer)</i>

All groups of participants mentioned difficulties triggered by the new secondary school setting. Getting lost was most commonly cited by carers and children; many indicated that children had got lost or overwhelmed following arrival at the school. However, in all cases it was indicated that these difficulties were soon resolved.

Many adults reported children’s organisational difficulties when preparing for lessons in secondary school, a skill that had not been required in primary school. A minority of children in Year 7 were reported to have ongoing organisation difficulties, after a term or two following transition, although others had adapted, such as ‘Rebecca’, whose carer described how she got into trouble at the start of the year for not having the right books to bring to class: *“Now she keeps all her books in her bag all the time and carries them round whether she needs them or not, that’s how she copes with it”*.

4.7 Minimising Difference

Table 4.7 Minimising Difference

Sub theme	Example quotes
Minimising Looked After status	<i>"We should normalise them, don't want to stand out and make them different" (Primary school teacher).</i> <i>"I think most of them don't want to be singled out. They want to be part of the group like everyone else it". (Secondary school teacher)</i>
Child not feeling different	<i>"he probably doesn't even consider himself as looked after" (Secondary school teacher).</i>
Difficulties for all children	<i>"No different to settling your own child into a different school. They're all going to have butterflies" (Carer).</i>

The importance of minimising children's differences was mentioned by all adult participants. No child made reference to feeling different or the same as other children, or wanting to be treated differently. However, there may be significance in what children didn't talk about. Children may not have perceived themselves as different, or conversely may have wished to conceal an awareness of difference in order to integrate and be accepted.

Adult participants made explicit reference to the importance of not singling children out and making them appear or feel different due to their Looked After status, particularly in front of their peer group. Some teachers indicated that it was unlikely that any pupils other than the child's close friends knew they were Looked After, indicating that children didn't want to single themselves out amongst their peers.

Many adult participants indicated they considered that the child themselves did not feel different to other children. This was especially true for children living with relatives.

The importance of minimising difference emerged when discussing how children could be supported through the transition. There was a strong emphasis on ensuring that children weren't singled out and hence activities should be provided for all children: "*A measure for all Year 6 makes it a lot easier*" (Carer). Where it was deemed that children would benefit from additional activities to support transition, these were carried out in a way to minimise children's differences, such as taking them on extra visits to the school after school hours.

4.8 Ideas to Support Transition

All interviewees were asked to suggest improved transition processes from primary to secondary school for children Looked After. These have been grouped below under a number of headings. They include responses to direct questions about how transition could be better supported, and specific comments made elsewhere in the interviews relating to possible improvements.

4.8.1 Information Sharing/ Planning

- Improved and more detailed information sharing, communication and planning between stakeholders (2 carers, 4 teachers, 2 Other professionals).
- Information sharing over a longer period of time (1 carer, 4 teachers, 2 Other professionals).
- Secondary school placement should be decided in Y5 or earlier and communicated to the secondary school (1 carer, 3 teachers, 1 Other professional).
- Regular contact between school staff and carers (1 child, 4 carers, 1 teacher).

- Secondary LAC coordinator to attend Y6 review (4 teachers).
- School meeting with the Social Worker prior to transfer and having ongoing communication (1 carer, 3 teachers).
- Greater continuity of Social Workers (3 teachers).
- Primary schools attending first LAC review of Y7 (2 teachers).
- To communicate important information to the child (1 Other professional).
- More information about school for carers (1 carer, 1 other professional).
- 'LAC coordinator' knowing more about the child's background (1 carer, 1 teacher).
- To combine Personal Education Plans, Individual Education Plans and Individual Behaviour Plans (1 teacher).
- Dedicated support worker to facilitate information sharing between agencies (1 carer).
- Consider how child's information is protected (1 other professional).

4.8.2 Systems to Support Greater Awareness of the Needs of Children Looked After

- Increasing adult stakeholders awareness of the issues facing this group of children (1 carer, 1 other professional).
- Increasing other children's awareness of the issues facing this group of children (1 carer).
- Primary school LAC coordinator being special role (as opposed part of head/SENCO role) (1 teacher).

4.8.3 Activities/ Information for the Child Prior to the Move

- More visits to the school prior to transition (1 child, 3 carers, 1 teacher, 1 other professional).
- Staff to get to know children before they start at the new school (1 child, 1 carer, 1 teacher, 1 Other professional).
- Children receiving more information from pupils already at the school (1 child, 1 teacher, 1 Other professional).

- Visit the school with carer (1 carer, 2 teachers).
- Talking to the child beforehand to ascertain any worries or concerns (1 carer, 1 teacher, 1 Other professional).
- Doing work/ lessons on the visit to the new school or preparation work (1 carer, 1 Other professional).
- Opportunities for the child to meet other children Looked After attending the school (1 carer).
- Children receiving more information about the school from staff (1 child).

4.8.4 Actions to Support the Child Following the Move

- Peer mentoring/ buddy system (1 child, 1 carer, 1 teacher, 1 Other professional).
- Help in finding way around new school (2 children, 1 carer).
- Availability of staff that child can speak to in school (1 carer, 1 Other professional).
- Less work and less homework or no work and no homework (2 children).
- Schools to take time to address any behaviour problems (2 carers).
- Individual adult support (1 carer).
- Increased efforts to make new friends (1 child).
- Easier work and easier homework (1 child).
- Being allowed to take MP3 players into school (1 child).

4.8.5 Foster Carer Actions

- Child being generally supported at home (1 carer, 1 teacher).
- Carers taking an interest in the school and being more involved (1 carer, 1 teacher).

4.8.6 School Placement

- Keeping children with friends/peer group (1 child, 3 carers, 1 teacher).

- Bending rules to allow children Looked After to attend an out of catchment school (2 other professionals).

4.8.7 Other

- Interventions for all of Year 6 (as opposed to individual child) (4 carers, 2 teachers).
- Other children not to be made aware they are Looked After (one carer).
- Provision for child to be somewhere other than at home if excluded from school (one carer).
- Greater consistency in expectations of children between schools (1 other professional).

Participants offered a wide range of suggestions, covering actions to support individual children as well as attitudinal and organisational changes. These reflected the themes and ideas emerging from the analysis, with adults emphasising information planning and systems, and children suggesting more tangible or observable events. It is worth noting that many of the suggestions are the kind of things many children living with their parents may also say, and do not represent a wish to be treated differently from their peers. While most of the adults shared this view some suggestions did imply some special treatment.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The present chapter discusses the findings set out in the previous chapter, in the context of existing literature.

5.1 Conceptualising the Findings

The results of the study indicate that there is no single factor, or set of factors perceived as supporting children Looked After when moving from primary to secondary school. Instead, results indicate that many factors, at many levels, may play an important role when supporting children through transition and that these factors interact in a complex way.

On analysis of the data I considered that the many different factors and the way they interacted could be conceptualised using a framework based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) widely regarded 'Ecological' model of development. This model conceptualises child development within a diverse but interrelated system of relationships, affected by multiple environmental factors.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that children constantly grow, change, engage with multiple systems, and are active participants in their development as a result of a reciprocal interaction between individual characteristics and their environments, which consist of interacting systems:

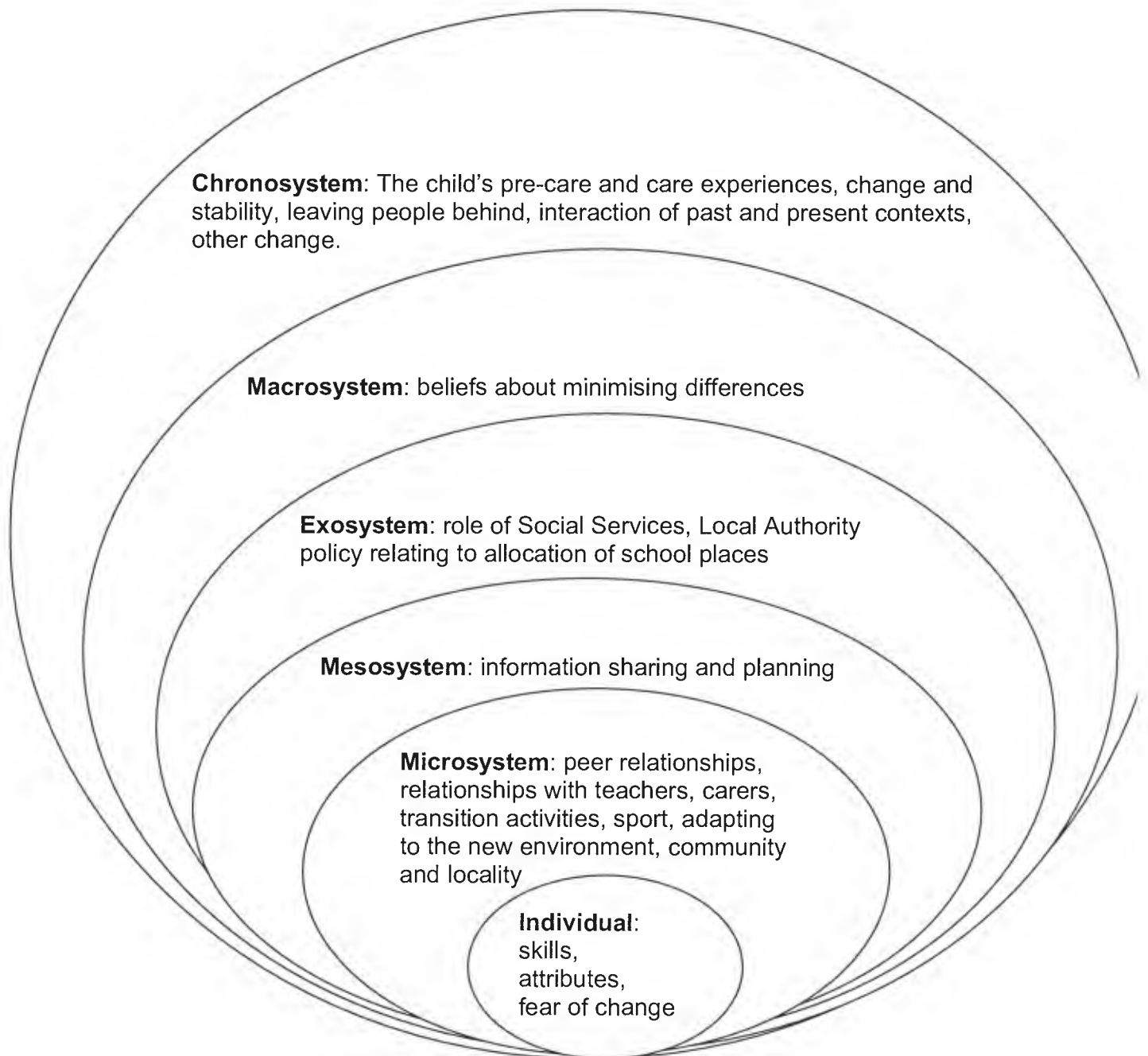
- The 'Microsystem', comprises the child's immediate environments. It refers to the environments that the child actually experiences.
- The 'Mesosystem', comprises connections between immediate environments (e.g. the relationships that those involved directly with the child have, such as the way teachers communicate with each other).

- The 'Exosystem', comprises external environmental settings which affect the child indirectly (e.g. school management or local authority policy).
- The 'Macrosystem', refers to the wider cultural context in which a child lives, and includes beliefs and cultural values (e.g. what comprises a 'good' education).
- The 'Chronosystem' was proposed later by Bronfenbrenner (1986). This refers to the influences of changes over time (i.e. changes within the individual and changes within their environments).

It can be argued that conceptualising the transition using eco-systemic theory shifts the focus away from the child and onto the interaction between the child and their environment. Because one of the aims of the present study is to create a set of principles to inform the development of a transition package, this is arguably more useful – we do not have control over 'the child' but we can manipulate their environment to become more supportive. While 'within child' aspects of the results are acknowledged and considered, emphasis needs to be placed on the contexts in which the child operates.

The present study produced results that fit into each of these systems, as illustrated in figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model Applied to the Perceptions of Stakeholders on the Transition of Children Looked After Moving From Primary to Secondary School.



The current chapter will be structured around the ecological model as a way of conceptualising the issues within a systems perspective. It is recognised that some themes may fit into different levels of the model, and as a result of this a 'best fit' approach was used.

5.2 Individual Factors Affecting Transition

Many adult participants made reference to children's strengths and difficulties as influencing the transition.

5.2.1 Within-Child Skills and Attributes

Within-child attributes were perceived as influencing the success of the transition; social skills, behaviour and ability to manage friendships were all considered to effect children's ability to cope with the change. The perceived importance of within-child factors has been found in other transition literature. Jindal-Snape and Miller (2008) discuss the importance of internal protective factors (e.g. self-esteem) as well as external protective factors to help reduce multiple 'risks' or 'stressors' at the time of primary–secondary transition. Zeedyk et al. (2003) identified good social skills and positive behaviour to be protective or 'resilience factors' in the transition.

'Resilience factors' may be a useful way of conceptualising some perceived 'within child' (as well as environmental) influences on transition. Resilience can be defined as *"those qualities which cushion a vulnerable child from the worst effects of adversity in whatsoever form it takes and which may help a child or young person to cope, survive and even thrive in the face of great hurt and disadvantage"* (Gilligan, 1997 p.12). Evidence set out in chapter 1 indicates that the primary–secondary transition may be considered a 'time of adversity' involving a number of challenges and stressors.

Fonaghy et al. (1994 cited by Dent & Cameron, 2003) suggest that predictors of resilience partially arise from within-child factors, such as an

even temperament and social competence. In the present study, some children reported to have difficulties in areas such as these were also reported to experience difficulties with transition, suggesting that they lacked some of the key resilience factors that would be supportive in the transition. For example, some children were reported to have poor social skills and difficulties forming and maintaining friendships and this was no different during the transition period. Friendships may serve as an important supportive factor at this time (see section 5.3.1) and indeed many children in the present study were reported to possess good social skills – a ‘resilience’ factor – and perceived friends as an important support. It is of course likely that these social factors will affect children in other areas, making them general resilience factors, and not just skills needed at the time of transition.

Interestingly specific interventions to encourage the development of children’s internal resilience were not mentioned by participants. For example, many participants made reference to children’s social skills impacting on transition, but none mentioned that specific interventions to develop social skills would support transition. This may be because participants did not consider within-child skills to be a factor that could be developed or changed, or they may have considered that environmental influences, such as having friends, could develop these skills therefore making specific interventions unnecessary. Alternatively it may be that carers and teachers did not consider this to be part of their role.

Certain within-child factors may have been considered to be a negative influence on transition by adults, but may have been considered to be more positive by children, representing different interpretations of behaviour. For example what adults may view as poor behaviour or lack of social skills, may be strategies employed by children to gain peer group approval.

5.2.2 Children's Fears

The fears expressed by the children in the present study, such as fear of bullying and fear of getting lost, were broadly similar to those reported in research of other populations of children experiencing transition (e.g. Humphrey & Ainscow, 2006; Zeedyk et al., 2003), suggesting that the fears of children Looked After in transition are not necessarily attributable to their care status.

However, fears such as these may be more salient for this group of children. As mentioned in chapter 1, Gilligan (2000) suggests that children may be able to cope with some adversity in life, but when there are multiple stressors they 'buckle under the strain'. Children in public care are likely to have many other stressors in their lives, other than the transition, and may therefore find this cumulative effect difficult to manage. In addition, it may be that some of their fears are well founded; for example, children Looked After are more likely to experience bullying than other children (Daly & Gilligan, 2005).

5.3 Microsystem Factors

All participants made reference to the immediate systems children interacted with as having an influence on their transition, including relationships with peers, school staff and the local community, and previous relationships. In addition, activities that children were directly involved in, such as organised transition activities and sports were considered to be supportive. Finally it appeared that children's situations were different according to whether they were looked after by relatives or not. Within these systems it was considered important to minimise children's differences (discussed in section 5.6.1), so as to not make the child feel different or stand out.

5.3.1 Peer Relationships

Participants in the present study considered that peer relationships were very important over transition for supporting children Looked After. This

supports the findings of Haslam (2004) whose interviews with children in public care produced results that emphasised moving with friends from primary school and making new friends were important resilience factors in the move.

Research on the transition of children regardless of status, has indicated that peers are particularly important during this process (e.g. Ashton, 2008; Evangelou et al., 2008; Weller, 2007). This may be because not only is the age of transition a time when children are becoming more dependent on friends and peers anyway (Madge, 2000), but there is a significant commonality in their shared experiences, i.e. peers all transitioning at the same time have similar anxieties and are likely to find comfort and support from each other (Weller, 2007). Hartup and Stevens (1999) suggest that friends may be a supportive factor because they foster self-esteem and a sense of well-being, and socialise and support one another in coping with developmental transitions and life stress.

5.3.1.1. Primary school peers. Going to a new school with peers already known to a child was viewed as important by all groups in the present study. This is reflected in existing transition research: Evangelou et al. (2008) found that moving to the same secondary school with primary school friends was considered to be a key factor in a successful transition; Reay and Lucey (2000) concluded that for the majority, making the transfer with a familiar group of peers is the best way to make the transition.

5.3.1.2 Making new friends. Research indicates that making new friends supports the school transition process (e.g. Evangelou et al., 2008) and this is endorsed in the present study, with some participants being reported to have developed better friendships than previously experienced in primary school.

Many children were reported to have moved with friends, but then to have formed new friendships following the transition. Literature indicates that

having friends at primary school is linked to the ability to make friends at secondary school. Weller (2007) suggests that children who transfer to a new school with a stable base of friendships are often able to expand their networks through a process of 'snowballing', such as gaining new relationships through their primary school friends' new networks. 'Sticking with' acquaintances from primary school following transition may have instrumental value in making new friends as they can "help project a more confident and popular persona to new peers" (Weller, 2007 p.346). This may have negative implications for those children who move to a school without friends or acquaintances, so making it harder to create new friendships, as was the case for some children in the study and may be more likely to affect children Looked After.

Although having friends may facilitate the formation of new friendships, a minority of participants considered that a 'fresh start' was an asset for developing friendships, suggesting value in going to a new school devoid of peer contacts. There is evidence to suggest that for some children, a 'fresh start' can be positive. Using data from an American longitudinal study, Weiss and Bearman (2004) conclude that "there seem to be benefits for some kids to fresh starts, especially those who have troubled histories with respect to peer integration, attachment to school, and prior history of grade retention" (p20). While Weiss and Bearman suggest that it is likely that students who were marginalised prior to transition are able to form new identities for themselves in high school, they acknowledge the paucity of research in this area.

5.3.1.4 Significance for Children Looked After. While peers are likely to be a supportive factor for all groups of children, they are likely to have particular significance for children Looked After. Rubin (1980 cited by Ridge & Millar, 2000) suggests that one of the main functions of children's friendships is to meet needs of belonging and the security that come from being part of a group. Children in public care are likely to have more need for belonging and security than other children as they are less likely to have a family to meet these needs, therefore it could be

speculated that they rely more heavily on peers to fulfil these. Ridge and Millar (2000) interviewed young people with experience of the care system whose responses revealed the significant value of friendships, not just for intimacy and sociability, but also as a social bond in the absence of more traditional social support provided by family. As well as meeting needs for belonging and security, friendship can be an 'entry point into wider social networks' (Ridge, 2002).

5.3.2 Carers

During the study a clear distinction emerged between children who were cared for by unrelated foster carers, and those who were cared for by relatives: 'kinship placements'. While kinship carers were less likely to assent to taking part in the research, enough participated for differences between the two groups to emerge. Most noticeable was the stability of the placements and number of schools attended, with children living with relatives being far less likely to experience changes of school (other than the transition in question) and changes of placement. Some adults in the study commented that children looked after by relatives did not consider themselves to be in care. The evidence suggests that children cared for in kinship and non-kinship placements have very different experiences, and should possibly be viewed as distinct groups. Research indicates that outcomes for children cared for by relatives differ from outcomes for other children Looked After. Kinship placements tend to be more satisfactory, more stable, last longer, are associated with increased contact with parents, and behaviour is less problematic (Flynn, 2002).

The present study did not involve enough participants to draw conclusions about the comparative benefits of kinship and non-kinship placements as a factor supporting children's transition, but the evidence indicates that kinship care is associated with other factors linked to positive education experiences, such as fewer changes of placement.

5.3.3 *Locality/ Community*

A clear theme emerging from carers in the present study was the importance of locality and community in transition and children's lives generally. Other studies cite the importance of these too. Weller (2007) found that children with family community links at a school often benefited from 'insider information' about the school, and a pre-established network of acquaintances that in many cases became friends and served as support networks. Evidence indicates that community may support children in transition more generally, whether Looked After or not: Newman and Blackburn (2002) recommend that transition interventions should not neglect the beneficial impact of informal support from families and the community.

Much of theory to explain the supportive nature of community is based around the notion of 'social capital': 'the resources individuals and collectives derive from their social networks' (Weller, 2007 p.339). It is likely that community links are a form of social capital and local schools are part of this: Putnam (2000, cited by Weller, 2007) argues that neighbourhood schools may provide 'unique sites for building social capital – friendship, habits of co-operation, solidarity.' Part of this social capital may be informational, for example, social networks may result in familiarity with the secondary school. Haslam (2004) concluded that the more familiar children were with people and systems of secondary school prior to entry, the more successful they believed their transition had been. By being part of a community children may familiarise themselves with the school through contacts with other people at the secondary school (e.g. pupils or local people employed by the school) or who know about the school (adults in the community) and become familiar with it through them.

While feelings about being part of a community were generally positive, the present research did touch on possible risk factors, such as negative experiences associated with travelling to school on transport shared with pupils from the local community. Jindal and Foggie (2008) acknowledge

the protective factors arising from the child, the family and their environment, but also consider these three ecosystems to be potential risk factors.

The importance of community was only cited by carers, which is unsurprising as they have responsibility for children within the community, as opposed to at school. One could hypothesise that issues relating to 'social capital' may be particularly important for those who are carers, and that feelings of community and responsibility may contribute towards the motivation for becoming a carer: research on motivation for fostering from the US Department of Health and Human Services (1993, cited by Rhodes et al., 2006), indicated that over half of carers believed that fostering was a way to do something for their communities.

5.3.4 School Staff

Adults in the present study emphasised the importance of children developing a good relationship with a member of school staff, as also cited in other literature on children Looked After (e.g. Dent & Cameron, 2003; Gilligan, 2007). A relationship with a teacher may form part of an important wider network of supportive adults, which is likely to be a resilience factor for children more generally. For example Woolley and Bowen (2007) indicated that students who reported having a network of supportive adults in their lives, such as teachers, also reported higher levels of psychological and behavioural engagement with their schooling.

5.3.5 Interventions

The interventions that children activity participated in were almost universally viewed as positive, with many participants citing them as helpful. This indicates current good practice within the study authority. Other studies on transition more generally (see Graham & Hill, 2003; Maras & Aveling, 2006) have found an association between participation in transition interventions and positive adjustment in a new school, providing an evidence base for these activities. The present study adds

support to this and indicates that general transition activities for all pupils provide a positive contribution to support the transition process.

5.3.6 Sport

The emphasis of sport as a protective factor was a surprising, yet clear, theme to emerge. Other studies have also identified sport as a positive support for young people in public care providing opportunities for success, socialisation or increasing their self-confidence. Steckley (2005, cited by Gilligan, 2008) and Gilligan (1999) cite examples of sport being a protective factor for young people in public care. Although these studies focus on sport in children's leisure time, it could be hypothesised that many of the benefits associated with sport would also apply to sport in school time (i.e. PE lessons) as well as after-school and lunchtime clubs, as was the case with many young people in the present study.

Sport may be supportive for a range of reasons. Studies show that participation in recreational activity may widen and strengthen the range of relationships the young person can access in their social network (McGee et al., 2006). It may also increase educational attainment and achievement (Mahoney et al., 2005, cited by Gilligan, 2008). Involvement in cultural, sporting and leisure activities can also foster self-esteem (Gilligan, 1999). Finally, there may also be value in sport because it has a normalising element. Gilligan (1999) suggests that children may gain more therapeutically from engagement in 'mainstream' activities rather than those perceived as clinical responses to problems. Sport provides opportunities for success, building peer relationships, self-esteem and skill acquisition in a mainstream environment, so normalising not ostracising the child.

5.3.7 Adapting to New Environments

Many children and adults reported fears or difficulties related to adapting to the new school environment, such as getting lost or getting organised for lessons. Haslam (2004) indicated that adapting to the new environment posed risk factors for children in public care over the time of

transition. Difficulties with organisation and navigation in the new school environment have also been reported in other transition studies about children more generally (e.g. Evangelou et al., 2008) indicating that such fears are not unique to those who are Looked After. However, as discussed previously, it may be particularly important to minimise the difficulties for this group, given the additional stressors they experience.

5.4 Mesosystem Factors

Many adults made reference to contexts outside the child's immediate systems of interaction, as being a source of transition support. It was in these systems that it was considered appropriate, and indeed important, to provide extra support for children Looked After

5.4.1 Information Sharing and Relationships Between Stakeholders

The importance of planning, information sharing and developing positive working relationships between stakeholders were key messages from adult participants. These processes were regarded as valuable and could be specifically tailored to the child's needs without the child necessarily being aware of this.

The importance of information sharing in transition has been shown to be valuable both for supporting Looked After children's education (e.g. Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge et al., 2004) and to support transitions for children more generally (e.g. Galton, Gray, & Ruddock 2003). Estyn's Annual Report 7(2002 - 2003, cited by Evangelou et al., 2008) states that there is clear evidence that effective collaboration between primary and secondary schools can bring immense benefits in attainment at Key Stage 3. However, recent studies have concluded that key stakeholders and organisations involved in looking after children in public care fail to communicate effectively to share relevant information and coordinate services (see Harker, Dobel-Ober, Akhurst et al., 2004). This view was also shared by some participants in the present study.

Participants emphasised the importance of communicating a range of information about children including their history, behaviour, academic and other information gathered from knowledge of the child over time. This supports the conclusions of Jindal-Snape and Miller (2008) who recommend passing on personal and social details of vulnerable children in order to alert secondary schools to their needs.

Many participants in the present study considered that information sharing and planning would be more effective if started earlier and was of a longer duration. The need for longer timescales to support children at risk has been reported in other studies (e.g. Jindal & Foggie, 2008).

5.5 Exosystem Factors

A number of themes emerged, about systemic factors considered to support or hinder the transition and affect children's environments indirectly.

5.5.1 Allocation of School Places

Most children transferred to a secondary school that was in their locality or was the feeder school for their primary, and were not aware of influences on the allocation of school places. LAC support workers, Social Workers and teachers indicated a general lack of knowledge about the systems for allocating places for this group of children. This may reflect the lack of certainty about the local authority criteria for children in this group, and the fact that Wales does not currently prioritise children Looked After for school places, unlike England.

5.5.2 Social Services Systems

Participants indicated that difficulties experienced with Social Services (frequent changes of Social Worker, lack of involvement in education) were not linked to individual Social Workers, but to the organisation of the system. These perceptions concur with those reported in other studies

(Francis, 2000; Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge et al., 2004), indicating that these views are common to other authorities.

5.6 Macrosystem Factors

There was a wider belief that emerged as a strong theme throughout the interviews regarding the importance of minimising children's differences. This belief transcended other systems such as the importance of making sure the child did not feel different (within-child) and that they were not treated differently by those around them (the microsystem).

5.6.1 Beliefs About the Importance of Minimising Differences

Not singling children out in front of others, or making them feel different was important to adult participants. This is a theme to emerge from research into supporting the transition of vulnerable children more generally: in Jindal and Foggie's (2008) research on secondary school transition participants considered that intervention programmes should be open to all children, rather than targeting particular individuals for extra support. Treating children Looked After in the same way as others or 'normalising' their experiences is emphasised by a range of literature about the education of children in public care. 'Being like other people' was also a theme to emerge from Martin and Jackson's (2002) research into educational success for children in care. In this study young people indicated they wanted to be treated in the same way as other people and not be perceived as different.

Ward (2004; 2006) outlines the argument for treating children Looked After 'normally', indicating that by subjecting children to 'normal' expectations devoid of special allowances, their sense of being different would not be emphasised. The ordinary should have the effect "of helping children to feel socially *included* rather than *excluded*, *similar* to rather than *different* from other children, and valued rather than awkward or troublesome members of society" (Ward, 2006). However, Ward discusses the notion that some young people may only be able to start feeling ordinary once their individual needs have been understood and

addressed. This was reflected in the present research: while participants felt that children should not be made to feel different it was considered important to address individual needs in discreet ways.

The widely accepted view of the importance of minimising differences is now a key element of recommended good practice for supporting children Looked After. Ofsted (2008) recommends that “unified but low profile support in school for each Looked After child so that they are not made to feel different from other children” (p.4) is a key element of school practice to encourage the progress of children Looked After.

It is interesting that children themselves did not make reference to minimising differences in the present study. This is in contrast to Martin and Jackson’s (2002) research, in which those who had experienced the care system talked about this, although the participants in their study were older than the children in the present study and reflecting on past experiences. It may be that in the present study children did not refer to this issue because they did not feel different to other children. Alternatively it may be that they did not wish to discuss their awareness of difference, possibly as a way of minimising or denying any perceived differences. Children may lack the language skills to express feelings about differences, or it may simply have not come up as part of a discussion about transition.

5.7 Chronosystem Factors

This system encompasses the “influence on the person's development of changes (and continuities) over time in the environments in which the person is living” (Bronfenbrenner, 1986 p. 724). Themes under this system are those directly involving change, and the effects they were perceived to have on the transition. However, as change (the transition) was the basis of the research, it is clear that all themes emerging were linked to change.

5.7.1 Developmental Change

In addition to all the changes related directly to school, some participants recognised that the primary–secondary transition comes at a time when children are experiencing other changes, meaning that children had to cope with other changes simultaneously. Literature also picks up on the biological and hormonal changes of puberty, and changes in cognitive capacity, emotional development and personal identity that comes at this time (Blakemore & Frith, 2006; Thompson et al., 2003).

5.7.2 Past Experiences

Some adults made reference to children's pre-care experiences, or their experiences in care, as affecting their current emotional well-being, behaviour and ability to form and maintain relationships. As discussed in chapter 1, a wealth of evidence supports these perceptions (e.g. as set out by Peake, 2006; Rutter, 1999). However, many adults did not make reference to this aspect at all, which may indicate a lack of awareness of some of the issues faced by this group of children.

5.7.3 Change and Stability

There was recognition, from many adults interviewed, that ongoing change in children's lives made aspects of life, including the school transition, more challenging. There was a widespread view that enabling stability in children's lives would be a general resilience factor, as well as in the context of the present transition. There is already evidence that stability is a factor that supports the education of children in public care. For example Jackson and Martin (1998) investigated factors that promoted resilience in 'successful' adults who had been in care as children and identified stability and continuity to be of key importance.

The present study was not comparing the transition experiences of children who were Looked After with those who were not. However, it was interesting to note that those who had experienced many changes of placement, were perceived to be more vulnerable to difficulties, such as problems with peer relationships. This could be linked to lack of

attachment or security as a result of all the changes experienced: children who are insecure seem to be at greater risk of a range of problems provoked at times of change such as bullying and difficulties with relationships (Dent & Cameron, 2003). However, the relationship is likely to be a complex one, and while interesting to consider, it lies outside the immediate aims of the present study and so has not been explored.

While some teachers in the present study recognised the potential negative impact of ongoing change on transition, others indicated that it makes no difference, or may even make the change of school easier to cope with. This may reflect a possible lack of awareness on the part of some teachers, of the wider implications of being Looked After.

5.7.4 Interaction of Past and Present Contexts

The theme of change bringing back issues from children's pasts was one to emerge from the present research. For example some children came back into contact with friendship groups they had had before they were Looked After. However, this issue does not appear to be reflected in other research. This finding could be specific to the context of the particular authority in which the research takes place. The mainly rural nature of the authority may mean that children are more likely to move primary schools when becoming Looked After, as schools may be some distance away from each other and it may be considered better for children to attend their local primary school. However, the small number of secondary schools within the authority, combined with the fact that many children are fostered within their families or geographically reasonably close to their family of origin, results in a higher likelihood of children going to school with peers they have had contact with in the past. These suggestions are hypothetical and call for further research as it was identified as an important issue for some children in the present study.

5.7.5 Leaving people behind

A number of children in the study made reference to having to leave important people in their lives behind, such as their families of origin and

established friendships. Many children had left these people recently, as part of the transition in question, or due to a change of placement. Other studies of children Looked After have also indicated disruption in social relationships: Ridge and Millar (2000) found that children struggled to maintain friendships and social networks throughout changes of placements.

The importance of continuity of relationships for children has long been established (e.g. Solnit et al . 1992 cited by Holland et al., 2005). The fact that only children made reference to the importance of their previous relationships, indicates that adults may be neglecting the importance of these, both as a support in a time of stress, such as transition, and more generally.

5.8 Conclusions from Discussion

Responses from interviews with stakeholders indicate that factors perceived to support the transition of children Looked After when moving to secondary school operate at a number of levels and interact together.

Evidence indicates that many of the factors considered to be supportive, or detrimental to the transition process such as fears about getting lost, the importance of peer relationships and the value of transition activities, apply to other populations of children, not just those who are Looked After. This suggests that much of what supports children more generally in transitions, will also support children Looked After.

Although Looked After children share similarities with other children, evidence from the present study indicates that there are a number of important factors, which may be unique to children in public care, for example the support they receive from Social Services. There may also be factors that are likely to support all children, but which are likely to be particularly pertinent to consider for this group. For example, information sharing and planning may be particularly important for children Looked

After who have particular needs and many adults in their lives and therefore require a coordinated response. Friendships and peer relationships may also be more important for this group as they are unlikely to have the extended family networks that other children have.

In addition to similarities and difference between children Looked After, and other groups of children, there also appear to be differences and similarities within the group of children referred to as 'Looked After'. Evidence from the current study indicates that there are sub-groups of children who may have different experiences of transition, for example those who are looked after by relatives and those who are not. It could be argued that these two groups should be considered separately within their different contexts.

All of these issues: factors operating at and between many systems and contexts, factors also applying to other populations of children, factors being specific to sub-groups, factors being particular to children Looked After, and factors being more important for this group, indicate that there can be no single, 'one size fits all' way to support a child who is Looked After through the transition process. It is likely that each child and their situation should be considered on the basis of individual need. The following chapter will go on to consider these issues in relation to principles to inform the development of a transition package and highlight other implications of the study, together with reflections on the study and implications for further research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The previous chapter discussed the results of the study, relating it to other literature in the field and psychological theory. This final chapter looks to the future to consider the implications of the study, for practice in the local authority in which the study took place, and more widely. The final conclusions take the form of a set of guiding principles, which could be used within local authorities to plan transition for children Looked After, and more specific recommendations. The chapter goes on to consider implications for the author's professional practice and that of other EPs, with possible directions for future research.

6.1 Final Conclusions/Principles to Inform a Transition Package

The following are a set of principles, designed to inform the development of a transition package to support children Looked After, moving from primary to secondary school.

These principles are based on the results of the present study as set out in chapter 4 and discussed in chapter 5. They are primarily based on examples of good practice currently taking place within the study authority, as perceived by the main stakeholders. They are also based on perceptions of areas in need of improvement and specific ideas from participants on how transition could be further or better supported. While the principles have been developed from the views and perceptions of stakeholders in the present study, they are also supported by results from previous research evidence which is considered to be particularly robust, and therefore suitable for a set of principles that could be used within the study authority and applied more widely.

It should be emphasised that it is anticipated that actions arising from these principles would be in addition to high quality transition support which should be available to all children. The present research indicates

that most needs of children Looked After during transition are those of all children during transition, indicating that high quality transition support on offer to all children, should meet most of their transition needs. The following principles are intended to respond to the more specific needs of this group.

6.1.1: Principle 1: There Should Be an Emphasis on Planning and Information Sharing by Key Stakeholders.

The importance of information sharing and planning was emphasised by adult participants. Good information sharing went on over time, was in depth and involved the key stakeholders, namely Social Workers, primary and secondary school teachers, carers, LAC support officers and other personnel. Information indicates that all of these stakeholders, including both primary and secondary school staff, should be involved in planning and information sharing prior to, and following transition. Carers in particular should not be neglected in these processes and are likely to benefit from regular opportunities to communicate with other key stakeholders.

It is particularly important that this group of children have their transition carefully considered by all those who work to support them, both directly and indirectly. Not only are children Looked After more likely to be at risk of experiencing difficulties in transition (see chapter 1), but having a 'corporate parent' means that many different people are responsible for them, so necessitating a co-ordinated approach. Even with two parents it can be difficult to achieve joined-up parenting (Davis, Day and Bidmead, 2002, cited by Bradbury, 2006) and the challenge with so many people involved in being 'the corporate parent' is even greater.

6.1.2 Principle 2: Support Should Be Holistic

As indicated in the last chapter, there is no single factor associated with positive transitions. Instead a range of factors at many levels, which interact together, may serve as support. The implication is that a support package is unlikely to be effective if it only considers one or two of these

factors. For example, helping a child to develop their own individual social skills is unlikely to lead to a successful transition if action is not taken at an environmental level. Any transition package would need to consider the different systems and contexts that may support a child directly, or indirectly, as illustrated in the 'ecological model' in the previous chapter. This proposal is rooted in current and previous research which endorses a holistic approach to support the education of children Looked After more generally (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge et al., 2004). This approach is also considered to be the best approach for supporting the primary-secondary transition of all children (see Jindal & Foggie, 2008).

6.1.3: Principle 3: Children's Differences Should Be Minimised

A clear message from participants was that, as far as possible, children's differences should be minimised so that they are not made to feel different, or singled out in front of their peers. This message mirrors previous research and examples of good practice (see previous chapter). As far as possible, children should only be identified for additional support in situations they are not directly involved in (i.e. the 'mesosystem' or above). For example, planning meetings, information sharing and systemic support from education and Social Services, may take place without children's awareness.

When it is deemed that children would benefit from taking part in particular activities, as far as possible they should be available to all children going through transition, not exclusively for those who are looked after. Where it is felt that individual children need additional support activities not beneficial to others, they should be considered carefully in discussion with other stakeholders, including the child, and presented in a way that minimises difference, e.g. activities after school hours or over the summer holidays, so that children are not taken out of class.

6.1.4: Principle 4: Support Should Be Individualised

The previous chapter concluded that it would not be appropriate to develop a 'one size fits all' transition package for children Looked After.

All children are different, with diverse needs. Some children in this group have extremely complex needs, and for others their needs may be no different to those of other children.

Catterall (1998) studied risk and resilience in primary–secondary transitions. He emphasised the need to move away from identifying ‘at risk groups’ and instead to consider individuals who might be at risk of difficulties. The present study endorses this recommendation: instead of viewing children in public care collectively as a vulnerable group, we should consider children’s individual needs. The present research suggests that some of these needs will be shared by other children Looked After, some will be common to other ‘at risk’ groups and some may be unique to the child.

The implications of this are that transition support to meet these needs should be flexible, and designed to respond to individual children, rather than by virtue of being ‘Looked After’. Individualising support not only means that children are likely to receive appropriate support, but also not receive support they do not need or that could be detrimental: “all interventions in health, education and social care may do harm as well as good and children’s resilience may be weakened by unnecessary or harmful interventions” (Newman & Blackburn, 2002).

6.2 :Recommended Actions

Within the four principles, the study indicated a range of more specific actions that are likely to support children Looked After in the primary-secondary transition. These have primarily been developed to be implemented in the study authority, but are likely to be applicable to most local authorities in the UK, as many of the ideas are supported by previous research or good practice in the education of children in public care, or transition of other vulnerable groups of children.

It should be noted that the many of the identified approaches already take place within the study authority. These recommendations endorse and encourage their application across the authority more widely. It is also of note that these recommendations are intended to be carried out in addition to, not instead of, current support systems within schools, communities and organisations. It is recognised that schools already have well developed transition systems supporting particular communities of children and families and it is important that these continue.

The recommended actions fall into three categories: those which should be implemented on an individual need basis; those that are likely to be of benefit to all children whether Looked After or not; and systemic and/or local authority actions.

6.2.1 General Actions

The following recommendations arising from the present research are likely to support all children and represent 'best practice' in transition more generally, although the evidence indicates that they may be particularly important for those who are Looked After.

- Children should have opportunities to take part in dedicated transition activities as part of a programme of events. These could include well managed 'buddy' systems, visits to the new school, opportunities to meet and get to know a member of staff and activities at the new school, such as sport events. These should start in Year 5 or early in Year 6. As far as possible activities should be offered to all Year 6, rather than some individuals.
- Children need help to learn to find their way around their new school. This could include developing their map reading skills, advice on how to find their way around (such as going with others) and opportunities to become familiar with the layout of new school.

- Children should be given support to develop organisations skills, such as managing homework demands and being prepared for lessons. This support should ideally start in Year 6 as a familiarisation measure so that children can successfully use these skills on arrival at secondary school.
- A member of secondary school staff should talk to Year 6 children to share information about the school and answer questions. This should be done in a way that does not make the new school sound intimidating.
- Children should be encouraged to attend school regularly.
- Adults should communicate appropriately and sensitively with children about decisions that involve them. Children's views should be sought and considered on all matters that affect them.
- Children should have the opportunity to meet other pupils already attending the secondary school, preferably in the year above who have gone through transition recently. It may be appropriate for children Looked After to meet another child or children who are also Looked After, but this should be done sensitively.
- Children who may benefit could be offered extra visits to the school with their carer or parent at times when pupils are not on site, such as in the evening.

6.2.2 Actions to Support Individual Children

It would be envisaged that actions to support children more generally would meet many of the transition needs of children Looked After. However, the study indicated actions to support transition which are more pertinent to this group. It is likely that on top of good quality more general

transition support, a set of actions may support this group more specifically.

The transition of children Looked After should be planned sensitively with relevant information about the child shared between all stakeholders. These stakeholders should include primary school staff, secondary school staff, the child's carer(s) and the child's Social Worker. Including the child's birth parent (where appropriate and relevant), a LAC support officer, and other relevant professionals, such as an Educational Psychologist is considered good practice.

These stakeholders should meet well before transition, possibly in Year 5, or at the start of Year 6. They should continue to meet as and when deemed necessary, but should include at least one meeting when the child is in Year 7.

There are a number of recommended actions/ points for discussion for these meetings. It may be appropriate to develop a checklist to ensure that they are all covered as follows:

- Information about the child that is likely to be relevant to their education should be shared with discretion. Decisions should be made between stakeholders with reference to local policy guidelines about how the information will be protected and how it will be shared with relevant people who support the child, such as school staff.
- The most appropriate secondary school for the child should be discussed and identified, with all stakeholders' choices being considered. Additional information may be required to make an informed choice. For example, it may be appropriate for a carer to look round different schools and convey their views at a subsequent meeting. The views of the child should be sought.

When considering schools, the importance of peer group influences at school and in the locality should be emphasised. Ideally the child should stay with their friends when moving to a new school, and also have the opportunity get to know children local to where they live, but each case should be considered separately and the merits of different choices weighed up. If moving with friends is not possible, every effort should be made for them to get to know other children from their new school in advance, for example by attending clubs in the local area.

- Transition meetings should include discussion of any possible difficulties that may arise as a result of the transition, such as issues from the child's earlier life being brought back. Efforts to prevent or diminish these problems should be made.
- Carers should have opportunities to become familiar with the chosen secondary school prior to the child enrolling. This should include becoming familiar with at least one member of staff, usually the designated 'LAC' coordinator.
- Carers should have a member of secondary school staff they can contact about their child and ideally a working relationship should be developed. Contact between the carer and the staff member should be made at agreed intervals, to exchange information between home and school, celebrate successes and discuss how the child can continue to be best supported. The carer should also be able to contact the staff member at other times and not just as a result of difficulties that arise.
- Carers should be made aware of any transition work that the child is engaging in.

- The child should feel supported at school by an adult who has relevant information, with whom the child can talk and liaise, and who can act as an advocate. The relationship with the member of staff from secondary school should start prior to transition.
- An adult who has a good relationship with the child should discuss any concerns or worries prior to transition.
- The child should have opportunities to experience success and receive acknowledgement for this both at home and at school. The meetings should consider providing opportunities for children to engage in sport, clubs etc., if they are not already doing so.
- If possible the child should engage in activities with the peer group they will meet in secondary school. For example attending a weekly sports club within the school catchment community.
- Encouraging the child to develop skills relevant to transition should be considered. For example it may be appropriate for some children to have specific support to develop their social skills, organisational skills etc. Previous research also indicates a need to help children develop their social and personal skills (e.g. Evangelou et al., 2008). There may be the expertise within the school or Social Services, to offer this support, but if not, it should be sought from outside agencies, such as Inclusion Services.
- Someone should ensure that the child has the equipment and uniform required for starting secondary school.
- Decisions being made about a child's secondary school over the summer holidays should only happen in the extreme. However, if this does occur, then every effort should be made for them to visit the school and get to know other children who will be going, e.g.

through holiday schemes, community activities. If possible they should also have the opportunity to meet a supportive member of school staff prior to arrival at school.

6.2.3 Overarching Policy and Professional Practice

The following are recommendations to be implemented at a systemic or local authority level relating specifically to children Looked After.

The present research has indicated important issues at an organisational level within Social Services, such as lack of a consistent Social Worker. However recommendations cannot be made at this level, due to lack of knowledge of these particular systems, although the results of this study will be communicated to and discussed with Social Services managers.

- School staff, not just the designated teacher, should receive training to increase their awareness of the needs of children Looked After. EPs, with their knowledge of the issues relating to children Looked After, could be involved in delivering this.
- Shared understanding should be developed about how information about children Looked After is disseminated and protected.
- Secondary schools should know well in advance that a child who is Looked After is to enrol. Children and their carers should know where the child is going to secondary school well in advance so that the transition can be planned for.
- As far as possible, children should not experience additional change around the time of school transition.
- Children who are Looked After should be given priority for school places, regardless of catchment areas (this is likely to be adopted with new Welsh Assembly Government legislation). All of those

who work to support the education of children Looked After should be made aware of local and national systems for allocating school places to this group of children.

6.3 Implications for Professional Role and Wider Professional Context

As well as implications for those who support individual children, and at a local authority level, the study has implications for my own professional role and development, that of other EPs, and the wider professional context through dissemination of results.

6.3.1: My Own Professional Role and Development

The present project has provided a valuable learning opportunity for me as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. Not only has it given the experience of planning, carrying out and writing up a research project, but it has also provided opportunities to learn about, and become familiar with, the systems and challenges associated with supporting children Looked After. I am now more aware of some of the complexities of the systems and organisations associated with this group, linked to legal and ethical guidance and safeguarding.

On a local level I have developed contacts and working relationships with those who support children Looked After, and have come to realise how vital it is to engage in effective multi-agency working. Linked to knowledge and understanding generated in this research, I have gradually developed a role within the authority in supporting children in public care from a psychological perspective, including supporting transitions, not just between primary and secondary school, but between schools and supporting children back into school. I hope to continue in this role, using this knowledge I have gained to implement, evaluate and refine the principles and recommendations arising from this project. I also recognise that many of the principles and recommendations are applicable for other children going through the primary-secondary

transition, and for children in public care going through other transitions, and consider that I am now more confident to practice in these areas too.

6.3.2: Wider Professional Implications

In addition to supporting my professional development, the project has wider implications for Educational Psychologists. As set out in chapter 2, EPs are well placed to work within the systems and contexts that support children Looked After, and as a result should be involved in planning for children's transitions. On a wider level, EPs are well placed to work at a local authority level and multi-agency level to communicate the results of the present study and facilitate the implementation and monitoring of the principles and recommendations.

In addition, schools link EPs, who are likely to be familiar with school staff and systems, could work to ensure that the transition of children Looked After is regarded as a priority, and implement the recommendations from the study, for example:

- Facilitating or contributing to transition planning meetings, both prior to, and following transition.
- Working with school staff, carers, and if appropriate other pupils, to increase awareness of the needs of children Looked After.
- Eliciting children's views on the transition process or supporting school staff to do so.
- Engaging in work to help inform secondary school placement for individual children, taking into account the results of this study such as the importance of community and moving with friends, to try to ensure that the child receives the most appropriate secondary school provision.
- Supporting staff in developing skills in children that are likely to help them manage the demands of secondary school, such as organisational or social skills.

6.3.3 Dissemination

As outlined in chapter 3, the implications of the study will be disseminated to participants and at a local level to those who work with children in public care directly or indirectly. It is anticipated that the results of the study will be disseminated more widely to EPs and other professionals.

6.3.4 Wider Implications

The present study has implications for the transition of children Looked After moving from primary to secondary school and also more widely. It is likely that many of the recommendations could support all children through transition, in particular, those from other vulnerable groups. Many of the implications may also be relevant to supporting children in public care through other transitions in their lives, e.g. when transferring between schools at other times, or transition at age 16 from compulsory education and from care.

6.4 Limitations and Suggested Improvements

One drawback of the research is that it was conducted over a limited period of time. The transition period could be viewed as lasting from Year 5 and into Year 8, to allow time for assimilation, preparation, adjustment, and adaptation associated with significant change. It was considered that children, especially those in the younger cohort who were interviewed after only a term in Year 7, were still experiencing a 'honeymoon' period. Their perceptions of the move might be different if they were to be interviewed at a later time. Kirkpatrick (2004, cited by Tilleczek, 2007) reports that students often feel that the honeymoon is over after the initial adjustment phase to secondary school. Ideally, children could be followed from Year 5 or 6 to Year 8, to gain a greater understanding of the transition over time.

Another possible criticism of the research is that while children did express their views, their input was limited, compared to that of adults. This was partially linked to difficulties gaining access to individual

children. In addition, the methodology may not have been the most effective for encouraging children to express their views, for example limited opportunities for rapport building, so limiting the extent and content of what was said. Alternative methodologies may have elicited additional insights into children's views and perceptions. A variety of techniques can support access to 'hard to reach' groups better than the traditional interview methods used in the present study (see McLeod, 2007). For example if repeating this project I might adopt a more collaborative approach with children and use of peer researchers (see Kellett, 2006), and additional time to get to know children in advance, as discussed in chapter 3.

6.5 Directions for Further Research

As set out in the discussion, the present study supports a range of existing theory and previous findings relating to the education of children Looked After, the primary-secondary transition of children more generally, and different transitions of vulnerable children and young people.

As well as supporting existing literature, the study brings new evidence to an area that has previously received little attention: that of the primary-secondary transition of children who are Looked After. While the evidence is currently limited to the present study, and therefore context related, it does suggest possibilities for further research to support or refute those findings. In particular further research is needed to investigate the following.

- The effect of children Looked After returning to contact with peer groups from previous periods in their lives, as a result of school, or other, transitions.
- Sport, both in and out of school time, was cited as a supportive factor in the present study. It would be interesting to further explore the effects of sport in supporting vulnerable children's transitions.

- The support that local communities can give to children Looked After.
- The effects of transitions on Looked After children's relationships with family and friends, and how these can be nurtured.

Possibilities for future research include a project to implement the principles and recommendations from the present study, and assess their effectiveness. This is a project I hope to continue within the authority.

While the perceptions of those involved in children's transitions are extremely valuable, a direction for future research could be to explore the same topic, but based on other sources of information. During the project it became evident that basing a transition package solely on the perceptions of stakeholders may result in certain elements being neglected, that I would consider important. For example there was very little emphasis on the emotional aspects of transition, which may be because this was not considered a priority by those involved. Basing the study on the views of other sources of information, such as the perception of EPs, or existing good practice in other authorities, may have elicited different results.

Another direction for future research, as suggested by some participants, could be to investigate factors that support young people who are Looked After when moving out of care and compulsory education. A number of stakeholders considered this was a particular time of vulnerability for young people which needed improved support services.

6.6 Concluding Thoughts

The present study has indicated that there are many factors that currently support, or could support, children Looked After through the transition from primary to secondary school. However many of these factors differ according to the needs of individual children and the contexts in which

they live, learn and develop. As a result no single 'transition package' will be relevant to all children. Instead, a holistic approach needs to be tailored to the needs of individual children, together with acknowledgment of the wider range of influences for successful transition.

This is a challenging task, and it is acknowledged that many of the factors that hinder successful transition are those which are linked to the care system, such as children experiencing lack of stability in other areas of life. However, the picture is far from bleak. The study has indicated certain actions and systems likely to support all children, making them suitable to implement on a more general basis. Research suggests that simply giving children some extra support to reduce the multi-factorial difficulties they face may make them more resilient and able to cope with difficulties encountered during transition. This implies that implementing any of the identified support structures is likely to be helpful. In addition, it is evident from the present study, that there is already much good practice to support children Looked After and many adults who care and support this group of children in a professional or personal role. There is also a strong desire to support this group of vulnerable young people even more effectively, as is evident from participants in the present project.

However, while it is true that even small amounts of extra support are likely to make a difference to children Looked After, we should not be complacent with simply doing the minimum. Evidence from the present study indicates there are many changes that could be made, that may further support this group of young people experiencing adversity in their lives. The difficulties and challenges they face should not be underestimated, and optimising support not only during transition, but more widely in terms of their education, care and well-being, is likely to help them to manage these challenges. As set out in chapter 1, this group of young people are more likely than their peers to experience negative life outcomes, not only affecting them as individuals, but also society as a whole. Equipping Looked After young people with the skills they need to

manage the primary-secondary transition, should be a part of a wider package of support to reduce the frequently experienced exclusion, adversity and upheaval in their lives, and optimise their chances of different life trajectories, in which they become happy, healthy, financially independent adults, who are fully included in society.

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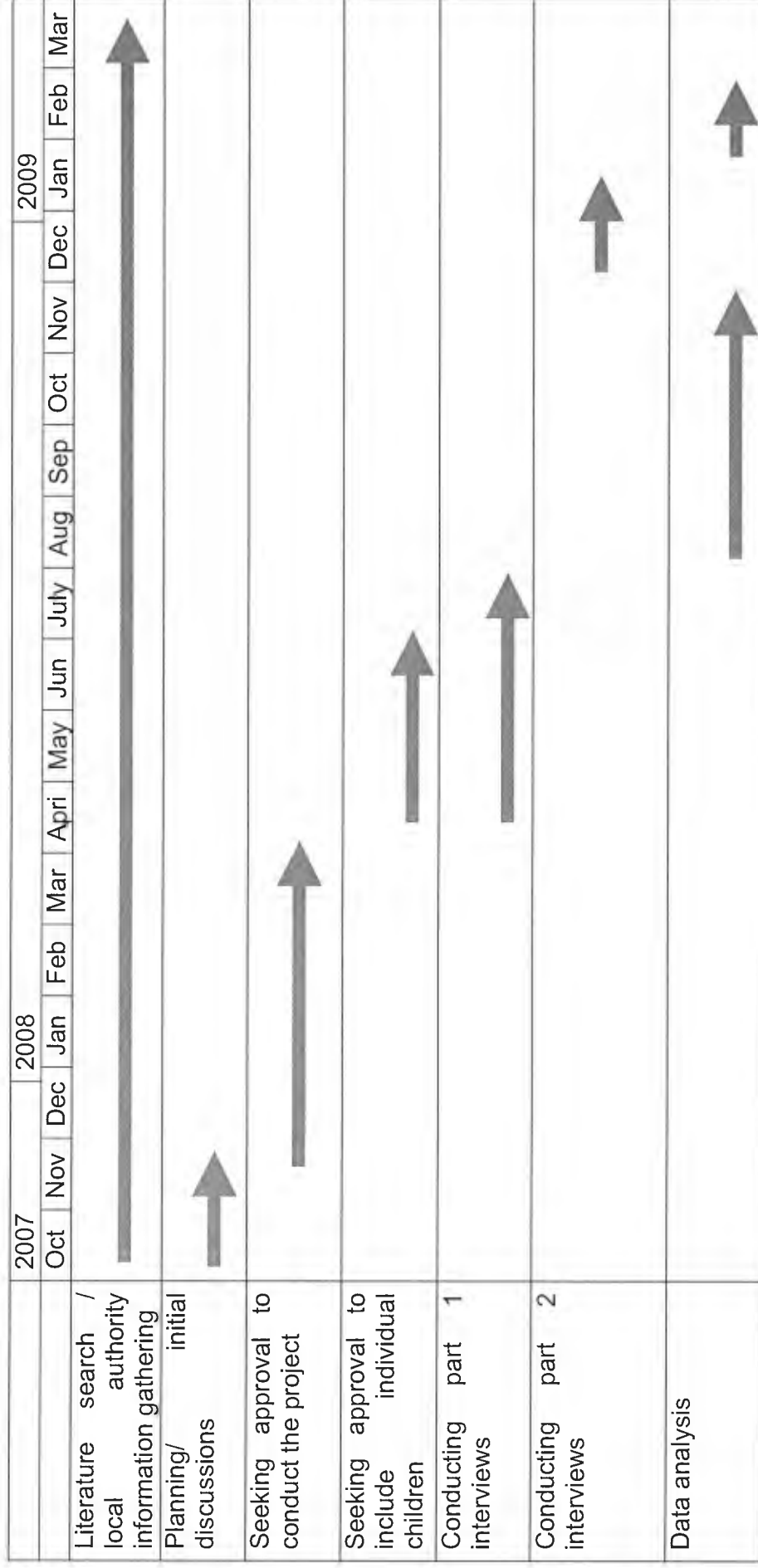
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Appendices

Appendix A: Timescale Flow Chart



Moving to secondary school study: Child interview outline – Y6

Preamble

I'm doing some research about what it's like for children when they are moving from primary to secondary school. I want to find out if there are things that teachers or foster carers or social workers can do to help children when they move schools. I need your ideas because you are in that situation yourself so you are one of the best people to ask. *[Check child has read and understood project leaflet and is happy to continue, ask if they have any questions about the research. Ask to sign simple consent form].*

A. Experiences of education

1. Can I ask you first what school has been like for you so far?
[Encourage child to talk about their educational history e.g. how many schools have you been to, how old were you when you started at this school, what is the best/worst thing about school at the moment]

B. New school placement

2. Do you know which secondary school you are going to go to?
When did you find out? Who told you? *Or*. Do you know when you will find out?

3. Is this the school that you wanted to go to? Why/why not?
Or. Which school do you want to go on to? Why?

4. Has anyone talked to you about moving to secondary school?
Who talked you? Did they ask you which school you would like to go to? Were you given a choice?

5. Have you found out anything about your new school? How? (Prompts – visited school(s), teachers from school came to visit primary school, information from friends).

C. Attitude to new school

6. Are you looking forward to going to secondary school in September?
Why/Why not?

7. Is there anything you are particularly looking forward to? Anything you are a bit worried about?

D. Interventions

8. What kind of things might make moving to secondary school (even) better?

9. Is there anything you can think of that teachers could do to help children like yourself when they move from primary to secondary school?

10. Anything that foster carers could do? How about social workers?

11. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about moving to secondary school?

Thank you very much for talking to me.

[Explain about follow up contact]

Moving to secondary school study: Carer interview outline – Y 6

A. Child's educational experiences

1. How long have you looked after X?

2. What has X's education been like up to now? (e.g. number of schools attended)

3. How does X get on at school? (strengths/weaknesses)

4. Does X get any extra help/support with his/her education? (Details)

5. Do you think X enjoys school at the moment?

6. Do you think he/she is looking forward to going to secondary school?
Why? Why not?

B. New school placement

7. Do you know where X will be going to secondary school? When did you find out? How?

8. Did you have any part in selecting their new school? How did you make this choice?

9. Do you know much about the new school? How did you find this out?

10. Does X know much about the school? Where did he/she get the information from?

C. Interventions

11. Are there any problem that you think X might experience as part of the move to secondary school? Could they be avoided?

12. What could make the experience of moving to secondary school better for children in foster care generally?

13. Is there anything that could help you support X in their move to secondary school?

14. Anything else you'd like to say about the transition to secondary school for children in care?

Thank you very much for talking to me.

[Explain what will happen next with the research and any feedback they will receive].

Moving to secondary school study: primary class teacher interview

A. About the child

1. How long have you taught X?
2. Does he/she attend regularly?
3. What are X's strengths/weaknesses in your view?
4. Do you think X enjoys school at the moment?

B. Systems in place for transition and new school placement

5. Are you aware of any particular systems in place in [REDACTED] for allocating secondary school places to children Looked After?
6. Do you know where X is going to secondary school? When did you find this out? Does X and his/her foster carer know?
7. Are looked after children involved in choosing their secondary school?
8. Are you able to prepare children in your class for the move to secondary school?
9. Is there any particular transition work for children who are looked after? Is X involved in this?

C. Young person's attitude to new school

10. Do you think X knows much about the new school? How did they find this out?
11. Do you think X is looking forward to going to secondary school? Why/why not?
12. Do you think the primary – secondary transition is more difficult for Children Looked After? If so, why?

D. Interventions

13. Do you anticipate any particular difficulties for X during transition? If so, any ideas for how they could they be avoided?

14. Do you have any (other) suggestions for ways in which the move from primary to secondary school could be improved?

15. Anything schools/social workers/foster carers could do? What could make the experience better?

Children's interview outline – Y7

I'm doing some research about what it's like for children living away from their families when they are moving from primary to secondary school. I want to find out if there are things that teachers or foster carers or social workers can do to help children when they move schools. I need your ideas because you have been through that situation yourself so you are one of the best people to ask. *[Check child has read and understood project leaflet and is happy to continue, ask if they have any questions about the research. Ask to sign simple consent form].*

A. Experiences of education

1. Can I ask you first what school has been like for you so far?

[Encourage child to talk about their educational history e.g. how many schools have you been to, what is the best/worst thing about school at the moment]

B. New school placement

2. Is this the school that you wanted to go to? Why/Why not? Or which school did you want to go to? Why?

3. Who decided which secondary school you went to? Prompt - Did anyone talk to you about which secondary school you would like to go to? Who was it and what did they say?

C. Attitude to new school

Think back to when you were in year 6

4. Were there any things you were looking forward to about secondary school?

5. Did you have any worries about moving to secondary school?

D. Interventions

6. Did you get to know anything about your new school before you started there? How? What was done to help you prepare for secondary school?
7. How helpful do you think these activities were in preparing you for secondary school?
8. Did anyone else do anything to help prepare you for secondary school? What did they do? Was it helpful?
9. Can you think of anything else that schools could do that might make the move to secondary school easier for pupils?
10. Some young people living away from their families find the changes difficult when they move from primary to secondary school? Why do you think that might be?

Thank you very much for talking to me.

[Explain about follow up contact]

Carer interview outline – Y 7

A. Child's educational experiences

1. How long have you looked after X?
2. What has X's education been like up to now? (e.g. number of schools attended)
3. How does X get on at school? (strengths/weaknesses)
4. Does X get any extra help/support with his/her education? (Details)
5. Do you think X enjoys school at the moment?
Why? Why not?

B. New school placement

8. How was the decision made about X going to his/her current school? Did you have any part in selecting their new school?
9. Did you know much about the new school before they moved? How did you find this out?
10. How do you think X managed the move from Primary to secondary school?

11. Were they given help to manage the change? In what ways?

12. Was there anything that you think made the transition easier?

13. Was there anything that you think made it more difficult?

C. Interventions

14. What could make the experience of moving to secondary school better for children in foster care generally?

15. Is there anything that could have been done to help you to help this child in making the change from primary to secondary school?

16. Anything else you'd like to say about the transition to secondary school for children in care?

Thank you very much for talking to me.

[Explain what will happen next with the research and any feedback they will receive].

Staff interview outline – secondary school.

A. About the child

1. How much contact do you have with X?

2. Does he/she attend regularly?

3. What are X's strengths/weaknesses in your view?

4. Do you think X enjoys school at the moment?

B. New school placement

4. Are you aware of any particular systems in place in [REDACTED] for allocating secondary school places to children Looked After? When do children Looked After find out their new school?

Are looked after children involved in choosing their secondary school?

C. Transition

5. Are you able to prepare children in year 6 for the move to secondary school?

6. Is there any particular transition work for children who are looked after? Was X involved in this?

7. Do you think the primary – secondary transition is more difficult for Children Looked After? If so, why?

D. Interventions

8. Were there any particular difficulties for X during transition? If so, any ideas for how they could have been avoided?

9. Do you have any (other) suggestions for ways in which the move from primary to secondary school could be improved?

10. Anything schools/social workers/foster carers could do? What could make the experience better?

Thank you very much for talking to me.

[Explain what will happen next with the research and any feedback they will receive].

Appendix C: Ethical Approval Form and Attachment

PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM

Tick one box: ☐ STAFF project ☐ POSTGRADUATE project ☐ UNDERGRADUATE project

Title of project: **The Factors Promoting Resilience in the Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Children Looked After.**

Name of researcher(s): Marnie Walker

Name of supervisor (for student research): XXXXXXXXXX Date: Feb 08

		YES	NO	N/A
1	Will you describe the main experimental procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	Y		
2	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	Y		
3	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	Y		
4	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?			NA
5	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	Y		
6	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	Y (for interview questions)		
7	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	Y		
8	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation (i.e. give them a brief explanation of the study)?	Y		

If you have ticked **No** to any of Q1-8, but have ticked **box A** overleaf, please give an explanation on a separate sheet.
[Note: N/A = not applicable]

		YES	NO	N/A
9	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?		NO	
10	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If Yes , give details on a separate sheet and state what you will tell them to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help).	YES		

If you have ticked **Yes** to 9 or 10 you should normally tick **box B** overleaf; if not, please give a full explanation on a separate sheet.

		YES	NO	N/A
11	Does your project involve work with animals? If yes, please tick box B overleaf.		NO	
12	Do participants fall into any of the following special groups? If they do, please refer to BPS guidelines, and tick box B overleaf.	Schoolchildren (under 18 years of age)	YES	
		People with learning or communication difficulties	Maybe	

	tick box B overleaf. Note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory CRB clearance (or equivalent for overseas students).	Patients		NO	
		People in custody		NO	
		People engaged in illegal activities (e.g. drug-taking)	Maybe		

There is an obligation on the lead researcher to bring to the attention of the Departmental Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by the above checklist.

PLEASE TICK EITHER BOX A OR BOX B BELOW AND **PROVIDE THE DETAILS REQUIRED** IN SUPPORT OF YOUR APPLICATION. THEN SIGN THE FORM.

Please tick

A. I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications to be brought before the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.	
Give a brief description of participants and procedure (methods, tests used etc) in up to 150 words.	
<i>This form (and any attachments) should be signed by the trainee, academic and EP supervisors and then submitted to the Programme office. You will be informed when it has been approved.</i>	

B. I consider that this project may have ethical implications that should be brought before the Departmental Ethics Committee, and/ or it will be carried out with children or other vulnerable populations.	
Please provide all the further information listed below in a separate attachment.	
1. Title of project. 2. Purpose of project and its academic rationale. 3. Brief description of methods and measurements. 4. Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria. 5. Consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing. Please attach intended information and consent forms. 6. A clear but concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them. 7. Estimated start date and duration of project.	
<i>This form (and any attachments) should be signed by the trainee, academic and EP supervisors and then submitted to the Programme office. You will be informed when it has been approved. If there are concerns that this research may not meet BPS ethical guidelines then it should be submitted to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee. If any of the above information is missing, your application will be returned to you.</i>	

I am familiar with the BPS Guidelines for ethical practices in psychological research (and have discussed them with the other researchers involved in the project).

Signed.....Print
Date.....
 (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

We consider that this project has **no** significant ethical implications to be brought before the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

Signed.....Print
Date.....
 (Academic Research Supervisor)

Signed.....Print
Date.....
 (EP Supervisor)

YOU WILL BE ADVISED WHEN ACADEMIC RESEARCH SUPERVISOR AND EP

SUPERVISOR HAVE CONSIDERED THE PROJECT AND HAVE SIGNED TO INDICATE THAT ETHICAL APPROVAL HAS BEEN GRANTED. IF THERE ARE ANY ISSUES RAISED, THE PROJECT WILL BE CONSIDERED BY THE FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

This project has been considered using agreed Departmental procedures and is now approved.

Signed.....Print

Name

.....Date.....

(Chair, Faculty Research Ethics Committee)

The Factors Promoting Resilience in the Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Children Looked After.

Purpose of project and its academic rationale.

The proposed study aims to investigate factors that encourage resilience during primary to secondary school transition; a time of 'risk' for all children, but arguable particularly CLA. Literature suggests that environmental factors can not only encourage resilience in CLA but can also positively impact on the success of school transition for all groups of children. The present study aims to explore what these environmental factors may be, specifically for children looked after during school transition. One could hypothesise that if young people transferring to secondary school encountered fewer risk factors and more resilience factors as part of this transition, they may have a more positive start to their time in secondary school, which may positively effect the possible trajectories of low attendance, inclusion and attainment levels, which CLA are particularly vulnerable to. While the study focus is on the primary to secondary school transition of CLA, the possible implications of the results may be more wide ranging; it is likely that factors that increase resilience in secondary school transition are also factors that would apply to other vulnerable young people. In addition CLA are also likely to change schools more than other children, often due to changes on care placement. It is likely that resilience factors relevant in the primary secondary transition may also apply when pupils transfer between schools.

Brief description of methods and measurements.

The project will be split into two parts. Part one will involve eliciting the views of year 6 children, their teachers and carers, about the forthcoming transition to secondary school and year 7 children, their teachers and carers, about the transition to secondary school that they have recently made. This will be done using semi structured interviews, which I will pilot with each group.

I will then analyse the views of all of the different groups, using grounded theory. On the basis of the results I will design part two of the study.

I also aim to gather quantitative data on the year group, in the form of attendance levels, exclusions, changes of school and, if possible, national curriculum levels. This is to enable me to compare these with levels a year later, following intervention.

Part 2 will involve using the experiences of children, carers and school staff to design an intervention aimed at promoting the resilience of the current cohort of year 6 pupils about to go through transition. I aim to build on current good practice, so that these practices are part of the transition experience for all children looked after across the borough and practice is consistent. I also wish to use the ideas of the groups interviewed to design new interventions if necessary.

I will then carry out the intervention. This is likely to take place during the summer term but depending on the intervention may start in the spring term and continue into the autumn term when children are in year 7.

I will then monitor the effectiveness of the intervention. I will do this by interviewing the children, who will by this time be in year 7, about their experiences and find out what they considered to be positive about the experience and what could have made it better. I will also interview staff and carers. It is likely that the interview questions will be the same as those given to the previous cohort of year 7s.

I also aim to gather quantitative data on the year group around autumn half term, in the form of attendance levels, exclusions, changes of school and if possible national curriculum levels. I will compare these to the levels the group were experiencing in primary school and also to the same cohort, from the previous year.

Participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria.

I aim to ask all Children Looked After in year 6 and 7 involved in transition who are both living in the borough and at school in the borough, to take part in the research. There may be some children in these year groups who are not involved in transition and these pupils will be excluded from the study.

Consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing.

I will seek the permission of children themselves to take part in the study, as well as the permission of their carers, schools and social workers. Please see attached forms.

A clear but concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.

Ethical consideration: Young people feeling that they have to take part. I will aim to communicate clearly, throughout the project that involvement of all parties is optional and only by consent.

Ethical consideration: Young people feeling that their views have not been acted upon. It may be the case that I will not be able to use some of the ideas of the young people involved in the intervention. I hope to make my choice of interventions clear in debriefing sessions. I will also aim to make it clear to

children, the level of intervention that will be possible so that their expectations are realistic.

Ethical consideration: Children feeling upset during interviewing. If it is clear that a child is upset I will pause or stop the interview. I will aim to be sensitive to their needs and respond appropriately for the situation. I will make the child's teachers and foster carers aware that they were upset. I will also notify the EP for the school and my supervisor in the local authority. If necessary I will go in to give a debriefing over and above what other pupils in the project will receive.

7. Estimated start date and duration of project.

Start date: spring term 2008. End date Summer term 2009.

Appendix D: Email Confirming Ethical Approval

Ethics Approval for year 2 project

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@ioe.ac.uk)

Sent: 19 February 2008 18:06:42

To: Walker, Marnie (marniewalker@[REDACTED])

Dear Marnie

I am pleased to inform you that your Research Proposal has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Dept of Psychology and Human Development and that you now have ethical approval.

Your ethics form will be kept on file. Should there be any further queries, these should be addressed to your dissertation supervisor and/ or your tutor.

Best wishes

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Programme Administrator

Doctorate in Professional Educational, Child and Adolescent Psychology

School of Psychology & Human Development

Institute of Education

25 Woburn Square

London WC1H 0AA

Tel:

Fax:

www.ioe.ac.uk

Date

Dear (Social worker)

Research Project on The Process of Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Children in Public Care.

I am an Educational Psychologist in training, employed by [REDACTED] Borough Council. I am currently involved in a research project examining the factors that help 'Children Looked After' make a successful transition from Primary to Secondary school. [REDACTED] Inclusion Services have identified a significant decrease in attendance and attainment levels among children looked after by the local authority, following the move from primary to secondary school. It is hoped that this project will start to address some of the factors contributing to this.

As an Educational Psychologist in training, I will be working on this project with [REDACTED], Senior Educational Psychologist at [REDACTED] Social Inclusion services, and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], based at the Institute of Education, University of London. I will also be working with Looked After Children (LAC) workers [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. The project will be looking specifically at the factors that aid the successful transition from primary to secondary school and creating a programme to support children in public care through this often difficult process.

I hope to gather information about the transition process through interviews with year 7 children, their carers and teachers. I will also be interviewing year 6 children, their carers and school staff, to find out their feelings about embarking on this change.

X is one of the children who will shortly [has recently] moved to secondary school, and I would like to invite him/her and his/her foster carer to take part in the research. Any information obtained will remain anonymous and confidential, but will hopefully contribute to improvements in the transition process for Children Looked After in [REDACTED]. I have enclosed some information about the project, and will ring you in a few days to discuss how best to approach the family. Alternatively, if you have any questions, please feel free to ring me on [REDACTED] or email me on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,

Marnie Walker

Appendix F: Child Letter Part 1

E mail and date at top of page

Dear X,

My name is Marnie and I am very interested in how children and young people think about school and learning.

I am doing research project about the experiences of young people living away from their families, who are moving from primary to secondary school. I am writing to invite you to take part in this project.

I would like to come and talk to you at school to find out your views and ideas about moving to secondary school. The information you give me will be treated very carefully, it won't be shown to anyone else and no names will be included in the final report. If you agree, I would like to tape the interview. No one will hear the tape except me.

If you have any questions about this research project, I would be happy to answer them. You could e mail me and I could send back a reply, or I could come into school to chat to you. If you prefer you could ask (insert name of social worker/ carer/ teacher/support worker) any questions you might have.

Please let (insert name of social worker/ carer/ teacher/support worker) know what you think about taking part in this research.

Many thanks,

Yours sincerely,

Marnie Walker

Research Project on the Process of Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Children in Public Care



Leading education
and social research
Institute of Education
University of London

The process of moving from primary to secondary school can be a difficult time for many children, and it can create particular challenges for children who are 'looked after'. [REDACTED] Inclusion Services have identified a significant decrease in attendance and attainment levels among children looked after, following the move from primary to secondary school. It is hoped that this project will start to address some of the factors contributing to this.

Aims of the research

The main aims of the research are to examine the factors that help children who are 'looked after' to make a successful transition from primary to secondary school, and to design and test out a programme to support such children through this transition.

How the research will be carried out

Part 1: February to April 2008 The first stage will involve eliciting the views of year 6 children, their teachers and carers, about the forthcoming transition to secondary school and year 7 children, their teachers and carers, about the transition to secondary school that they have recently made.

Part 2: April to December 2008 Using the experiences of children, carers and school staff, an intervention will be designed aimed at supporting children through the transition. This will be implemented between the summer term of year 6 and the autumn term of Year 7, depending on the intervention.

Confidentiality

Information obtained during the course of this project will remain anonymous. No individual children, schools, social workers, teachers or foster carers will be identified in the report from this study.

Who is doing the research

The project is being carried out by Marnie Walker, an Educational Psychologist in training employed by [REDACTED] Council. She will be working on this project with [REDACTED] Senior Educational Psychologist at [REDACTED] Inclusion services, and Vivian Hill and Professor June Statham, based at the Institute of Education, University of London.

For further information, please contact Marnie Walker at [REDACTED] Inclusion Services:

Telephone: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Appendix H: Teacher and Carer Letters Part 1

Research Project on the Transition from Primary to Secondary School of Children in Public Care.

Dear (carer)

I am an Educational Psychologist in training, employed by [REDACTED] Borough Council. I am currently involved in a research project looking at ways in which children in care can be helped to manage the changes when moving from Primary to Secondary school. As part of this project I am gaining the views of the children making that transition, school staff and foster carers, such as yourself.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to talk to me as part of this project. Your views would remain anonymous and the discussion should only take about 10 – 20 minutes. It could take place at school, over the telephone, in your home or wherever is convenient for you. I would also like to talk to X about moving to secondary school, and X's teacher at school to get their views.

I have enclosed a leaflet about the research which I would be grateful if you could pass on to X. I hope you will both agree to take part in this project, which aims to improve the support for children in care when they move from primary to secondary school. I will call you in a week or so to hopefully arrange a convenient time to talk to you and (separately) to X. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to ring me on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

Marnie Walker

Dear (Headteacher)

Research Project on The Process of Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Children in Public Care.

I am an Educational Psychologist in training, employed by [REDACTED] Borough Council. I am currently involved in a research project examining the factors that help 'Children Looked After' make a successful transition from Primary to Secondary school. [REDACTED] Inclusion Services have identified a significant decrease in attendance and attainment levels among children looked after by the local authority, following the move from primary to secondary school. It is hoped that this project will start to address some of the factors contributing to this.

As an Educational Psychologist in training, I will be working on this project with [REDACTED], Senior Educational Psychologist at [REDACTED] Inclusion services, and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], based at the Institute of Education, University of London. I will also be working with Looked After Children (LAC) workers [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. The project will be specifically examining the factors that aid the successful transition from primary to secondary school and creating a programme to support children in public care through this often difficult process.

I hope to gather information about the transition process through interviews with Year 7 children who are looked after, their carers and teachers. I will also be interviewing Year 6 looked after children, their carers and school staff, to find out their feelings about embarking on this change. (change round depending on Y6/7). The aim of the project is not to increase teacher's work around transition, but to help develop countywide systems to support children's transfer. The information obtained over the course of this project will be treated as confidential and no children, teachers, carers or schools will be identified in the project report.

The Social Worker of X in your school has agreed for him/her to take part in this research, and I am seeking the permission of X to be interviewed for the project. I would very much appreciate the opportunity to interview X's class teacher about the transition process.

I will telephone you in a week or so, to discuss this further. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to ring me on [REDACTED]

Thank you, in anticipation, for your help,

Yours sincerely,

Marnie Walker

Appendix I: Overview of Child Participants

Name	Year group at start of the study	Gender	Looked After since	Number of placements	Cared for by relatives or foster carers?	Number of schools attended (excluding the current/ potential secondary school)	Interviewed?	Other information
Stuart	6	M	November 2006	2	Foster carers	2	Y	Moved to a secondary school in a neighbouring authority
Jordan	6	M	November 2004	4	Relatives (previous placements foster placements)	1	N (invited but declined)	Has received 2 school exclusions: 21.5 days and 1 day
Chloe	6	F	2004	5	Foster carers	4	N (invited but declined)	Selective mute. Sees mum at weekends.
Rebecca	6	F	December 2001	8	Foster carers	6	N (invited but declined)	Has moved around Wales

Sharon	6		F		September 2007 – May 2008	1		Relatives	1		Y	geographically Ceased to be looked after over the summer
Nicole	6		F		December 2004	5		Foster carers	4		Y	Some time spent out of school but records are unclear
Geraint	7		M		March 2001	1		Relatives	1		Y	Placed with his mum but looked after status
Sandy	7		F		November 2004	2		Foster carers	4		Y	Twins placed together
Lisa	7		F								Y	
Robert	7		M		January 2003	5		Foster carers	5		N	
Simon	7		M		September 1996	6		Foster carers	3	Sept 2004 (records unclear before)	Y	Has lived in France for some placements
						placements plus 1 adoption						
Danielle	7		F		September 2005	1		Foster carers	4		Y	
Sarah	7		F		Unclear when CLA status started but	2	(since	Foster carers	Unclear		Y	

				was adopted between 2001 and 2004 and has had CLA status since then.	2007)					
Kevin	7	M	1999		1	Relatives	1	Y	Has received 7.5 days over school exclusion over 4 periods.	
Cathy	7	F	Sept 2003		1	Foster Carers	3	N		
Jack	7	M	August 1996		1	Relatives	2	N		
Lewis	7	M	August 2003		2	Foster Carers	2	Y		

Appendix J: Child Consent Form

Name.....



I am happy to be part of the 'moving schools' project.



I am not happy to be part of the 'moving schools' project.

Signed.....

Appendix K: Child Thank You Letters

(On handwritten note)

Dear (Y7 child)

I am writing to say a big thank you for talking to me as part of the 'moving schools' project.

What you told me has been very useful and you've given me some good ideas. I am now using the information that you have given me, along with information from other young people and adults, to try to come up with ways to make sure that the move from primary to secondary school goes well for more young people in the future.

If you have any questions about the project, you can still e mail me at [REDACTED]

Many thanks again for all your help!

Marnie Walker

(On handwritten note)

Dear (Y6 child)

I am writing to say a big thank you for talking to me as part of the 'moving schools' project.

What you told me has been very useful and you've given me some good ideas. I am now using the information that you have given me, along with information from other young people and adults, to try to come up with ways to make sure that the move from primary to secondary school goes well for more young people in the future.

I would be very interested in talking to you again, at the end of this term, to find out how you think the move to secondary school went. I will contact you sometime after half term to ask you if you would be happy to talk to me again.

If you have any questions about the project, you can still e mail me at [REDACTED]

Many thanks again for all your help!

Marnie Walker

Appendix L: Carer Thank You Letters

Dear (Y7 carer).

I am writing to thank you for talking to me as part of the research Project on the Transition from Primary to Secondary School of Children in Public Care. I really appreciate the information and ideas that you have given me and the time that you took to do this.

I am now using information you have given me, along with information from other carers, teachers and children themselves, to try to develop the systems in [REDACTED] that support children who are looked after, in their transition from primary to secondary school. This is an ongoing project and I hope to be able to keep you informed about the changes that have been made and the results of these.

If you have any questions or comments about the project, please feel free to contact me by e mail at [REDACTED], ring me on [REDACTED] or write to me at [REDACTED]

Many thanks again for your help with this research

Yours sincerely,

Marnie Walker

Dear (Y6 carer).

I am writing to thank you for talking to me as part of the research Project on the Transition from Primary to Secondary School of Children in Public Care. I really appreciate the information and ideas that you have given me and the time that you took to do this.

I am now using information you have given me, along with information from other carers, teachers and children themselves, to try to develop the systems in [REDACTED] that support children who are looked after, in their transition from primary to secondary school. This is an ongoing project and I hope to be able to keep you informed about the changes that have been made and the results of these.

I would very much appreciate the opportunity to speak to you again at the end of the autumn term to find out how you feel X is getting on at secondary school. I will contact you after half term to find out if you are happy to do this.

If you have any questions or comments about the project, please feel free to contact me by e mail at [REDACTED] ring me on [REDACTED] or write to me at [REDACTED]

Many thanks again for your help with this research

Yours sincerely,

Marnie Walker

Appendix M: Teacher Thank You Letter

Dear teacher

Research Project on The Process of Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Children in Public Care.

I am writing to thank you for talking to me as part of the above research. I really appreciate the information and ideas that you have given me and the time that you took to do this.

I am now using the information you have given me, along with information from other teachers, carers and children themselves, to try to develop the systems in [REDACTED] that support children looked after in their transition from primary to secondary school. This is an ongoing project and I hope to be able to keep you informed about the changes that have been made and the results of these.

If you have any questions or comments about the project, please feel free to contact me by e mail at [REDACTED] ring me on [REDACTED] or write to me at [REDACTED]

Many thanks again for your help with this research

Yours sincerely

Marnie Walker

Appendix N: Social Worker E-mail 2.

Dear X

Research Project on The Process of Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Children in Public Care.

You may remember that I contacted you last year to gain permission to invite XXX to participate in the above project. Thank you for your support with this.

I just wanted to E mail you to let you know that now that XXX has moved to secondary school, I will be inviting him/her and his/her foster carers to talk to me again as part of this project so that I can find out how they feel the move went. As before, any information obtained will remain anonymous and confidential, and will hopefully contribute to improvements in the transition process for Children Looked After in [REDACTED].

If you have any concerns or queries about XXs continuing participation in this project, I would very much appreciate you contacting me before DATE. Please feel free to E-mail me, or ring me on [REDACTED]

Many thanks again for all your help.

Yours sincerely

Marnie Walker

Appendix O: Child Letter for Part 2

[REDACTED]

November 2008

Moving Schools research project

Dear X

You may remember that you talked to me last year, when you were at XXX primary school, as part of a research project about the experiences of young people living away from their parents, who are moving from primary to secondary school. Thank you again for your ideas. The information you have given me has been very helpful.

Now that you have moved to secondary school, I would like to come and talk to you again, to find out how you think the move went. As before, the information you give me will be treated very carefully, it won't be shown to anyone else and no names will be included in the report I write. If you agree, I would like to tape the interview. No one will hear the tape except me.

If you have any questions about this project, I would be happy to answer them. You could e-mail me and I could send back a reply, or I could come into school to chat to you. If you prefer you could ask XXX any questions you might have.

Please let your XXX know what you think about taking part in this research.

Many thanks,

Yours sincerely,

Marnie Walker

Appendix P: Carer Letter for Part 2

Research Project on the Transition from Primary to Secondary School of Children in Public Care.

Dear (carer)

You may remember that you participated in the above project in the spring /summer, by giving your views about XXXs forthcoming move to secondary school. Many thanks again for your input and ideas.

Now that XXXX has moved to secondary school, I would very much welcome the opportunity you talk to you again to find out how you feel the move went. I would be very grateful if you would agree to talk to me once more. As before, your views would remain anonymous and the discussion should only take about 10 – 20 minutes. It could take place at school, over the telephone, in your home or wherever is convenient for you. I would also like to talk to X about the move, and a teacher at X's school who knows him/her well, to get their views.

I will call you in a week or so, to hopefully arrange a convenient time to talk to you and if possible to X. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to ring me on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

Marnie Walker

Appendix Q: Teacher Letter for Part 2

Dear (Headteacher)

Research Project on The Process of Transition from Primary to Secondary School for Children in Public Care.

I am an Educational Psychologist in training, employed by [REDACTED] Borough Council. I am currently involved in a research project examining the factors that help 'Children Looked After' make a successful transition from Primary to Secondary school. [REDACTED] Inclusion Services have identified a significant decrease in attendance and attainment levels among children looked after by the local authority, following the move from primary to secondary school. It is hoped that this project will start to address some of the factors contributing to this.

As an Educational Psychologist in training, I am working on this project with [REDACTED] Senior Educational Psychologist at [REDACTED] Social Inclusion services, and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] based at the Institute of Education, University of London. The project will be specifically examining the factors that aid the successful transition from primary to secondary school and creating a programme to support children in public care through this often difficult process.

Last summer term I gathered information about the transition process through interviews with Year 6 looked after children, their carers and school staff, in order to find out their thoughts and feelings about embarking on this change. X was one of children involved. Now that X has moved to secondary school I hope to interview him/her and his/her carers again. I would also very much appreciate the opportunity to interview the member of teaching staff at school who has been most concerned with XXs transition.

The information obtained over the course of this project will be treated as confidential and no children, teachers, carers or schools will be identified in the project report.

I will telephone you in a week or so, to discuss this further. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to ring me on [REDACTED]

Thank you, in anticipation, for your help,

Yours sincerely,

Marnie Walker

Appendix R: Part 2 Interview Outlines

Moving to secondary school study: Children's interview outline – Y7

I'm doing some research about what it's like for children living away from their families when they are moving from primary to secondary school. I want to find out if there are things that teachers or foster carers or social workers can do to help children when they move schools. I need your ideas because you have been through that situation yourself so you are one of the best people to ask. *[Check child has read and understood project leaflet and is happy to continue, ask if they have any questions about the research. Ask to sign simple consent form].*

Experience of education

Can I ask you first what being at this school has been like for you so far? (What is the best/worst thing about school at the moment? Are there any subjects you like at school? Why? Are there any subjects you don't like? Why?)

Do you get homework? (What do you think about homework? When do you do it? Does anyone help you? Do you think you should get more, less or the same amount of homework?)

New school placement

Is this the school that you wanted to go to? (Why/Why not? Or which school did you want to go to? Why?)

Who decided which secondary school you went to? (Prompt - Did anyone talk to you about which secondary school you would like to go to? Who was it and what did they say?)

People

What are the new teachers and other adults like at your new school? (How do they help you? Is there an adult you could talk to if you had a problem? If so who?)

What are other children like at your new school? (Are there any other children at your new school that you like spending time with? Did you know them at your old school or meet them here?)

The move

Think back to when you were in year 6. Were there any things you were looking forward to about secondary school? (Prompts –

nothing, doing new subjects, making new friends, doing more sports, being in a bigger school, being treated in a more grown up way, learning new things, having new/more teachers)

Did you have any worries about moving to secondary school? (Prompts not knowing anyone in class, getting picked on, doing more subjects, having to do more homework, having more teachers, getting lost. Find out if they were actually things that were problematic/ difficult)

What was the best thing about coming to this school?

Was there anything that you found difficult when you came your new school? (prompts getting lost, making friends, getting used to having lots of teachers, new subjects)

What would make school (even) better at the moment?

How are things different to when you were at primary school? (Is there anything about being at primary school that you wish was still part of your life now?/ Is there anything you wish had stayed the same as when you were in primary school? Is there anything that was part of your life in primary school that you are pleased you have moved away from?/ is there anything that you are pleased is different about moving from primary school.)

Normalisation

Think about the change from primary to secondary school. What things were the same for you as other children? (For example, did you buy the same uniform, or go on the same trip to visit your new school?). conversation around this.

Was there anything that was different of special for your? (For example did you go on any special visits or did you already know some children that other's didn't, or did you have different teachers.) Conversation around this.

Interventions

Did you get to know anything about your new school before you started there? (How? What was done to help you prepare for secondary school? Prompts – visits to secondary schools, teachers from secondary schools coming in to talk to primary schools, induction day at secondary or primary school, talking to secondary school pupils, buddy schemes, information leaflets). **How helpful do you think these activities were in preparing you for secondary school?**

Did anyone in particular help you in your move to secondary school? (Prompts – did anyone do anything to help while you were still at primary school? Over the summer holidays? Did anyone do anything to help you settle in when you came to your new school? Who helped? How?)

Is there anything that you would suggest that might help children in your situation/ living away from their families when they transfer school?

Some young people living away from their families find the changes difficult when they move from primary to secondary school? Why do you think that might be?

Thank you very much for talking to me.
[*Explain about follow up contact*]

Moving to secondary school study: Carer interview outline – Y 7

School – current situation

Do you think X enjoys school at the moment? (Differences from primary school)

How does X get on at school at the moment? (strengths/ weaknesses/ academically/ behaviour wise/ difference from primary school)

Are there any subjects/ activities that X particularly likes at school?

Does X get any extra help/support with his/her education? (Details)

Does X get homework? How do you think X feels about it?

Does X attend school regularly?

Friends/ peers

Do you think that X gets on well with other children at school? (Do you think they find it easy to make friends? Do they have any difficulties with other children at school?)

Does X have particular friends at school? (were they from previous school/ are they new friends? Do they live locally? Does child see them outside of school? Does the child have different friends outside school?)

New school placement

How was the decision made about X going to his/her current school? (Did you have any part in selecting their new school? Is it their local school?)

Did you know much about the new school before they moved? (How did you find this out? Did you have the information you wanted?)

How do you think X managed the move from Primary to secondary school? (What went well? were there any difficulties?)

How did you feel about the move? (before and after)

Do you think X found the move easier or more difficult than other children? (Why/ why not?)

Were they given help to manage the change? (In what ways?)

Was there anything that you think made the transition easier?

Was there anything that you think made it more difficult?

What do you feel your role was in the transition? (Was there anything that you did to help them with the move?)

Who else was involved in managing or helping with the transition? (prompts – social worker, primary/secondary school staff, other professionals etc.)

How were they involved? (Did they work together or separately? If so how did they work together?)

Interventions

Do you think Xs previous life experiences made a difference to how well they coped with the move?

What could make the experience of moving to secondary school better for children in foster care generally?

Do you think anything should be done differently to what is done for other children? (Why?/ Why not?)

Is there anything that could have been done to help you to help this child in making the change from primary to secondary school? (prompts – more information about the school, more meetings, open evening etc. what information do you think carers should have when a child moves schools?)

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the transition to secondary school for children in care?

Thank you very much for talking to me.

[Explain what will happen next with the research and any feedback they will receive].

If difficulties are discussed : Was this an issue at Xs previous school?

If behaviours issues: How does the school respond too this behaviour?

Moving to secondary school study: Secondary Teacher interview outline

About the child

How much contact do you have with X? (What is your relationship with them like?)

Do you think X enjoys school at the moment? (How do they show this?)

Does he/she attend regularly?

What are X's strengths/weaknesses in your view? (Behaviour/academic. If behaviour issues draw out behaviour management – how do you respond to this?)

How do you feel X gets on with other children at school? (Do you think they find it easy to make and keep friends? Do they have any difficulties with other children at school? Did the child come with any friends? To your knowledge, do they have a friend or group of friends in school now?)

Do you think other children know that X is looked after? (How? How do other children respond to this?)

Transition

Why did X come to this particular school? (were they involved in choosing the school? Do you think it's the school they wanted to go to?)

Do you think X knew much about this school before they started? (How?)

Are you able to prepare children in year 6 for the move to secondary school?

Is there any particular transition work for children who are looked after? Was X involved in this?

Do you think X found the move more difficult than other children? (Why?/ why not? Do you think Xs previous life experiences made a difference to how well they coped with the move?)

Do you think the primary – secondary transition is more difficult for Children Looked After more generally? (If so, why?)

Other agencies/ information sharing

Did you have information about X from before he/she came to you? (Who from? How did you get this information? Did you meet X before they arrived here? Do you feel that you had enough information?)

How was X's primary school involved in the transition?

Were social services involved in the transition? (How?)

Was X's carer involved? (How?)

Interventions

Were there any particular difficulties for X during transition? If so, any ideas for how they could have been avoided?

Do you have any (other) suggestions for ways in which the move from primary to secondary school could be improved?

Is there anything schools/social workers/foster carers could do? What could make the experience better?

Thank you very much for talking to me.

[Explain what will happen next with the research and any feedback they will receive].