

AN INCLUSION AS PREVENTION  
TEST OF CHANGE

# JUNIOR PATHFINDER PILOT

January 2023

## Executive Summary

The transition from primary to secondary schools is recognised as a crucial time for children's wellbeing and development. Research has found that psychological support and preparation during this time can alleviate some of the negative effects, particularly for children with additional support needs.

Strong links between parents/carers and schools has been shown to be vital for positive educational outcomes, particularly among more vulnerable children.

Preparing for this transition is standard practice within primary schools; all pupils are supported to prepare for this. However, there is a recognition that, for some children, additional focused work could be beneficial.

The Junior Pathfinder test was designed to be a six-month (amended to twelve-month) pilot programme based within two primary schools. Its aims were to help children feel more confident and prepared prior to the transition to secondary school, and to foster better relationships between families/carers and schools.

Inclusion as Prevention funded the pilot project, and wanted to understand how the Junior Pathfinders worked in each school. As far as possible we wanted to measure what impact that the pilot had. Which measures / approaches were adopted within each school? What worked well? The evaluation made use of children's activity books, postcard surveys, email surveys, reflective diaries maintained by the Junior Pathfinders and evidence of impact in the form of records maintained by the pilot schools and the Junior Pathfinders.

There was limited quantitative data available to the evaluation, and comparisons prior to and post pilot were not appropriate due to the circumstances. However, in spite of this, and the short time frame of the project itself, feedback from those involved was positive. The children receiving input from the Junior Pathfinders were able to articulate and represent their anxieties about leaving primary and attending secondary school in activity books provided for this purpose. Those parents who responded reflected positively on the project's impact for their children. Class teachers and headteachers highlighted the positive impact of the Junior Pathfinders, within both the classroom and the wider school environment. The Junior Pathfinders themselves recorded their work with the children, documenting pupils who achieved 'positive impact measures' during the pilot.

All of this took place at a time where schools were affected by pandemic restrictions. This forced the Junior Pathfinders to adapt the methods they used, and impacted on the evaluation of the pilot

The next step in this evaluation will be a roundtable learning and reflection session, including teachers and other local authority stakeholders. Using this report as a jumping off point we will: focus the discussion on the findings and limitations of the data; explore the different needs and strengths of each school; and look to identify aspects of the pilot programme that could be adopted in the longer term.

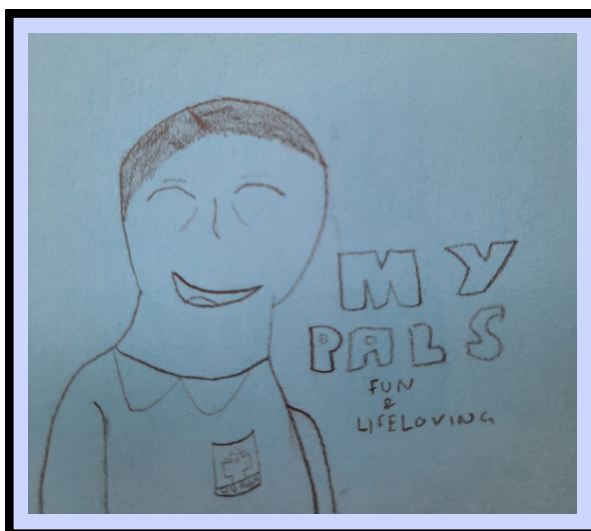
## Introduction

Inclusion as Prevention (IAP) is a five-year initiative funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. IAP is a partnership between South Lanarkshire Council, Action for Children, the Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) and Dartington Service Design Lab.

The focus of IAP is on co-production and collaboration between young people, communities and partners. Our intention is to test and demonstrate how involving young people in service design/delivery can lead to improved outcomes and more effective provision. Young people should have a voice in decisions/systems that affect their lives. We believe that by doing so we can reduce the number of people coming into contact with the police, and the system providing services can change and be more adaptive and responsive.

There are 3 main strands within IAP, which overlap and support one another: engagement, improvement and and evaluation. IAP employs improvement methodology to explore the ways in which services can better meet the needs of children, young people and families. This method, based on the Plan - Do - Study - Act model (PDSA), is useful for working in real life situations. E.g. Identify a need, design a way to respond to this need, test this idea and then examine what happens as a result. This is the first step of the 'test of change'. 'The subsequent stage involves an Adopt-Adapt-Abandon process: the response is either fully adopted, amended to work better, or abandoned entirely, depending on the findings of the test. The test of change described in this report is one of nine which have been, or are being, carried out by Inclusion as Prevention within South Lanarkshire.

A previous Pathfinders programme based in South Lanarkshire had focused on secondary schools. This test of change makes use of its findings, but is amended to focus on supporting children and families through the transition from primary to secondary school. Two Junior Pathfinder roles were created, with each based in one of two primary schools in South Lanarkshire in 2021. This report describes how the Junior Pathfinders operated, who they worked with, and the impact they had in each school.



# Background

## Transition to secondary school

The World Bank Development Report (2018) identifies transition to secondary school as one of the five most important life stage transitions. It has been documented that most children express anxiety and apprehension about multiple aspects of this change. Common concerns range from practical issues such as managing timetables to social anxieties around mixing with older pupils. However, these concerns are usually short lived (Rice et al, 2011). Nonetheless, a significant minority of children experience difficulty in adjusting after transitioning to secondary school. This is evidenced in lower test scores, poor attendance, increased anxiety and disruptive behaviour (Anderson et al, 2000; Galton, Morrison & Pell, 2000). These issues can also translate into longer term challenges, leading individuals to experience lower self-esteem, depression and lower attainment, up to and beyond the age of 18 (West et al, 2008).

Studies have found that positive transitions are more likely when: the child has higher expectations of the transition (Waters et al, 2014); parents are involved in the transition process (Davis et al, 2015); and where there is a close relationship between the child and their parents (Wales et al, 2014). Indeed the family relationship was found to be more important than any other factor in transition (Benner et al, 2017; Waters et al 2014) with this family involvement including school communication and engagement in potential interventions. In addition, children feeling accepted by their peers, and the number of friendships they have, are also considered to be relevant factors in a positive transition. (Kingery et al, 2011; Waters et al, 2014).

NHS Health Scotland produced an evidence review that was focused on transitions into secondary school, and how best to support children with this journey. They found that a 'whole school' approach was effective, and would help to prepare the majority of children, but that children with additional support needs may require a more tailored response. Clear communication between the home and the school was also identified as vital (White, 2020).

Despite many programmes of support that have been delivered within schools to ease these issues with transition, there are very few longitudinal studies that measure how effective they are in reducing longer term concerns. However, one such study conducted by the Scottish Government in 2021 made use of the Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) data. Many of the findings from this 2021 study echo what was already known from other national and international literature, such as the importance of positive family involvement and positive expectations of transition.

## The Senior Pathfinders programme

The Pathfinder initiative in Rutherglen/Cambuslang was established in 2019. following discussions which started in 2018 between Education, Social Work and Corporate Resources.

The focus of the initiative was to promote effective early intervention, and to consider how best to support young people felt to be at risk of being on the ‘edges of care’, who experienced significant barriers to learning, and whose health and wellbeing were at risk. Two unpublished reports capturing the journey and learning of this programme were completed in 2019 and 2020.

The findings from the senior programme and the key recommendations for potential implementation included (but were not limited to):

- That the Pathfinders should be based within schools
- That Pathfinders should be managed by Youth, Family, Community learning (YFCL)
- The importance of family engagement
- The positive benefit of Pathfinders being fluid, responsive and flexible

The idea for the Junior Pathfinder version of this intervention emerged from this senior programme in South Lanarkshire secondary schools. The evaluation of that programme highlighted that some of the concerns identified within the cohort of children emerged at an earlier point in time, and children being supported within that programme might have benefitted from earlier involvement with the Pathfinders service. A consultation with some of the parents whose children took part in the Pathfinders programme echoed these points. We recognised that an earlier intervention and earlier support for children, combined with increased involvement from parents and carers, could have greater impact. This was the impetus for designing the Junior Pathfinder test of change.

Inclusion as Prevention adopted an amended version of the senior programme, agreeing to fund two Junior Pathfinder roles with a focus on the transition to secondary school. The pilot length was initially for six-months (although this was later extended to twelve-months) to test the impact and identify what aspects of the pilot resulted in an improved transition period and if so, why. The Junior Pathfinders were seconded from, and line managed by, the Youth, Family and Community Learning Service in South Lanarkshire.

## The test of change: Junior Pathfinder pilot

### Objectives of the ToC

The Junior Pathfinder pilot worked with young children and their families to encourage greater school involvement; it helped young people with additional support needs, providing one-to-one support and group sessions. It aimed to:

- Identify concerns and needs of children reaching the end point of primary school working with them to increase their confidence
- Improve relationships between the school and parents/carers
- Ameliorate the potential negative impact of the transition for children

This report should be read in conjunction with the initial Junior Pathfinders Summary Report published by Inclusion as Prevention in April 2021 (<https://inclusionasprevention.org.uk/learning/>).

## Ethics

Permission was granted by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee. The Ethics Committee strives to protect the rights, dignity, safety and well-being of all actual and potential participants.

## Methodology - data collected

The table below shows the different methods used to evaluate the pilot. Paper surveys for both children and parents/carers were anonymous and distributed by the Junior Pathfinders and returned in individual envelopes to the researcher. The Activity Booklets were often used by Junior Pathfinders working with children, as a tool to aid discussion and build relationships. They were then returned, completed, to the researcher. The Junior Pathfinders recorded the work they did with the children, recording achievements such as Impact Measures. They were also asked to complete monthly diaries, reflecting on their work and achievements, and any barriers that they experienced.

|                            | Pre                     | Midpoint              | Post  |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Children</b>            | Activity booklets (n=8) |                       | Paper surveys, including a standardised wellbeing survey (n=49) |
| <b>Parents/Carers</b>      | Postcard surveys (n=15) |                       | Paper surveys (n=2)   |
| <b>Head/class teachers</b> |                         | Email surveys (n=3)   | Email surveys (n=3)   |
| <b>Junior Pathfinders</b>  | Self recorded journal   | Self recorded journal | Journals / Impact Measures (n= 2)                               |

## Additional context

### Further IAP work

The Junior Pathfinders from this pilot were also involved in a further IAP project: a system leadership programme of work supported by IAP partners Dartington Service Design Lab. This project supported practitioners in identifying small tests of change. Along with other practitioners from secondary schools and sports education, this group designed a summer programme of activities for children transitioning from primary to secondary schools. There is evident overlap in these different projects, so a summary of this test will be included within this report. Further details will be forthcoming in a process report on the IAP website.

### The impact of pandemic lockdown

The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown had an impact on this test. The Junior Pathfinder test of change was designed to be carried out within schools, many of which were closed to most, if not all, pupils for long periods of time. The Junior Pathfinders were given license to be flexible within their role, responding to the needs of individual schools/pupils. However, lack of face to face access to children and, importantly, their families negatively impacted on what they were able to achieve. Limited face-to-face access was also identified as a barrier by the previous Pathfinder pilot, where it hampered certain areas of work and led to changes in methodology. It is impossible to understate the impact of the pandemic on this test of change. The good work that was carried out is testament to the hard work and perseverance of the Junior Pathfinders and school staff throughout this difficult time.

It should also be noted that Junior Pathfinders took part in a Systems Leadership Training Programme over the final summer of the pilot. During this time they built a different test of change that looked to improve the transition to secondary school by building relationships between pupils who would be moving on to the same school. They succeeded in involving families in the development of this test. This was an opportunity to fill some of that potential gap, and the work they did within that short-term transitions project was beneficial for the children and families involved.

# Findings

## Children's views of school and the school journey

### Use of activity books

Children were provided with 'Junior Pathfinder Journey' activity books near the start of the pilot. The activity books included various sections such as: 'Getting to know me', and 'A family portrait'. They were also asked to describe what they think would make a good Junior Pathfinder. These were distributed by Junior Pathfinder workers who went on to support the children to complete them. If and when consent was given by parents/carers, these activity books were returned to the IAP evaluator; eight completed activity books were returned in total. The sections below show their views and feelings about their current school, moving to secondary school and what they think makes someone a good Pathfinder.

### Feelings about transition

Four girls and four boys, ages ranging from 10 to 12 years old, completed sections of the activity books. When asked to describe how they feel about school, in the main children described feeling happy. However this was often counterbalanced with less positive feelings, such as 'bored' or 'sad'. When asked what, if anything, they would change about school this was often 'less homework', or more fun things 'like slides and swings'.

Not all the children shared their thoughts on leaving their current primary schools. Those that did frequently spoke of mixed feelings, such as 'sad and happy'

When asked to explain why they described their feelings that way the children referred to feeling nervous about the change, both in terms of different expectations e.g. 'homework, other pupils' but also the loss of previous friends and anxiety about meeting new people:

*"Because I don't know what awaits, what will happen after" (Girl, aged 12)*

*"I'm nervous because I don't know what other kids are like and the work I have to do"  
(Girl, aged 11)*

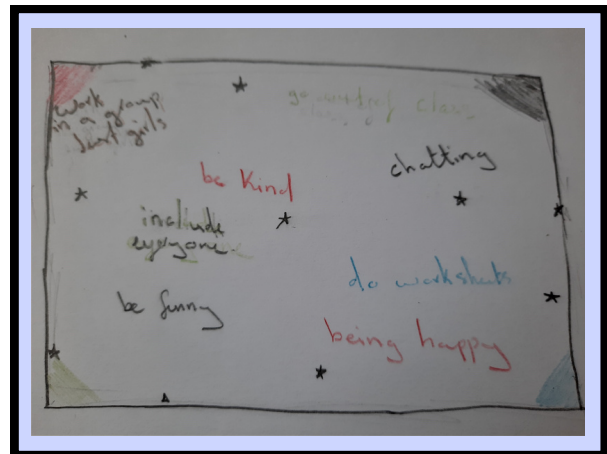
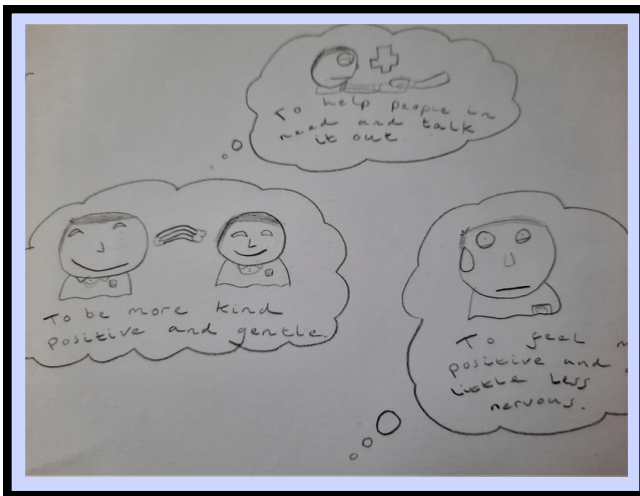
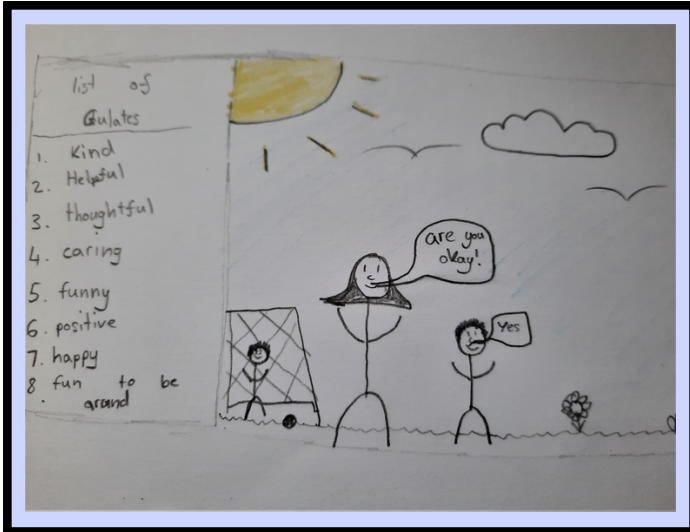
In terms of moving to their respective secondary schools, children who responded described feelings of excitement, and, again, in some cases feelings of nervousness. These nerves related to 'getting lost' and not being in the same class as their friends:

*"Happy but nervous at the same time" (Girl, aged 11)*



## What should a Pathfinder be like?

The children were asked to make a poster featuring the things they thought would make a good Pathfinder and some of these drawings are included below. Where children identified characteristics these tended to include: kindness, helpfulness, being fun and cheerful, being supportive and being easy to talk to..



Both children and parents were provided with 'follow up' surveys at the end of their involvement with Junior Pathfinders. It is worth noting however that some children have continued to be involved beyond the official end of the project.

These one-page 'follow-up' surveys were intended to do two things. In the case of the children it was designed to measure how they feel about school and their community, and made use of a wellbeing measure, the Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale. In the case of parents/carers the survey looked to establish their views on school, the upcoming move to secondary school and their thoughts on the impact of the Junior Pathfinders.

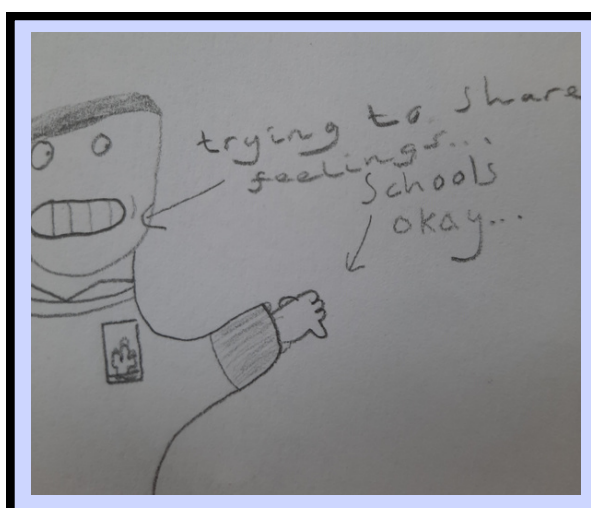
## Feelings about school at follow-up

49 children responded to the follow up survey; 13 stated that they had worked on a one-to-one basis with the Junior Pathfinder; 33 had carried out some work with the Junior Pathfinder as part of a group and 17 said that they had worked with the Junior Pathfinder as part of a class. In some cases there were multiple types of interaction between the Junior Pathfinder and the child. Two of the children also stated that their parent/carer had worked with the Pathfinder.

The children were aged between 9 and 11 with a mean age of 10.49 years. The majority of them were P7, with the remainder P6 and one in P5.

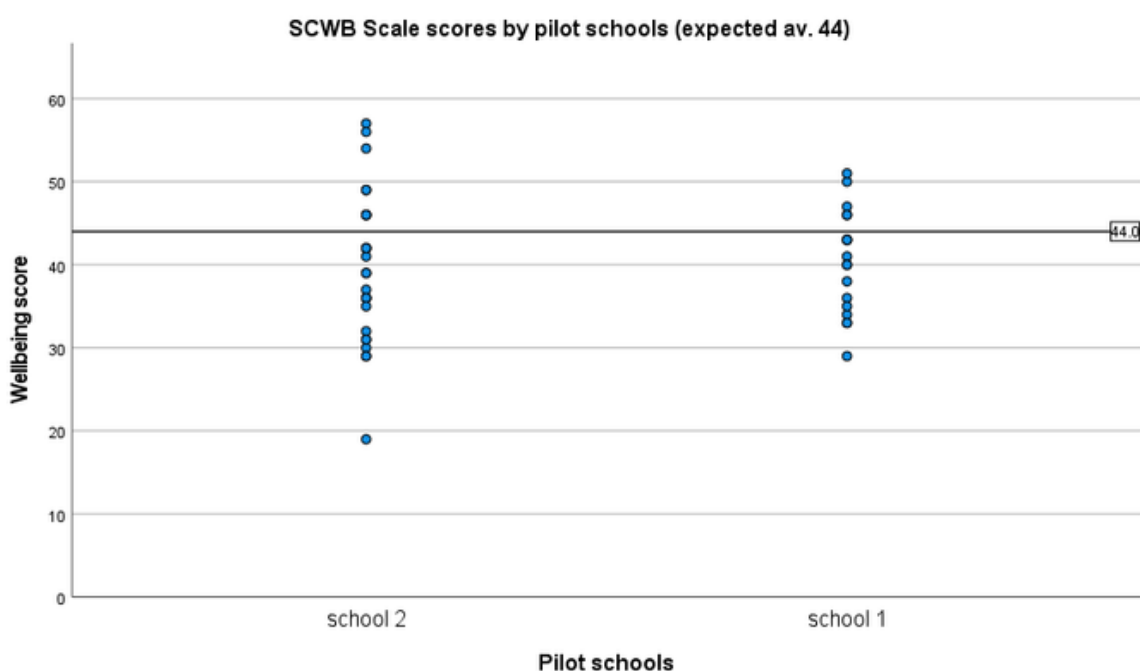
Using the answers 'yes', 'no' or 'sometimes' children were asked to indicate whether they felt school was safe, fun, difficult, hard work or something they enjoyed. The majority (61%) of the children felt school was a safe place, or a safe place sometimes (a further 37%). Just over half of the children found school fun sometimes with a further 30% finding school fun overall. School was reported as difficult and hard by around half of the children and there was a three-way split between children who liked school, liked school sometimes or did not like school (37%). The full responses are recorded in the table below.

|                  | Yes      | Sometimes | No       | Total |
|------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-------|
| <b>Safe</b>      | 28 (61%) | 17        | 1        | 46    |
| <b>Fun</b>       | 14       | 26 (56%)  | 6        | 46    |
| <b>Difficult</b> | 12       | 23 (51%)  | 10       | 45    |
| <b>Hard</b>      | 14       | 24 (52%)  | 8        | 46    |
| <b>Like</b>      | 13       | 16        | 17 (37%) | 46    |



## Measuring wellbeing in the children receiving JP support

The Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale (SCWBS) designed by Stirling Educational Psychology Service is self described as a holistic, positively worded scale measuring emotional and psychological wellbeing for use in children aged 8 to 15 years old. The scale was included in the second survey distributed to children who had engaged with the Junior Pathfinders. The scale is primarily used to measure and assess changes in wellbeing. However, using it on one occasion only, as in this context, provides a single snapshot of the wellbeing of those children who completed the surveys. The Wellbeing Scale has been used across multiple studies and its mean or average score is 44 from a total of 60; 50% of children will score between 39 and 48. Within the sample who completed this test as part of their follow up survey, the children attending school 1 measured between 29 and 51 and school 2 measured between 19 and 57. These scores are mapped onto the graph below.



This measure indicates that, as a snapshot indication, there is a broad range of wellbeing scores in both of the schools, particularly school 2 where one of the children's wellbeing scores was recorded as low as 19 and another as high as 57.

We then examined the type/extent of JP involvement: wellbeing ranged from 38 to 54 for those children who received one-to-one support. This was higher, on average, than those who received group work or class based support; these relatively higher scores may be due to the intensive work they completed with the JP in preparation for the transition. It is important to note however that for 5 of the 14 children receiving one-to-one support there was no wellbeing score recorded, as this set of questions was not fully completed by the respondents. This missing data might therefore be skewing the average measure of wellbeing amongst those children.

## Parent's views of school

15 parents/carers completed initial surveys and these responses showed varying views of the school and their relationship with it. 5 parents said they 'agreed very strongly' to feeling they were a part of the school community, while 7 more 'agreed' that they felt part of the school community. 3 parents indicated that they did not feel part of the school's community. All of the parents reported that they knew who they could approach within the school if they needed advice or support. However, 3 reported that they did not think the school was a place they could approach. In addition 4 parents/carers did not feel that the school understood their circumstances.

All of those parents who responded to the survey felt that the school was supporting their child's transition to secondary school (7 agreed with this statement very strongly). When asked in what way they would like the Junior Pathfinder in the school to support them few parents identified a particular need either for themselves or their child. However, some of the comments were:

*“Would like them to be honest about how high school is, the way work changes and the pressure you might feel” (Parent/carer)*

*“Help to support kids that find it hard to keep up with work in class (slow learners)” (Parent/carer)*

*“Ensuring as smooth a transition as possible to secondary school. I want my child to feel confident about the move” (Parent/carer)*

## Parents reflections on the Junior Pathfinder pilot

This follow up survey was intended to explore their views on school, the upcoming move to secondary school and the Junior Pathfinder impact more directly. As a result of the low number of responses from parents (2, with children attending the same school) detailed analysis would not be appropriate. However, in both responses received the parents expressed that they were happy with the support they or their child received from their time with Junior Pathfinders and they expressed satisfaction with the current relationship they have with the primary school. In one case the parent felt that their child's attendance had improved as a result.

## Who the Junior Pathfinders worked with and how this changed over time

The Junior Pathfinder role was always intended to be fluid and responsive to the specific needs identified within the school in which they were located. As a result the Pathfinders were free to allocate some of their time working in a more general way with larger numbers of pupils while also working with children on a one-to-one basis where the child had been identified as having additional needs by their teacher.

Neither of the Junior Pathfinders limited their work to only the class year that would be transitioning to secondary school next year; they worked across a range of year groups, focusing on different skills and topics.

## JP reflections and learning

Although not every month was included by both Junior Pathfinders in their monthly reflective journals, the following themes were identified as important to the roles.

### **Being within the school but not part of the school**

It is clear that the more fluid and responsive approach to both individual pupils, combined with more group work and class-wide work was seen as a positive to the schools involved throughout the pilot. However, for at least one of the Junior Pathfinders, after a few months they felt there was a need to clarify their role to the children; they felt that being seen as less 'school affiliated' would help in building relationships with some of the children. They were concerned that being seen as perhaps just another teacher was a potential barrier for some children.

*'On reflection being in the class so much may have been leading the children to see me as part of the teaching staff and even worse, me thinking of them primarily as pupils' (Junior Pathfinder)*

### **Lockdown and school holidays**

One Junior Pathfinder reflected that their attempts to be seen as separate to other teachers was initially hard to create. It was felt this was complicated by lockdown restrictions where both teachers and the Junior Pathfinders had limited access to groups of children, and those they could work with would be limited to that small group or 'bubble'. In addition, the Junior Pathfinders were restricted to working on school premises rather than being more flexible and able to move freely between school and the community. Being limited to working within school premises with only limited children also reduced their ability to continue working with children during school holiday time.

### **Links to parents and the wider community**

The restrictions in face-to-face meetings due to pandemic-mitigating lockdown rules meant that for a large period of time Junior Pathfinders couldn't meet with families in the way they had hoped. The Junior Pathfinders engaged with groups of parents/carers using Zoom or MS Teams; however this was very different to the kind of engagement work they had hoped to do, which involved bringing families together, and creating links between them and their schools.

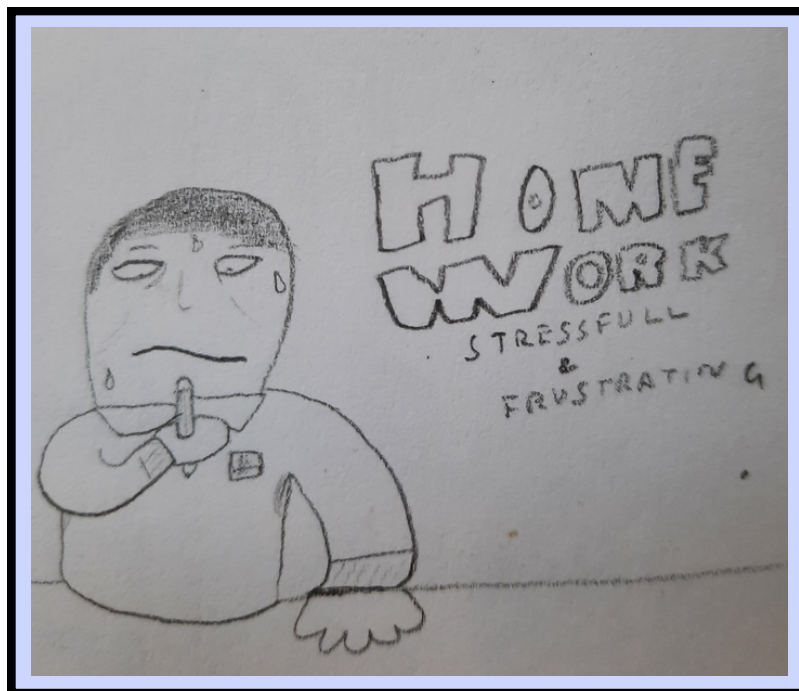
One Junior Pathfinder discussed having phone contact with the mum of one of the children being supported on a one-to-one basis, but the pandemic restrictions clearly negatively impacted this element of the pilot.

*'With ongoing restrictions, the engagement with parents and carers has been low. Therefore, has impacted on the opportunities that would have normally been on offer to parents to engage and participate in' (Junior Pathfinder)*

### **Communication and clarity of roles**

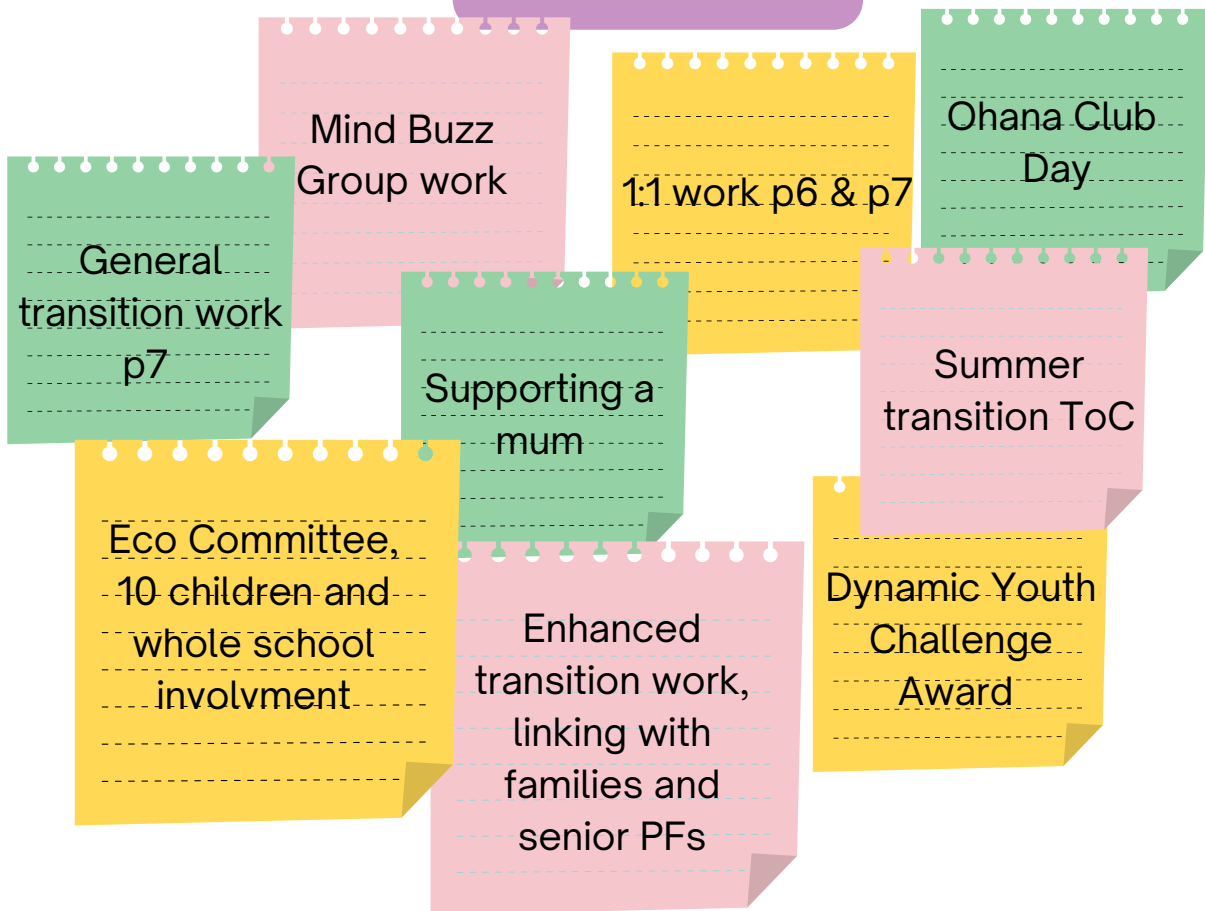
The use of masks is an area that one Junior Pathfinder felt was a barrier to communicating and building relationships with the children. This was particularly an issue at the start of the pilot. There were also a few issues with a Junior Pathfinder feeling that they hadn't been informed of things that might have been helpful to them within their role. One example was when they told about something at the last minute, and therefore felt they were not able to prepare adequately. Again however, this was only an issue near the start of the pilot.

*'I had imagined inclusion as prevention as building social activities, groups events around my targeted children [...] I now think part of my inclusion is about right and inclusion in decisions around you' (Junior Pathfinder)*

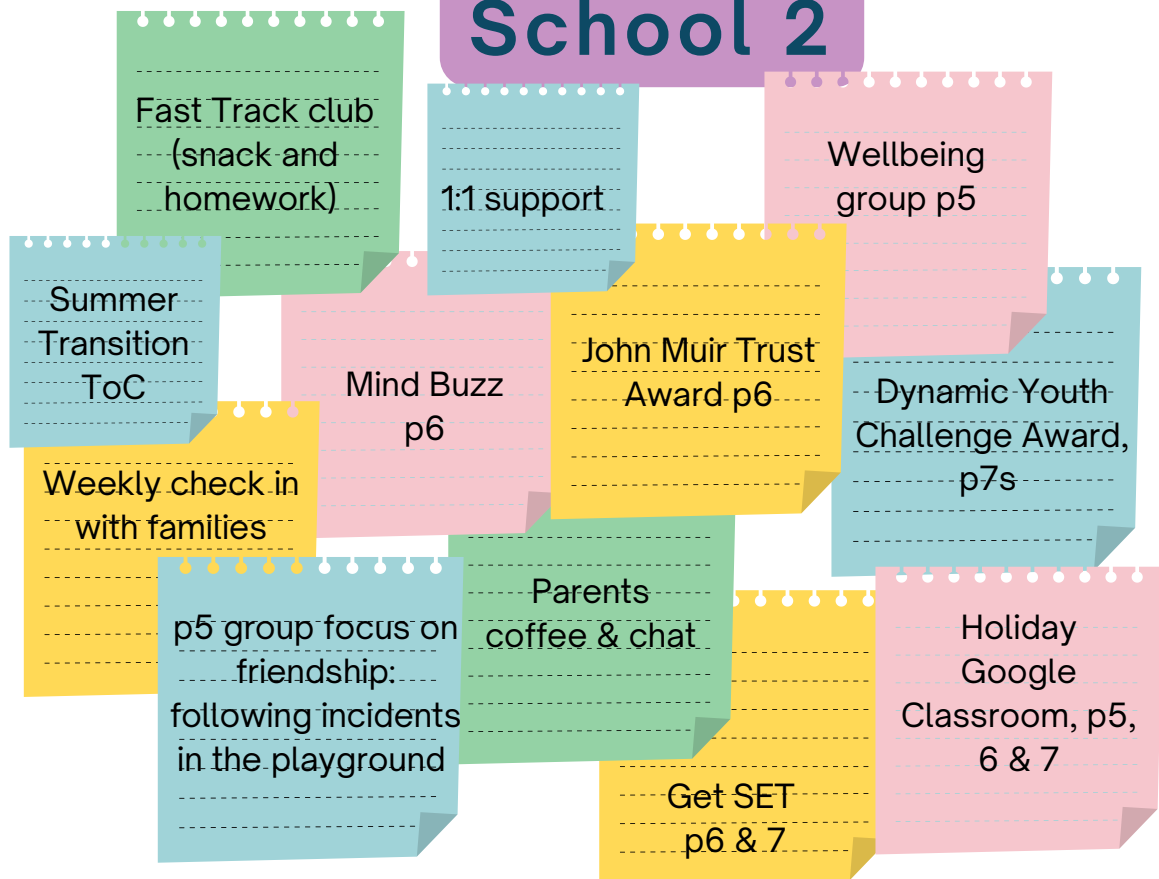


The following page shows the various ways each Junior Pathfinder worked within their primary school. The graphic shows that the Junior Pathfinder for each school worked in class groups, smaller groups and on a one-to-one basis, as well as reaching out to families where they could. In one school there is a record of the Junior Pathfinder responding to an issue that took place in the playground by creating a session on friendship.

# School 1



# School 2



## How the Junior Pathfinders measured impact

The Pathfinders documented some of their work with the children through evidencing impact measures. These impact measures were provided in summary version and are described below.

### Impact Measures

#### **School One:**

For every child (n=65) the Junior Pathfinder from school one worked with there was an achievement of at least one impact measure.

These varied from 'Learners have improved confidence and self-esteem, which 54 children achieved, to 'learners have improved their physical health and wellbeing', which was achieved by 53 children. 'Learners have reduced their risk-related behaviour' was worked on with two children, both of whom achieved this measure.

These impact measures of achievement were supported with one-to-one sessions with some children and group work with others.

#### **School Two:**

Within School Two the Junior Pathfinder engaged with 43 participants from Jan 21 to Dec 21. Again this took the form of group work or one-to-one support. As with School One the Junior Pathfinder recorded each child achieving one or more impact measure (although they did not specify the numbers achieving each impact measure).

The impact measures recorded as being achieved by the children are listed below.

- Learners have improved confidence and self-esteem
- Learners have improved their social skills
- Learners have reduced risk-related behaviour
- Learners have improved their mental health and wellbeing
- Learners have gained a positive experience through regular attendance



## Teachers mid-point feedback

Two class teachers and a Headteacher provided feedback at around the midpoint of the pilot project, which was in June 2021. It is important to note that at this point there were still restrictions in mixing with others due to the Covid-19 pandemic and this was articulated as an obstacle by each of the respondents. The teachers, however, described that in the early months of the pilot time was taken by the Junior Pathfinder workers to build relationships with the children.

*“[JP worker] has built positive relationships and has ensured that all activities are pupil led to help engage all of the children” (Class teacher)*

This time spent building relationships was felt to be positive with teachers reporting that the children were responding well and keen to participate in activities

*“They have been able to discuss worries with [JP worker] and find out about his role when they get into S1” (Class teacher)*

*“The work and support that [JP worker] has been able to offer so far given the current pandemic has been invaluable” (Headteacher)*

Although one of the aims was to support those P7 children who were preparing to transition to secondary school, the Junior Pathfinder role was also able to offer support to other children. This was highlighted by one Headteacher:

*“My plan was for Pathfinders to support our P7's transition and to support any pupils who were disengaged in the learning to re-engage” (Headteacher)*

When asked if the Junior Pathfinder pilot had had an impact at this stage one said: “To date the Pathfinders Project has had an impact on some pupils”, going on to say “One or two pupils are more prepared for High School given the support offered from Pathfinders”.

As previously highlighted, the impact of Covid-19 on schools was vast and this was acknowledged at this half-way point by a headteacher who said:

*“Due to the current pandemic, it has been difficult to measure the impact of this project as access to parents/pupils at home was not possible. Hopefully, this will change when the schools return in August” (Headteacher)*

## Teachers reflections at the end of the pilot

Two headteachers and a class teacher provided feedback at the end of the pilot, reflecting on their experience of the Junior Pathfinder pilot in their classrooms. These surveys asked both for the teachers' views on the pilot overall but also to identify any evidence of positive impact resulting from the Junior Pathfinders work with the children and families.

## Impact on children's behaviour

In one of the schools two of the children were receiving one-to-one support from the Junior Pathfinder; the Headteacher of that school reported that for one of those children there had been a reduction in the number of concern reports made. The Headteacher acknowledged the support that the Junior Pathfinder had provided in modelling positive behaviours and teaching group skills; these encouraged the child to manage social situations better. The Junior Pathfinder was able to provide support during key times in the day when the child would struggle to maintain appropriate behaviour.

One Headteacher described how a child in their school improved significantly, and is now much more settled in school, as a result of time spent with the Junior Pathfinder. The Junior Pathfinder was able to meet with the child at the start of every day; employing creative methods based on the child's interests the Junior Pathfinder was able to build a meaningful relationship. The Headteacher felt that this way of working had improved the child's engagement with knock-on benefits for their formal literacy and numeracy targets.

## Impact on children's engagement/attendance

The Leuven scale is a 5 point scale that is used often within schools to measure a child's emotional wellbeing and involvement. One Headteacher described that, from the results of the use of this scale (and other methods, such as behaviour trackers) they could see that engagement had increased for those children working with Junior Pathfinders..

In one school a great deal of work was done on a one-on-one basis with two children. In both of these children the Headteacher reported an increase in their school attendance record, saying that they both responded well to the Junior Pathfinder, in terms of the support provided and the activities arranged.

One class teacher reported that there had been increased attendance for those children who needed additional help with transition. This same teacher also reported increased levels of engagement in the class when the Junior Pathfinder brought in activities.

## Impact on the whole class and school

The fluidity of the Junior Pathfinder role in being able to work individually and with small and larger class groups was seen very positively by class teachers and head teachers.

*“Children have had the opportunity to engage in small group sessions and 1 to 1s whilst working towards initiatives that they would not normally have the opportunity to do, due to staffing and expertise” (Headteacher)*

*“being based in the school allowed us to have a flexible approach to supporting individual children and groups and adapt the programme to suit the needs of the pupils as and when required. Also, we were able to provide immediate intervention when it was required” (Headteacher)*

*"The P7 Mind Buzz programme being delivered by [the Junior Pathfinder] has supported pupils within this group to improve their focus and concentration as well as improve their level of engagement both in the group sessions and within their class environment. [The Junior Pathfinder] has adapted this programme to suit learners' needs and interests and has presented this programme in a child-friendly manner" (Headteacher)*

One Headteacher when asked what they had gained from having a Junior Pathfinder based in their school said:

*"Time spent with our most vulnerable pupils in P6 and P7. Opportunities for children to achieve in a small group or individual setting tailored to their needs - progress and achievement of pupils" (Headteacher)*

*"The support from Junior Pathfinders this session has continued to support a positive impact across our school community, through the individualised and group work provided as well as enabling the school to access further supports to improve outcomes for learners" (Headteacher)*

*"The support provided by [The Junior Pathfinder] has been invaluable this session. He is very much part of our school team and although he primarily supports pupils within our upper school, he also gets involved in whole school events across all stages of the school" (Headteacher)*

*"[The Junior Pathfinder] has involved himself in the Eco Committee which has allowed him to get to know some younger kids and get himself involved in what is going on in the community" (Class teacher)*

## Impact on transition

Although the children who were in the primary 7 class had now transitioned at the point at which the pilot ended, one Headteacher said that in conversations with colleagues in the secondary school now working with those pupils "most pupils have settled well". Other comments made about the impact the Junior Pathfinder had on the primary 7 class who moved to secondary school were:

*"I think having [the JP] in the class this last year has been beneficial to both me and the children. He has worked so well with some children who need that extra bit of support for going up to High School and has been striving to work on developing the children's positive attitude for going up to High School" (Class teacher)*

*With regard to preparing for transitioning to the secondary school one class teacher stated: “[The Junior Pathfinder] has been great in discussing with the children how to deal with their worries about going to High School” (Class teacher)*

### Impact on family

One Headteacher felt that relationships between the school and parents had improved in this time as a result of “opportunities for parental involvement in projects, such as, family cooking session” although another head teacher did acknowledge that this part of the transition work had suffered due to the pandemic and being unable to facilitate home visits to parents and carers. This headteacher did feel there was some slight improvement in their communication with parents; the Junior Pathfinder attended parents meetings where appropriate to support this communication.

### What did the Junior Pathfinder bring?

The teachers were asked what might have been different in their class/school had the pilot not been running and there has not been a Junior Pathfinder based within their school and one Headteacher responded:

*“I would have been reaching out to our allocated youth and community workers to ask how they could support pupils at [this school]” (Headteacher)*

## Additional system leadership work with Dartington Service Design Lab

During the course of the Junior Pathfinder pilot both of the Junior Pathfinders were involved in a Systems Leadership Training programme that was facilitated by IAP. This programme took place over an 8 month period and involved bringing together practitioners with an interest in school transitions to create a test of change.

Within the programme there were three tests of change; the Junior Pathfinders were involved in one that focused on P7 transitions. In an echo of what they were already doing with the Junior Pathfinder pilot this group hoped to reduce anxieties and worries around moving to high school; their aim was to facilitate the development of relationships with other young people and to develop a four-part summer programme for children transitioning into high school. The intended outcome was increased confidence around transition, and this was to be measured via survey.

Parents were also invited to be involved in these activity sessions, with the intention that the summer programme could provide an opportunity for parents to meet one another and share the experience of supporting children in this transition.

This piece of work is described more fully within the forthcoming IAP publication: *Process Evaluation of Systems Leadership Training*, written by Dartington Service Design Lab. The feedback from all parents involved in the summer transitions programme was positive and parents played a large role in mid-programme recruitment, helping to bolster the number of students in attendance. The express purpose of the programme was to support young people in making friends and feeling comfortable as they transition from primary school to secondary school and based on the early feedback from students involved the group was successful in these aims.

## Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic was an unforeseen situation that, as described, can't be underestimated in terms of its impact on both this test of change and the experience of schooling more broadly for children, parents and school staff throughout that time.

Head and class teachers reflected that the fluidity of the Junior Pathfinder role in this test of change was helpful. Schools were in the process of reshaping their provision to provide ongoing education for the children of keyworkers and children that were identified as vulnerable; Junior Pathfinders were able to provide additional capacity to schools already experiencing stress as a result of lockdown protocols.

Even during an uninterrupted period of schooling 6 months is still a very short timescale for a pilot (especially a pilot with a significant focus on building relationships). Time spent on developing relationships during that initial period leaves very little time for focused work. As a result, the pilot was extended for a further 6 months. However, school provision continued to be disrupted for the remainder of the pilot - far from ideal circumstances for measuring impact. However, this report provides as full a description as possible of the work achieved with children and how the Junior Pathfinders supported the pilot primary schools during a very difficult period of time. It also highlights from the Junior Pathfinder's point of view some of the aspects they felt worked well and where there was additional learning from barriers or obstacles.

Feedback from head and schoolteachers was positive in relation to the Junior Pathfinders and what they brought to the schools and to individual children. One class teacher highlighted increased engagement within the class for those receiving additional support and also increased attendance in class. This building in of broad inclusion from one-to-one support, small group working and class activities, reflects the Inclusion as Prevention ethos, that young people are not singled out as being at-risk, rather all young people are offered engaging and fulfilling activities that can mitigate future adversities.

Feedback was extremely limited from parents but again was positive. The impact on the children measured by the Junior Pathfinders was also positive in that the children engaged with them and made positive strides in terms of increased confidence, self-esteem, increased social skills, and where relevant, reduced risk-related behaviours.

At the end of the pilot, it was recognised by the Junior Pathfinders that due to the relationships built up between some children and the Pathfinders on a one-to-one basis it would not be appropriate to 'walk away' from them without a gradual stepping away process. As a result of this recognition Youth, Family, Community Learning made the decision to continue with this type of supportive work on a reduced capacity basis with some children beyond the life of the project, until that work reached a natural end.

## Learning from the IAP test of change process

Reflecting on the Junior Pathfinder as a test of change within IAP there are a few aspects to acknowledge. This was one of the first tests of change adopted by the project and in comparison with some of the later tests it is more on par with a traditional short term pilot project rather than being designed and shaped by the individuals (parents and children) who received support from it.

The timing of the pilot ended up being problematic as lockdown rules restricted the potential for many of the aims of the pilot to be realised. The pandemic also impacted the evaluation aspect of the pilot, resulting in little quantitative data being available to bolster our understanding of short-term impact with this cohort of children.

It is hoped that the next stage of evaluation, a roundtable of stakeholders and decision makers in South Lanarkshire, will enable further exploration of the issues facing primary schools. This discussion should also enable decisions to be taken regarding any aspects of the Junior Pathfinder pilot that could be adopted or amended as part of either a wider strategy or individualised school approach.

### Reflection and potential discussion points for 'Thinking ahead roundtable'

What did the Junior Pathfinders end up actually doing? A lot of their capacity was taken up with supporting particular children one to one and maintaining them within the school if not the classroom. This is valuable and important work but **what would schools have done to respond to the needs of the children if there had not been a Pathfinder available to focus time on these children?**

As a result of lockdown over the Covid-19 pandemic the usual measures of immediate impact (e.g. school attendance, school engagement) were not available. The database capturing types of concern report have also undergone recent changes, meaning that going forward these will be easier to track but at the time are not available. **Are these measures the best forms of capturing short-term impact?**

In terms of long-term impact in examining interventions of this sort there are limitations in measuring things 'that did not happen' and also in correlating this lack of 'behaviour' to the intervention. It can be tempting to make the argument that 'something is better than nothing' but that would be inaccurate and unhelpful 1. Because schools and class teachers do address lack of engagement and support transition to secondary school as a matter of course and 2. To justify the cost of a Junior Pathfinder it needs to be clear that they are providing something new and valuable that is not being provided within schools currently. **So what would be helpful and meaningful when considering longer-term impact?**

## References

- Anderson, L.W., Jacobs, J., Schramm, S., & Splittgerber, F. (2000). School transitions: beginning of the end or a new beginning? *International Journal of Education*, 33, 325-339.
- Benner, A. D. & Graham, S. (2009) The transition to high school as a developmental process amongst multi-ethnic urban youth. *Child Development*.
- Davis, J. M., Ravenscroft, J. & Bizas, N. (2015) Transition, inclusion and partnership: Child-, parent- and professional-led approaches in a European research project. *Child Care in Practice*.
- Galton, M., Morrison, I., & Pell. (2000). Transfer and transition in English schools: reviewing the evidence. *International Journal of Education*, 33, 341-363.
- Gillon, F. (2020) <https://inclusionasprevention.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Junior-Pathfinders-Summary.pdf>
- Jindal-Snape, D. & Dianne Cantali, D. (2019) A four-stage longitudinal study exploring pupils' experiences, preparation and support systems during primary–secondary school transitions
- Kingery, J. N., Erdley, C. A. & Marshall, K. C. (2011) Peer acceptance and friendship as predictors of early adolescents' adjustment across the middle school transition. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly- Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 57(3), 215-243.
- Neal, S; Rice, F; Ng-Knight, T; Riglin, L; Frederickson, N; (2016) Exploring the longitudinal association between interventions to support the transition to secondary school and child anxiety. *Journal of Adolescence* , 50 pp. 31-43
- Rice, F., Frederickson, N., Shelton, K., McManus, C., Riglin, L. & Ng-Knight, T. Identifying factors that predict successful and difficult transitions to secondary school (STARS) UCL, Cardiff University
- Rice, F., Frederickson, N., & Seymour, J. (2011). Assessing pupil concerns about transition to secondary school. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81, 244-263.
- World Bank. 2018. *World Development Report 2018 : Learning to Realize Education's Promise*. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank.
- Waters, S.K., Lester, L. & Cross, D. (2014b) How does support from peers compare with support from adults as students transition to secondary school? *Journal of Adolescent Health*
- West, P., Sweeting, H., & Young, R. (2008). Transition matters: pupil's expectations of the primary-secondary school transition in the West of Scotland and consequences for well-being and attainment. *Research Papers in Education*, 1-29.
- White, J. Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing at transition from primary to secondary school: Evidence review Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland; 2020