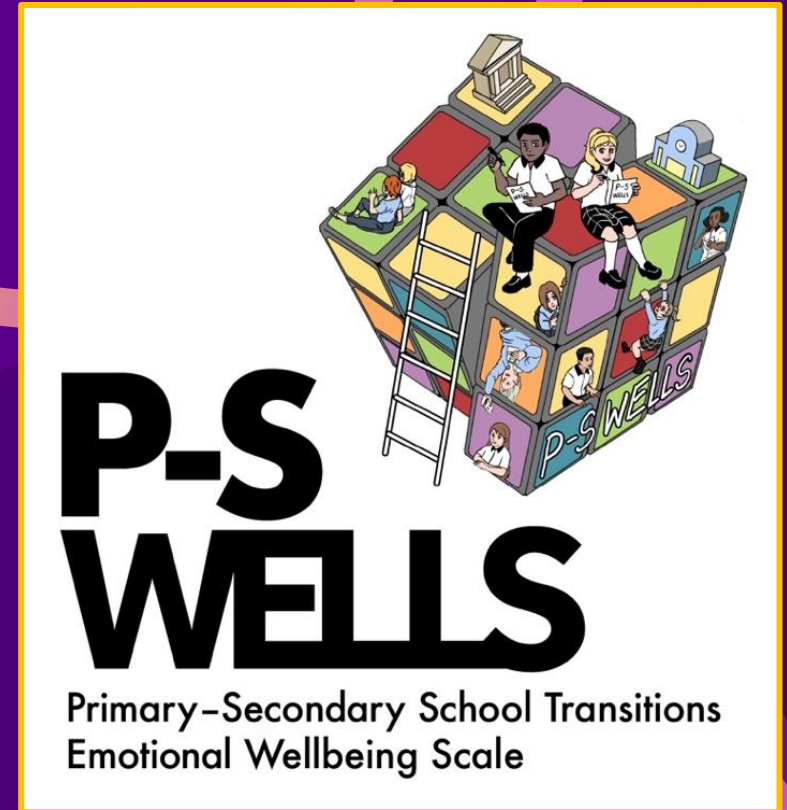


SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OVER PRIMARY-SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITIONS: BUILDING AN EVIDENCE BASE TO INFORM DECISION-MAKING

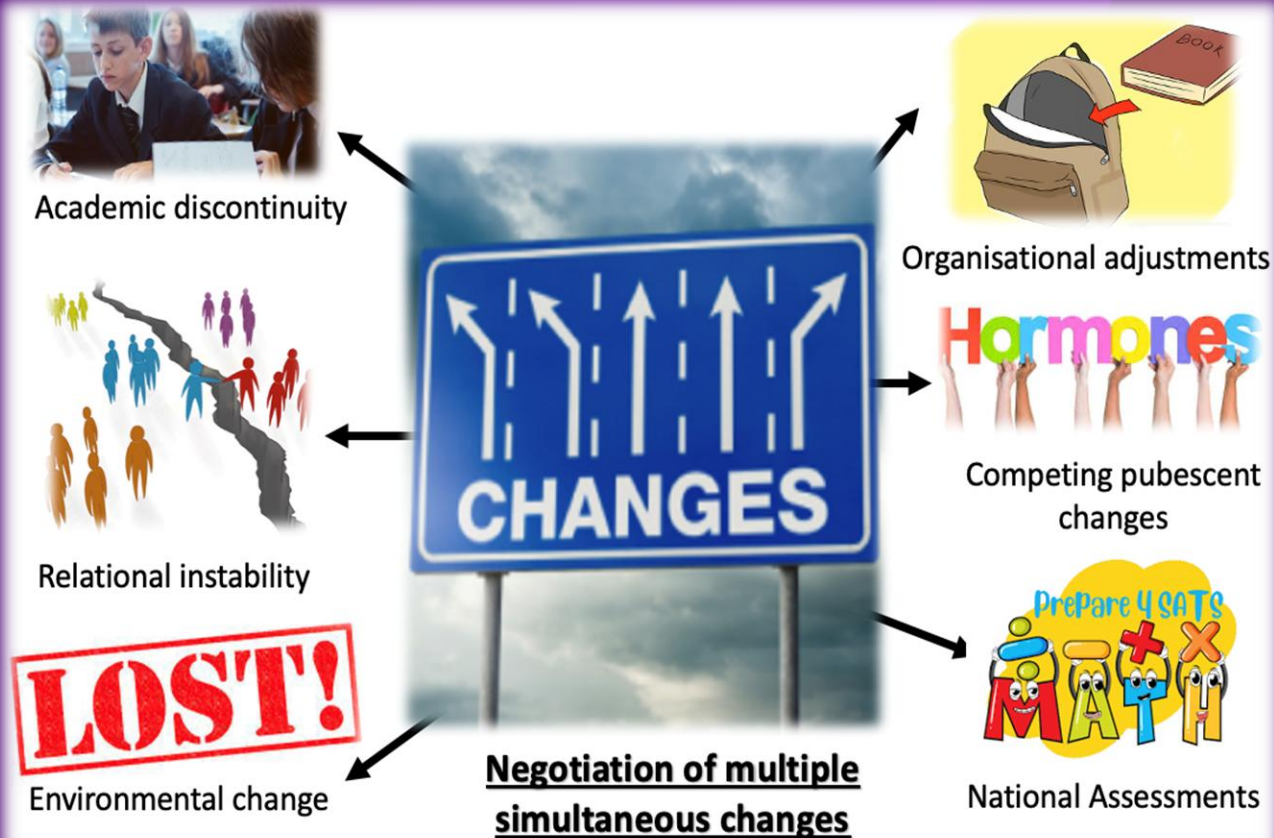
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BACKGROUND



The transition from primary school to secondary school is a critical period for children, where they negotiate simultaneous changes or 'transitions' across multiple domains and contexts, which are ongoing, dynamic, and multi-dimensional (*Jindal-Snape, 2023*)

Up to two-thirds of children report feelings of stress and anxiety two years prior to the 'move' to secondary school (*Bagnall et al., 2024*) which can continue two years into secondary school (*Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019*), especially if children do not receive timely support (*Bagnall et al., 2021*).

Poor experiences of primary-secondary school transitions are associated with poor educational attainment, attendance, social adjustment and mental health, especially for more disadvantaged groups (*Donaldson et al., 2025; Harris & Nowland, 2021; Moore et al., 2020; West et al., 2010*).

Thus, it is paramount that best practice guidance is developed and disseminated.

Research Programme

1. Monitoring children's emotional wellbeing over primary-secondary school transition, through the design and validation of the *Primary-Secondary School Transitions Emotional Wellbeing Scale* (#P-S WELLS)
2. Design, implementation and evaluation of the *Talking about School Transition 5-7* (#TaST 5-7) curriculum
3. Development of a National Primary-Secondary School Transition strategy



Monitoring children's emotional wellbeing over primary-secondary school transition, through the design and validation of the *Primary-Secondary School Transitions Emotional Wellbeing Scale (#P-S WELLS)*

There is need to take a preventative early-intervention approach during this time, by examining longitudinal changes in children's emotional wellbeing, through termly monitoring, to understand:



Which aspects of primary-secondary school transition children are experiencing emotional difficulties with

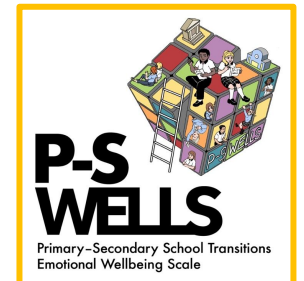


Who might be particularly vulnerable during primary-secondary school transitions

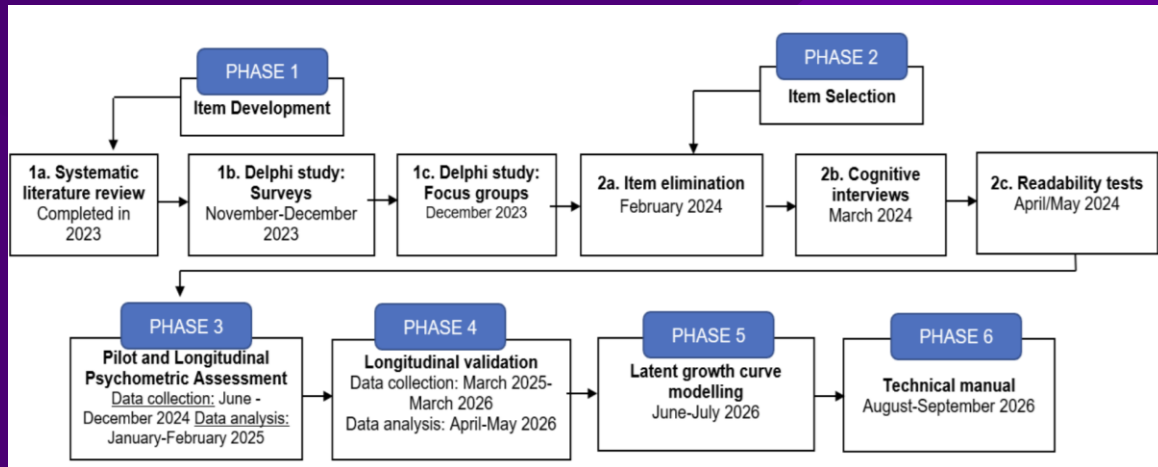


What universal and targeted support could be useful and **when**

To do this, we have designed, piloted and are now validating the ***Primary-Secondary school transitions Emotional Wellbeing Scale (#P-S WELLS)*** which is an easy-to-use scale that measures children's emotional wellbeing across the social, academic, personal and environmental aspects of primary-secondary school transition. ***#P-S WELLS*** is novel in its approach (i.e., asking children about their feelings towards the changes they are negotiating in context), and in its design and operationalisation (e.g. through careful phrasing of items and longitudinal psychometric assessment and validation)



What is unique about #P-S WELLS?



✓ approach (i.e. asks children about their feelings towards the changes they are negotiating in context) *(Bagnall et al., 2024)*

✓ longitudinal design and operationalisation *(Beatson et al., 2023; Symonds et al., 2023)*

✓ ability to overcome poor psychometric properties shown in measures to date *(Bagnall & Jindal-Snape, 2023)*

✓ ability to demonstrate a vital shift in the paradigm of examining emotional wellbeing in the context of primary-secondary school transitions *(Bagnall et al., 2025)*

- **Bagnall, C. L., & Jindal-Snape, D. (2023).** Child Self-Report Measures of Primary-Secondary Transition Experiences and Emotional Wellbeing: An International Systematic Literature Review. <https://doi.org/10.5334/ijelt.35>
- **Bagnall, C.L., Jindal-Snape, D., Panayiotou, M., Qualter, P. Banwell, E., Mason, C. (2025).** Emotional wellbeing in the context of primary-secondary school transitions: a concept analysis. [10.1007/s10648-025-09990-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-025-09990-6)

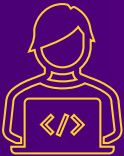
Impact and reach

#P-S WELLS has been implemented in 176 schools, capturing the views of 8948 children across 23 Local Authorities in England and Scotland; following the same children across Year 5, 6 and 7.

We have produced bespoke analyses and reports for each school and Local Authority using their #P-S WELLS data, including personalised changes they can make to benefit their pupils' emotional wellbeing over primary-secondary school transitions, improving practice:



"We have seen a much calmer response from our SEND/vulnerable children with regards to the subject of Transition, through the #P-S WELLS project. Any mention of High School or the transition itself is handled with a more positive approach from the children. Just knowing the children have that wider, targeted support there gives the children a reassuring aspect to Y7 transition as a whole. Additional tracking of their progress only aids in supporting their mental wellbeing." (Y6 Teacher, Doncaster)



"#P-S WELLS has been embedded into the Local Authority Transition handbook, the Children and Young People Partnership Plan, Health action strategy and the data will be used to help early identification for those students that will benefit from additional transition support" (Rochdale CYPP)

National Reach: Our approach to supporting children's emotional wellbeing, through the #P-S WELLS project has been recognised by the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing, at the 2025 party conferences, and we are now working with the DfE to disseminate #P-S WELLS nationally via the DfE RISE platform.

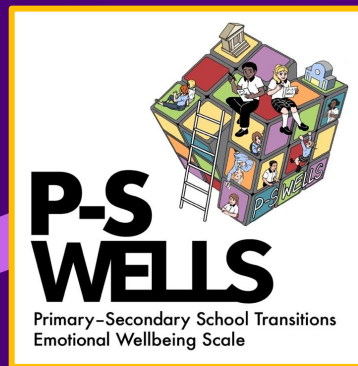
International Reach: #P-S WELLS is also being adapted and rolled out in Australia & New Zealand



Next steps



Final round of data collection which will involve children completing #P-S WELLS in June and July 2026 in Year 6, followed up into September 2026, December 2026 and March 2027 in Year 7. Survey completion time will take approximately 15 minutes and is completed in class. Please sign-up your school by scanning the QR code





What does participating in #P-S WELLS involve for educators?

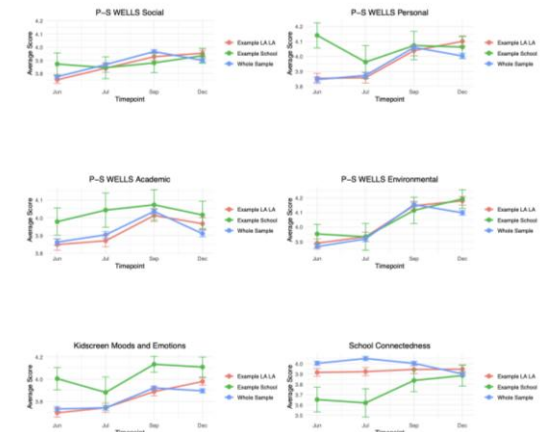
- Schools will sign up via our [project website](#); send out opt-out parent consent forms and sign a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Manchester to share pupil socio-demographic data (e.g. UPN, sex, FSM status) via a secure link (we use ZendTo encrypted software). The University of Manchester #P-S WELLS team then create a unique password for each pupil to enable anonymous longitudinal follow-up of children over time. Using the passwords, schools facilitate Year 6 pupils in completing an online 15-minute survey at three time points in Year 6 (April, June & July) and three time points in Year 7 (September, December & March).
- Following participation, each school and Local Authority receives a personalised school report, which includes rigorous and accessible data, and robust individual strategies on how to improve their pupils' adjustment over primary-secondary school transition: *#P-S WELLS has advanced our ability to understand our pupils' emotional responses to their transition in greater detail, enabling us to tailor our plans for pupils with greater effectiveness. This has led to teachers being better prepared to support pupils, who ultimately will have a more positive and successful transition.* (Staffordshire Local Authority)
- These reports also provide a shared language across feeder primary and secondary schools, supporting collaboration and progression: *"Our partnership with #P-S WELLS has enabled us to understand more systematically the challenges our children face at transition in both primary and secondary school. These partnerships have opened up multi-agency conversations about approaches to transition across Liverpool"* (Liverpool Local Authority)

Changes over time - comparing your school with your LA, and the whole sample

The below figures show how your school compared to the rest of your Local Authority, and the whole sample.

The figures below show how pupils' responses to items within the four domains of primary-secondary school transitions within #P-S WELLS changed over time. Higher scores are indicative of a MORE positive wellbeing response to the domains.

Below these are the findings of the "moods and emotions" subscale of the KIDSCREEN-52, which looks at mental health symptoms, and a measure of school connectedness (higher scores are indicative of a MORE positive wellbeing response for both)



As **Page 4** shows, scores across all four domains of #P-S WELLS scores are shown to steadily increase over the last two months of primary school, then dramatically increase in the first month of secondary school, and then decrease three months later, across the #P-S WELLS sample. This can be explained in line with the temporary 'honeymoon transition period' pupils may experience during initial primary-secondary school transitions, where transitions anxieties are shown to be temporarily reduced during the first term of secondary school as pupils perceive their new secondary school environment through rose-coloured glasses, and then increase again in the following term (Hargreaves, 1984).

To support pupils during this time, it is important that primary schools develop pupils' awareness, knowledge and ability to cope with the multiple changes experienced over primary-secondary school transitions, by practicing skills, asking questions and discussing their feelings in a safe space. This can help pupils feel prepared, but not overwhelmed by their next chapter, which has been shown within qualitative research to be a fine balancing act (Bagnall et al., 2020). Secondary schools can help children over the first two terms of secondary school by taking a gradual and progressive approach that nurtures pupils' confidence, fosters a sense of belonging, and allows time for socio-emotional and academic adjustment. Providing consistent pastoral support, clear communication, and opportunities for peer connection can ease anxieties and promote resilience, helping to establish positive attitudes toward their new school environment (Bagnall et al., 2024). This is especially important considering the increase in mental health symptoms, and decline in school connectedness, that is shown on the bottom two figures of **Page 4** across the #P-S WELLS sample.

To this end, we offer the following recommendations:

- Making stress more manageable by creating...
 - Gradual change over time, and avoiding too many changes at the same time
 - Opportunities for discussions in a safe environment about excitement and concerns related to starting secondary school. This could be done by creating hypothetical discussions using fictional character/s, and/or practicing relevant skills
- Developing self-compassion by...
 - Teaching of self-compassion in the curriculum/classroom discussions; using compassionate pedagogy
 - Teachers and other adults role-modelling self-compassion
 - Developing growth mindset through everyday classroom practices
- Developing positive peer relationships and networks by...
 - Developing active and empathetic listening
 - Using pedagogical approaches through, for instance, problem based learning and small group-based learning activities/assessment
 - Prioritising relationship-building over academic aspects, especially at the start of secondary school



What does participating in #P-S WELLS mean for research and policy?

To date there are no consistent, UK-wide performance indicators or datasets which have specifically monitored children's wellbeing over primary-secondary school transitions regularly and consistently over time. Adopting #P-S WELLS as a feasible measurement strategy, would provide strategic oversight of primary-secondary school transition at the national level. This is crucial in identifying the trajectory of variability in outcomes during this time, to inform targeted universal intervention efforts and early identification of children who may need additional support; formalising accountability and ensuring provision is well-resourced and embedded in school routines.

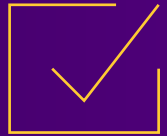
For policy: With approximately 750,000 pupils starting secondary school annually and two thirds likely to experience some degree of difficulty, the case for a coordinated, efficient approach to knowledge-sharing is compelling. #P-S WELLS provide a ready-made tool designed for scalability at minimal cost (e.g. it is free-of-charge and teacher-delivered within timetabled PSHE hours). At a time when the DfE is investing significantly in inclusion (£1.6bn Inclusive Mainstream Fund), attendance (RISE Hubs), and SEND reform (£1.8bn Experts at Hand), our programme offers a complementary evidence base that can help maximise the return on those investments.

For research: All #P-S WELLS pupil data is linked to administrative and health data provided by National Pupil Database (NPD), which enables longitudinal outcome tracking, e.g. the impact of primary-secondary school transition adjustment on attendance trajectories and attainment beyond the trial period. This provides the means to model unique learning profiles and design responsive universal and targeted intervention.

Next steps



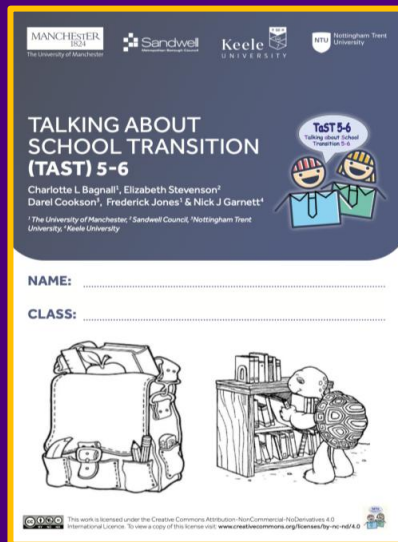
Longitudinal statistical modelling to examine the trajectory of change and variability in children's emotional wellbeing over primary-secondary school transitions.



Disseminate a technical manual which will include the #P-S WELLS instrument, scoring manual and instructions to enable schools and Local Authorities to embed our research meaningfully into their practice. This will hopefully be disseminated via the DfE RISE platform to support transition across England.



Support data-informed graduated care & continuity of support aligning with the DfE (2026) White Paper ambition for data-informed, graduated support, e.g. to encourage school collaboration; support continuity of pastoral and wellbeing information sharing; and responsive, continuous support across primary-secondary school transition



Attendance: we are monitoring children's attendance trajectories over primary-secondary school transitions, through #P-S WELLS to support early identification of disengagement risk, with a focus on more disadvantaged groups. We are also exploring children's and parent/carer perspectives of EBSNA risk to understand and improve transitions experiences.

- Directly complements the DfE's existing attendance data infrastructure – Wonde and the attendance reports identify *who* is not attending, #P-S WELLS adds the critical *why*, *before* non-attendance patterns become established
- Began working with the DfE school attendance team on what we can do to jointly support the sector.

Design, implementation and evaluation of the *Talking about School Transition 5-7* (#TaST 5-7) curriculum

Primary-secondary school transitions presents a critical entrance point for early-intervention support that promotes children's emotional wellbeing, which is recognised by key stakeholders (Bagnall et al., 2020) and within educational policy (DfE, 2023)

However, our international systematic literature review identified key limitations in existing interventions including:

1. lack of emotional wellbeing foci;
2. reach (e.g. lack of early-intervention contiguous programmes, spanning 3 school years);
3. sustainability (e.g. few interventions consider ecological fit and social validity, by neglecting stakeholder involvement);
4. rigorous evaluation methods (Beatson et al., 2023).

To overcome these gaps we have co-developed with practitioners, conducted feasibility testing and are currently piloting, a universal, skills-based intervention, called **#Talking about School Transitions (#TaST 5-7)**.

- **#TaST 5-7** takes an early-intervention approach, through developmentally sequenced lessons delivered across the last two years of primary school (Year 5 and 6) and first year of secondary school (Year 7).
- Focus is placed on supporting children's emotional wellbeing, through a skills-based curriculum, which gradually develops children's awareness, knowledge and ability to cope with the multiple changes they will experience over primary-secondary school transition, through scaffolding socio-emotional skills and coping efficacy.
- The curriculum is informed by theory, research, educational practice and significant stakeholder consultation.



Talking about School Transition 5-7

PRIMARY SCHOOL YEAR 5 & 6 LESSONS TIMETABLE

Session Theme	Session Date	Brief description
Lesson 1 Asking for help	Year 5 April	This session will help pupils develop the skill of asking for help when it is needed, especially from people (adults and children) that they don't know or trust yet.
Lesson 2 Identifying independence	Year 5 May	Helping pupils recognise the times they are/know how to be independent. This independence looks very different between primary and secondary school.
Lesson 3 Progression vs. Loss	Year 5 June	This session will help pupils to start thinking about the transition to secondary school as a progression, by balancing feelings of loss towards leaving primary school with anticipation for the new experiences they will encounter at secondary school.
Lesson 4 Choices/Decisions	Year 5 July	This session will support pupils in identifying when and how they make their own decisions and scaffolding skills to continue doing this in primary and secondary school.
Lesson 5 Expectations (theirs)	Year 6 September	This session will look at pupil's expectations of secondary school, managing those expectations and dispelling the myths!
Lesson 6 Coping with change	Year 6 October	This session will help pupils to develop coping strategies to overcome challenges they may experience over primary-secondary school transition.
Lesson 7 Navigating	Year 6 November	This session will look at navigating around new surroundings, including understanding timetables and systems.
Lesson 8 Structure/life changes	Year 6 December	This session will look at how life at secondary school will be different, including new routines before and after school.
Lesson 9 Making friends	Year 6 January	This session focuses on how to make and manage friendships. This is a skill that we have discovered over the years that many children have never really had to do.
Lesson 10 Parent/Carer support	Year 6 February	This session focuses on encouraging open communication and discussion channels between parents/carers and children in the lead up to primary-secondary school transition.
Lesson 11 Teacher support	Year 6 March	This session helps pupils to recognise that they can and should still access support from teachers when they move to secondary school, although the way they do this may change, reflective of changes within the secondary school environment.
Lesson 12 WoW	Year 6 April	This is a reflective session working with pupils to remind them of what they have learnt over the TaST 5-6 programme, whether their thoughts, feelings and emotions around starting secondary school have changed and how to continue managing this.
Lesson 13 Cross-aged teaching	Year 6 June	This session helps pupils to consolidate their learning from the TaST 5-6 lessons by using cross-aged teaching techniques.

#TaST 5-7 a universal, skills-based intervention, delivered by teachers in schools, informed by theory, research and significant stakeholder consultation.

SECONDARY SCHOOL YEAR 7 LESSONS TIMETABLE

Lesson Theme	Brief description	Page No
September suggested activities		
Asking for help	This activity will help pupils to develop the confidence in asking for help in secondary school, by scaffolding pupils' confidence in speaking to adults and children that they don't know or trust yet.	6
Navigating	This activity encourages pupils to get to know, and navigate between, places in their new secondary school building, by learning how to read a school map.	7
Getting to know other pupils	This activity supports pupils in getting to know other pupils in their class, to support friendship building and peer support.	8
Speaking to new teachers	This activity focusses on developing pupils' confidence in speaking to new secondary school teachers, and the skill of finding and being an appropriate version of themselves based on who they are speaking to.	9
October suggested activities		
Budgeting	This activity supports pupils in learning how to manage financial decisions at break and lunch time	10
Making positive decisions	This activity will support pupils in identifying what they have control over and can make their own choices (including the skills that are important to make adaptive choices), and what they cannot control, and how to manage this.	11
Building bridges	This activity supports pupils in developing the skills and confidence in re-building a teacher/pupil relationship if it has broken down.	12
Managing change and problem-solving	This activity will help pupils to reflect on the changes they have navigated over primary-secondary school transitions and how they have managed these changes to help future problem-solving.	13
Additional activities		
Coping with change (suggested additional activity for September)	This activity will help pupils to reflect on the similarities and differences between primary school and secondary school, to help in managing feelings of progression vs. loss.	14
Meeting even more staff (suggested additional activity for October)	This activity provides the opportunity for pupils to get to know staff they may only see in passing or may not get taught by until they are older, to help develop a sense of school belonging and community.	15

#TaST 5-7 takes an early-intervention approach through 21 developmentally sequenced lessons delivered across the last two years of primary school and first year of secondary school

#TaST 5-7 lessons are built around 4 conceptual primary-secondary school transitions domains (e.g. social, academic, environmental and personal primary-secondary school transition changes), operationalised within **#P-S WELLS**.

LESSON 3: PROGRESSION VS. LOSS

Date: Year 5, June



Helping pupils to start thinking about the transition to secondary school as a progression, by balancing feelings of loss towards leaving primary school with anticipation for the new experiences they will encounter at secondary school.

Key aim	Moving to secondary school is a key life event and developmental milestone for pupils. It is normal for pupils to feel conflicting emotions when thinking about this next chapter, especially while at primary school and anticipating the move. However, pupils may not realise this, or struggle to put into words and voice how they feel. These activities will help pupils to give words to their feelings, which will help in acknowledging, understanding and managing their feelings.
RSHE Links	Following the lesson pupils should know: - Isolation and loneliness can affect children and that it is very important for children to discuss their feelings with an adult and seek support. - How important friendships are in making us feel happy and secure, and how people choose and make friends.
Warm up COUNT TO 20 <i>Time: 5 minutes</i>	Count to 20... The aim of this game is for the group to count to twenty, one person saying one number at a time. All pupils start sitting on chairs in a circle. When a pupil wants to say a number they must stand up to speak. Any pupil can start the count with a different pupil saying the next number. However, if two or more people happen to stand and speak at the same time, or the incorrect number is spoken, counting must start again from the beginning.
1st Activity DRAMA ACTIVITY <i>Time: 5 minutes</i>	Continuum... This helps pupils to start thinking about their feelings. One side of the room to symbolise strongly agree, the other strongly disagree, and pupils stand in the middle of the room while the statement is read out, and then position themselves on the continuum to represent their feelings. Ask a few pupils each time, to share why they have positioned themselves in that way. Possible statements: "I prefer Maths than English"; "I find change difficult"; "The thought of meeting new people scares me"; "I am ready to leave primary school"; "I am looking forward to secondary school".
2nd Activity WRITTEN ACTIVITY <i>Time: 15 minutes</i> * It is important that this remains an independent activity.	Primary school progression (workbook page 3) This activity will help the pupils to independently reflect on their time at primary school (including their achievements, and things that they have learnt) and how this will prepare them for secondary school. This activity is based on the positive psychology model, that recollection of positive experiences and emotions can promote positive behaviour.
3rd Activity WRITTEN ACTIVITY <i>Time: 15 minutes</i> * It is important that this remains an independent activity.	Life Transitions written activity (workbook page 4) This second written activity will help pupils to think about how a previous transition experience inside and outside of school that can help prepare them for their transition to secondary school. Pupils should think about one transition experience to fill out the worksheet independently. Examples of transitions pupils may have faced: moving house; birth of a new sibling; moving through year groups at school; moving to a new club (e.g. Beavers to Cubs); new step-parents; changing school.
Important vocabulary:	How did that feel? How might that feel? How can you cope and deal with those feelings?

LESSON 4: CHOICES/DECISIONS

Date: Year 5, July



Supporting pupils to identify when and how they make their own decisions and giving them the skills to continue to do so.

Key aim	This session is designed to support pupils with secondary school choice decision processes, by providing the tools to help pupils understand and identify when it is appropriate to start making their own choices and the skills that are important to make adaptive choices.
RSHE Links	Following the lesson pupils should know: Where to get advice, for example family, school or other sources.
Warm up DRAMA ACTIVITY <i>Time: 5 minutes</i>	Line up... Come up with a list of ways for pupils to line up. Call them out one after another, but tell pupils that they cannot speak to one another. This is a silent game! When the line is finished, go along the line checking their accuracy.
1st Activity DRAMA ACTIVITY <i>Time: 5 minutes</i>	Yes/No/Maybe... Pupils stand by either the Yes, No or Maybe 'wall' based on their answers to questions. Examples of which are: Do you like fish fingers? Do you wear a coat to school? Do you know where that coat is right now? Do you have a favourite teacher in school? Do you have a favourite subject? Do you know what secondary school you want to apply to?
2nd Activity WRITTEN ACTIVITY <i>Time: 15 minutes</i>	Choosing secondary school (workbook page 5) - Draw up a list of things that the pupils think are important in a secondary school. - What do you think is important when considering a secondary school? - Why are they important? Can you prioritise them? - How can you find these things out?
3rd Activity IT ACTIVITY <i>Time: 15 minutes</i>	This activity involves pupils pairing answers from the worksheet in activity 2 to actual secondary schools in the area to inform pupils choices around which secondary school they wish to attend.
Important vocabulary:	Choice, Decision Making, Planning, Open Evenings, Curriculum.

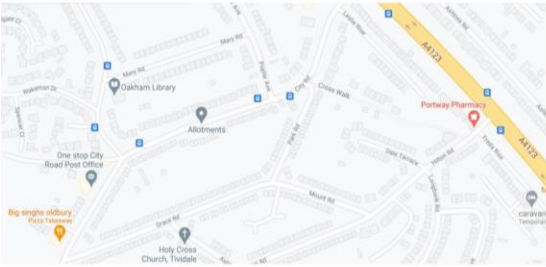
LESSON 6

Although transitions can sometimes be worrying, they can also be positive. Change can be good and help us to become stronger, adaptable and more confident and it is important to learn ways to do this.

Using the differences you have just noted down, take each in turn and write down some possible solutions to adapt to them. The first one has been completed for you as an example.

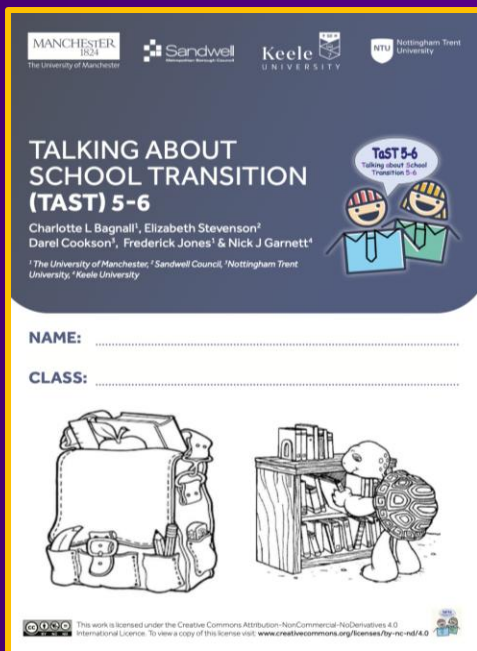
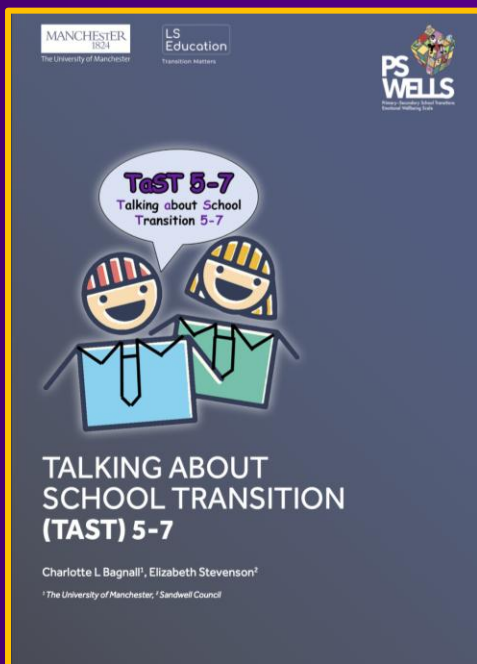
Change (something Ugly):	Solutions (turned to good):
Secondary School will be much larger than my primary school. I may get lost.	Use a school map to help find classrooms, be organised and know where I need to be and when and don't be afraid to ask for help.

LESSON 7



- Can you explain how to get from?
- The library to the Allotments?
 - The Pharmacy to Holy Cross Church?
 - Big Singh's Pizza Takeaway to a house on Leslie Rise?
 - Now pick your own point of origin and DO NOT tell your partner where you are taking them, can they work it out?

Example Lesson Plans



#TaST 5-7 is being evaluated alongside the validation of **#P-S WELLS**; with evidence of:



Feasibility: implemented as planned with 1686 Year 5-7 children in 32 schools in the UK;



Acceptability: children and teachers find the skills-based and gradual early-intervention approach useful: *“these are mindset changes for the children, these are skill changes that need to come to form habits which take time”* [Year 6 teacher]; *“what I thought was most helpful was giving us realistic situations that will happen in secondary school and testing them out”* [Year 6 pupil];



Utility: in improving children’s coping efficacy, emotional wellbeing and negative transition appraisal scores, predicting fewer mental health difficulties over time;

- **Cost-effectiveness:** These effects were more pronounced for children with SEND, those eligible for PPF and children who are academically behind.

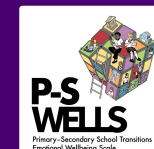


Reach e.g. national support for **#TaST** as a ‘promising universal school-based intervention that could influence policy and practice nationally’ has been referenced in DfE (2024), NICE (2023) and Health Scotland (2022) guidelines, and internationally there has been appetite by the DfE in Australia: *“#TaST reduced children’s anxiety, increased their awareness about transition and ultimately gave them the language to feel more comfortable... [and] has transformed Victoria’s approach to supporting P-S ST”* [Mental Health Practitioner]

CO-PRODUCING A NATIONAL PRIMARY-SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITIONS STRATEGY: DRAWING ON INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE



MANCHESTER
1824
The University of Manchester



Policy Context



Over the past decade, Government reports in England have consistently identified primary–secondary transition as a period ‘not handled well’ (*Ofsted, 2015, March, p. 65*), with the quality of transition practices between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 ‘too often poorly managed’ (*Ofsted, 2015, September, p. 21*). More recently, the Department for Education have reiterated that ‘a greater focus on transition periods in children and young people’s lives is needed’ (*DfE 2018, p.13*), with many children believed to be ‘lost in transition’ (*Children’s Commissioner, 2024, p. 96*).



This is in stark contrast to other devolved nations in the United Kingdom (i.e., Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales) which have legislation in place to support primary- secondary school transitions (*Welsh Government, 2022; Education Scotland, 2020; Department of Education Northern Ireland, 2005*). However, currently evaluation of implementation is limited if non-existent.



Thus, a systemic, evidence-informed approach to primary–secondary school transitions is urgently needed in England, supported by the development and dissemination of best-practice guidance drawing on research, policy, and practice.

Educational Practice

- Within practice, the multiple and disparate challenges that primary-secondary school transitions present can be difficult to manage, especially without clear and consistent statutory guidance (EEF, 2024).
- This has led to school transition provision being locally interpreted by schools, Local Authorities, and other services, leading to variation in quality and implementation, under-resourcing, and/or shared gaps, which remain inconsistently addressed, underdeveloped, and overlooked (White, 2020). This includes:



Monitoring and accountability;

there are no consistent, UK-wide performance indicators or datasets which have specifically monitored children's wellbeing over primary-secondary school transitions



Widening disadvantage;

children who are disproportionately impacted by poorly managed transitions, lack adequate support



Evidence-based interventions are not been accessed by educators



Partnerships, joint-working and co-ordinated transitions processes

between primary schools, secondary schools, and parents/carers could be improved

- Practitioners have raised not knowing what to prioritise, how to most effectively intervene, and when, underscoring the need for evidence-informed statutory guidance (Bagnall et al., 2024b).

Development of a National Primary-Secondary School Transition Strategy



Over the past decade, Government reports in England have consistently identified primary-secondary transition as poorly managed and a systemic weakness ([DfE, 2025](#))



Educational practitioners have raised issues of not knowing what to prioritise, how, and when.



A systemic, evidence-informed approach is urgently needed, supported by the development and dissemination of best-practice guidance drawing on research, policy, and practice.

To overcome these gaps we have spent the past two years triangulating multiple stakeholder perspectives and multidisciplinary evidence to co-develop a unified, evidence-based framework with key policy recommendations to inform a National Primary-Secondary School Transitions Strategy in England.

We did this through two National Primary-Secondary School Transitions Strategy events, where 15 round-table discussions were conducted to aggregate multi-disciplinary perspectives of 75 experts leading on primary-secondary school transitions provision within educational practice, research and policy, nationwide.



PRIMARY-SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITIONS STRATEGY EVENT

Hosted by the *Primary-Secondary School Transitions Emotional Wellbeing Scale (#P-S WELLS)* research team

Date: Friday 24th January 2025; Time: 10am – 4pm; Location: Whitworth Gallery; M15 6ER

Dr Charlotte Bagnall, Carla Mason, Dr Andrew Holliman, Dr Emily Banwell, Richard Seymour, Dr Nick Garnett, Dr Margarita Panayiotou & Professor Divya Jindal-Snape

Logos: P-S WELLS, MANCHESTER 1824, UK Research and Innovation, SOCIAL RESEARCH, UCL, MANCHESTER 1824

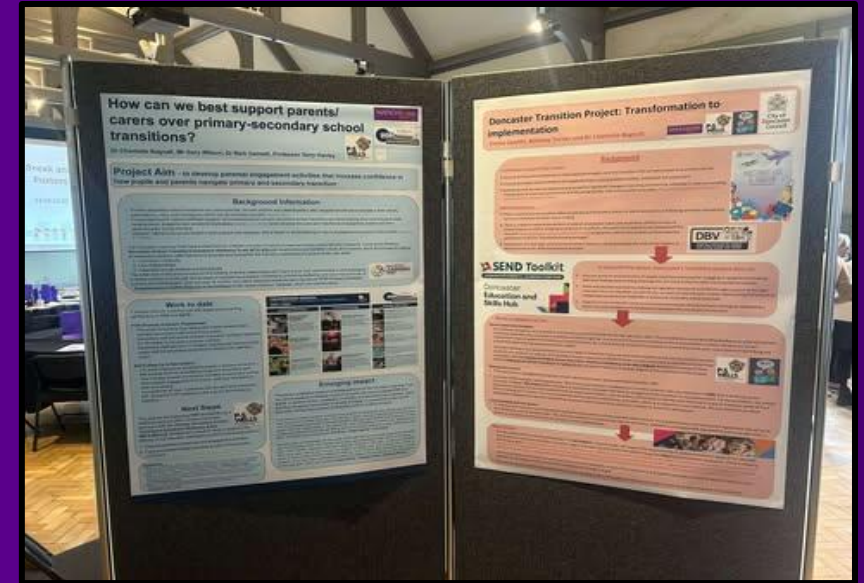
PRIMARY-SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITIONS STRATEGY EVENT

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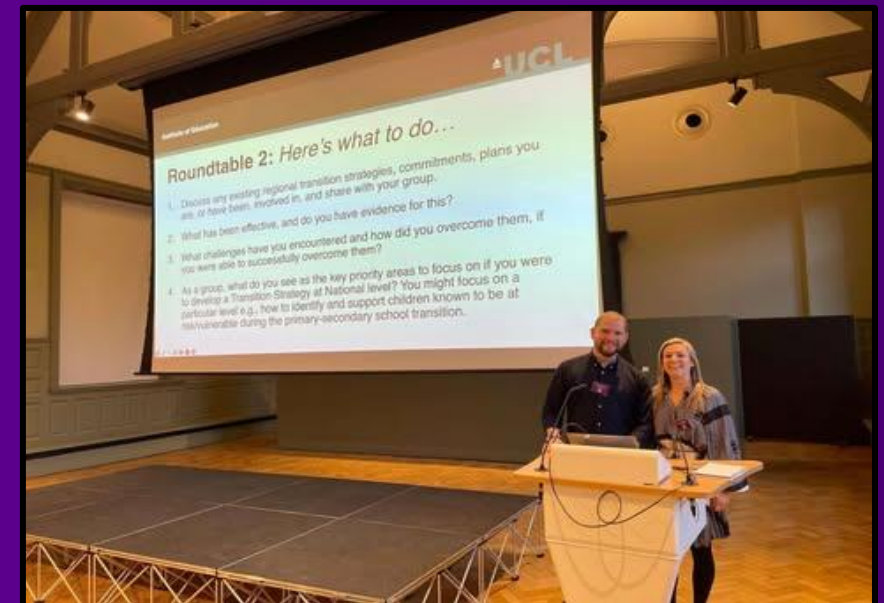
Date: Friday 23rd January 2026; Time: 10am – 5pm; Location: Whitworth Gallery; M15 6ER

Dr Charlotte Bagnall, Carla Mason, Dr Andrew Holliman, Dr Emily Banwell, Richard Seymour, Dr Nick Garnett, Dr Margarita Panayiotou, Rebecca Seward, Kathryn Mills-Webb, Dr David Edge & Professor Divya Jindal-Snape

Logos: P-S WELLS, MANCHESTER 1824, UK Research and Innovation, SOCIAL RESEARCH, the british psychological society, MANCHESTER 1824



- Our first roundtables focussed on how we can improve children’s emotional wellbeing in the context of primary-secondary school transitions at the (a) child level; (b) family level; (c) school level; (d) Local Authority level; and (e) National level, by looking at existing barriers and facilitators in implementing “gold-standard” transition provision.
- Our second roundtables then focused on what a National Primary-Secondary School Transitions Strategy could look like in best supporting stakeholders at each level, what support will be needed, and what measurable objectives and quality markers would be useful.
- Our third roundtables refined our recommendations, evidencing (a) how the recommendations respond to identified needs within primary–secondary transitions provision; (b) integrating research evidence with practitioner appraisal and exemplars of effective practice; and (c) identifying the conditions, enablers, and mitigations required to optimise implementation and impact.



Next steps

We are calling for educational policymakers to engage with the further development and dissemination of our National Primary–Secondary School Transitions Strategy, and for Local Authorities to engage with the rollout and implementation of this work.



We have won substantial funding to establish a National Consortium for Excellence in Primary–Secondary School Transitions to provide sustained national infrastructure to implement our co-produced policy recommendations, drive system change, and formalise cross-sector partnerships, creating a shared governance framework uniting researchers, practitioners, policymakers, health professionals, and third-sector partners.

Our framework has been accepted in
Educational Psychology Review

Policy Recommendations for a Primary–Secondary School Transitions Strategy in England

Policy Recommendation 1: Establish a *national standardised framework for information sharing* between primary and secondary schools to ensure consistency, accuracy, and continuity in supporting children over primary–secondary school transitions. This framework should outline the essential data to be shared, timelines for transfer, and protocols for collaboration between schools.

Policy Recommendation 2: Develop *national standards for facilitating gradual exposure and familiarity during primary–secondary school transitions* to support children’s emotional and social adjustment over time. These standards should aim to reduce logistical and administrative barriers that limit opportunities for primary school children to engage with their future secondary schools.

Policy Recommendation 3: Ensure that all schools have *timely access to high-quality, evidence-informed transitions support* that promotes effective and equitable primary–secondary transitions. This provision should align with *national pastoral priorities*, include *mechanisms for sharing best practice* across schools and Local Authorities, and embed transitions-related criteria within *Ofsted inspection frameworks* to strengthen accountability and consistency.

Policy Recommendation 4: Develop a *national approach to monitoring children’s emotional wellbeing and ensuring early identification of emotional needs* to promote timely, targeted support during primary–secondary school transitions. A consistent framework would enable schools to identify emerging concerns, intervene proactively, and reduce the escalation of mental health difficulties.

Policy Recommendation 5: Promote *continuity of pedagogical approaches across primary–secondary transitions* to ensure coherence in learning progression, reduce academic disruption, and support children’s confidence and engagement. A nationally guided but locally adaptable framework should align curriculum expectations, pedagogical approaches, and assessment practices across Key Stages 2 and 3.



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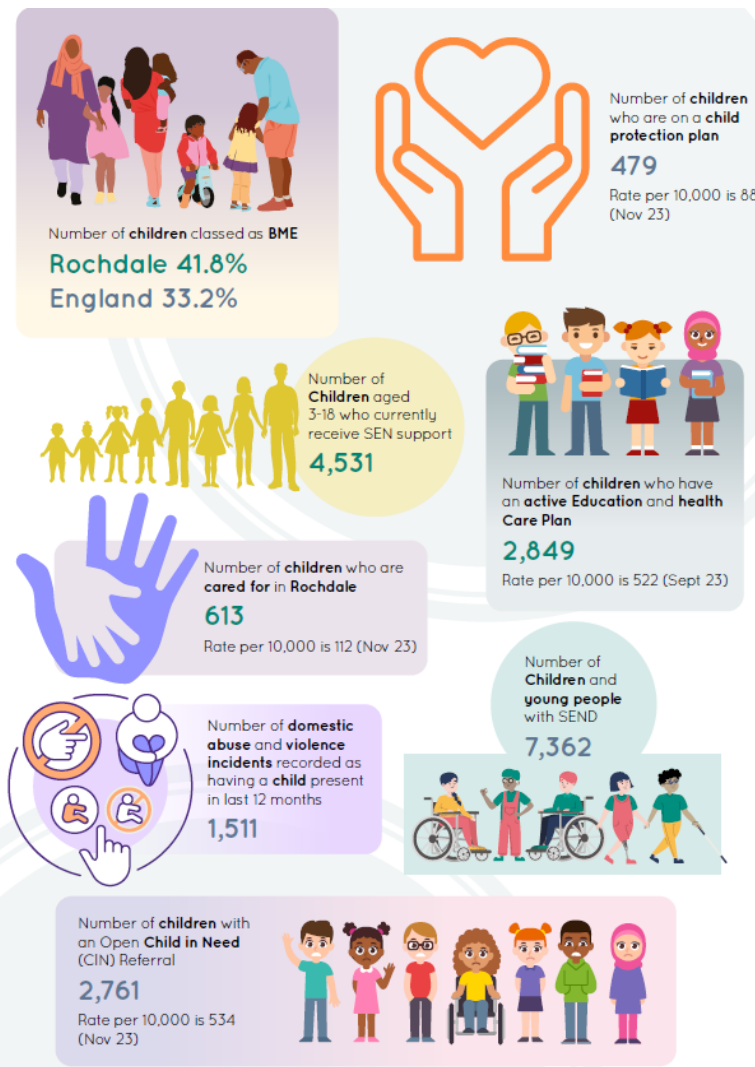
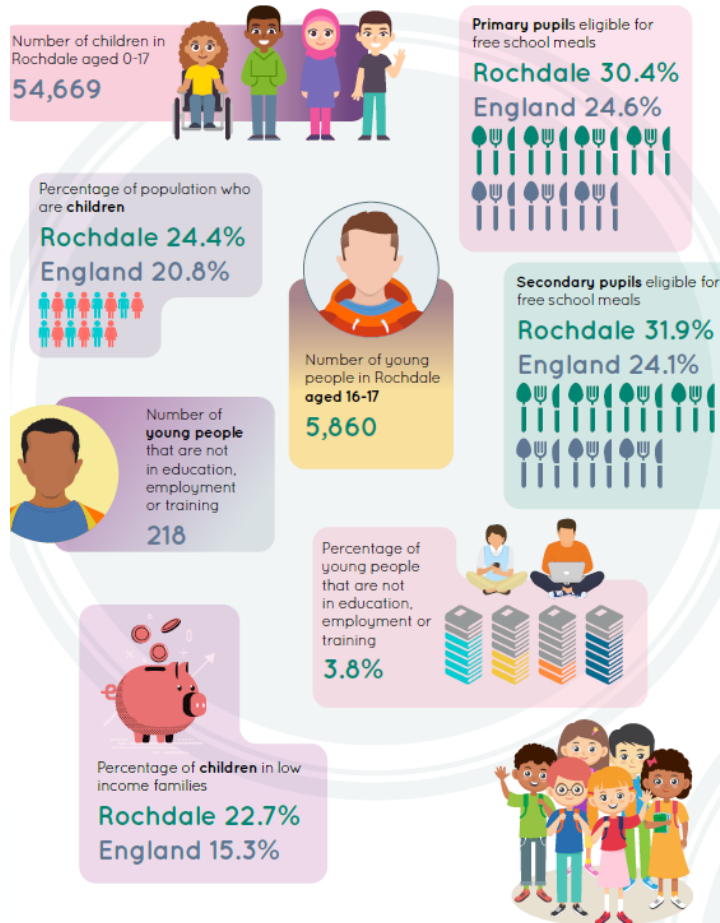




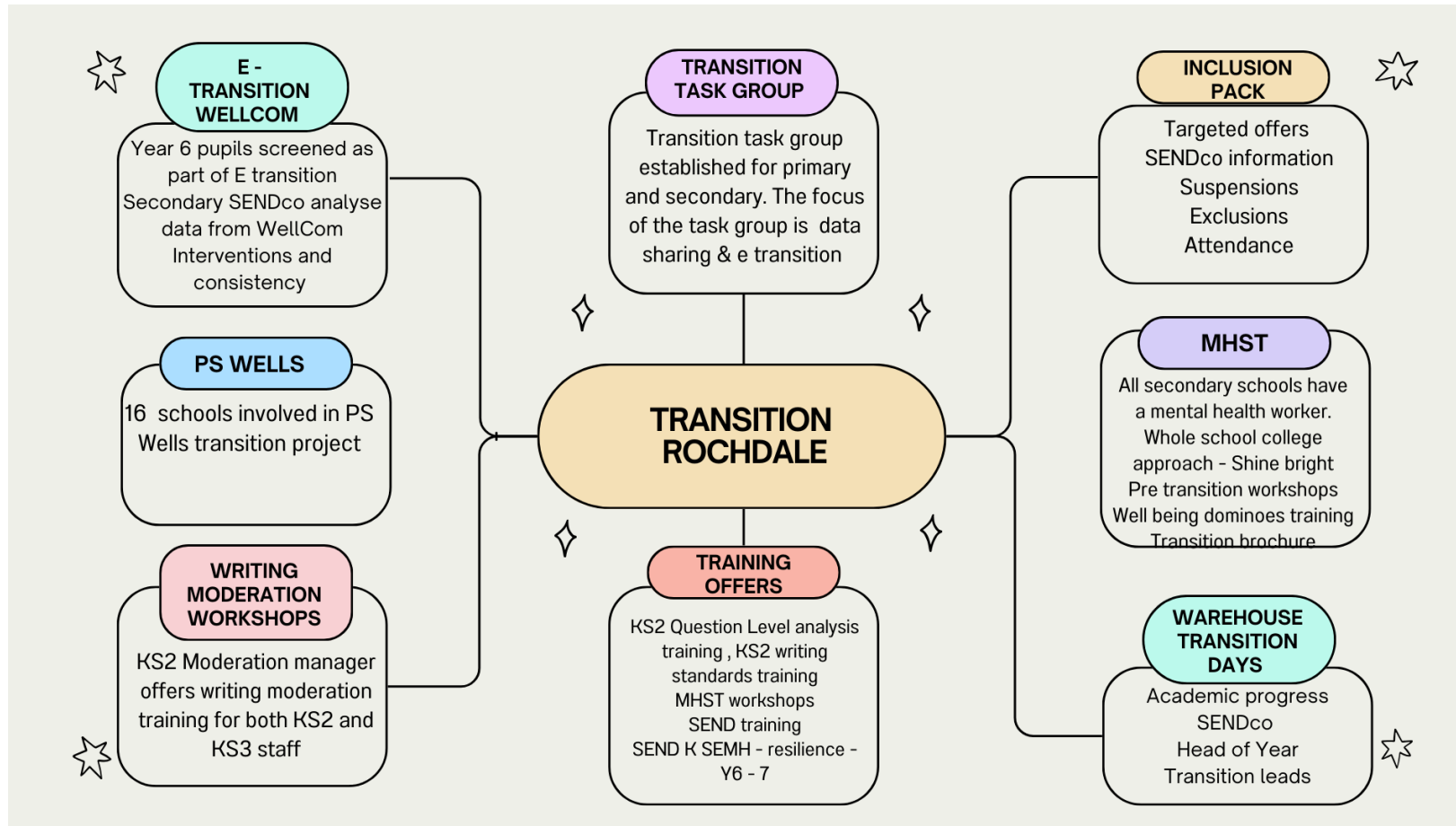
P - S Wells
Rochdale Transition
GM Policy May 2026

CYPP contextual information

The Children and young people of Rochdale



Rochdale LA Transition



Transition in Rochdale

Additional transition
of information.
Enhanced offer from
each school.

EHCP

Available for targeted
learners at any school, at
no cost.

Available to all schools
at no cost, they just
need to opt in!

Targeted support
for vulnerable
groups

Transition work
shops and mindful
movements

E-transition data

All schools complete
this data set. This
includes attendance,
SLCN, SEMH and
more.

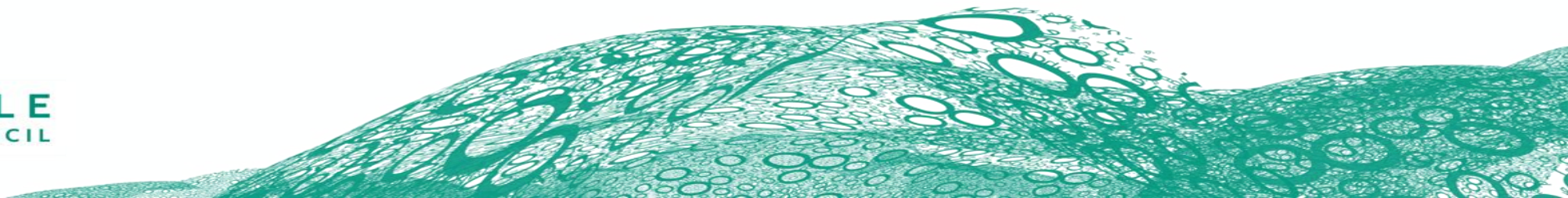
Children at the
centre of our
offer.



ROCHDALE
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Rochdale Transition focus & projects

- #BeeWell
- Young Health champions
- Transition collaborative group
- Transition projects – Y6 -7
- Pupil voice – Y7
- Transition offers



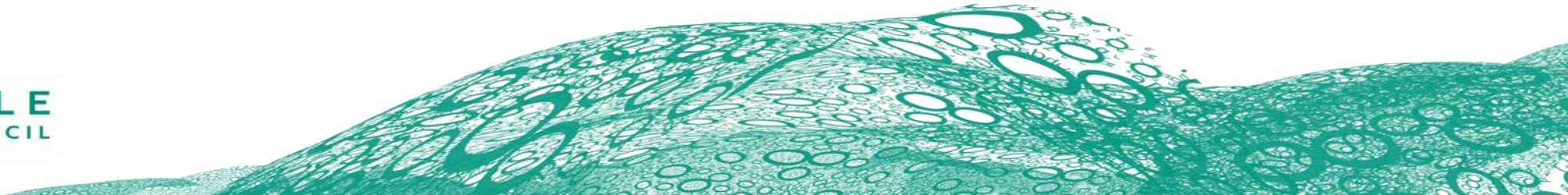
Rochdale Transition task group

Local authority lead a well established cross phase group which focuses on ensure smooth transition between KS2 and KS3.

- LA led
- Representatives from all primary collaborative
- Representatives from all secondary schools
- Focus led projects
- Data sharing

Current focus of the group

- Transition of information – MH information, attendance & Suspensions & exclusions
- E transition



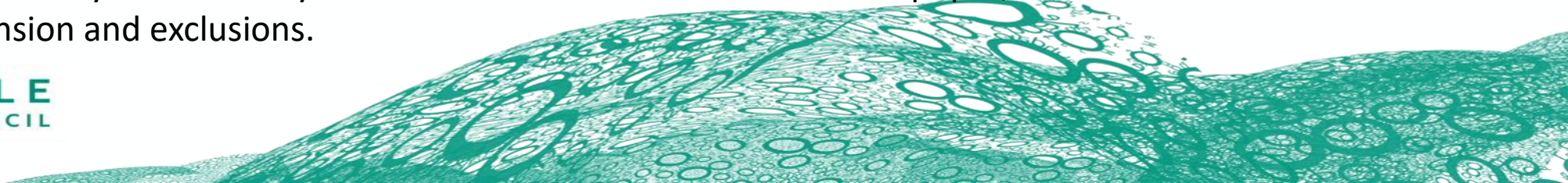
Transition task group projects

Transition in Rochdale has varied according to the needs of both our schools and pupils. We have responded to both locally and nationally identified needs.

Some of our more recent projects aimed to address the issues raised in the DfE 'Wasted Years' report. These projects focused ensuring both KS2 & KS3 teachers were aware of the expected standards and curriculum taught in KS2. Our approach included:

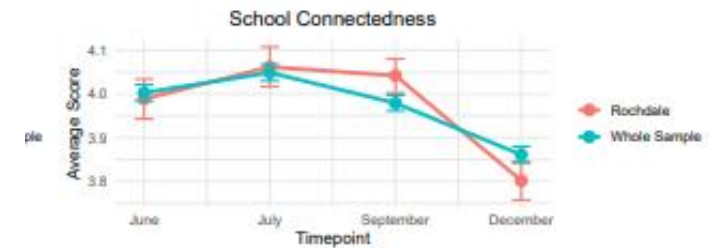
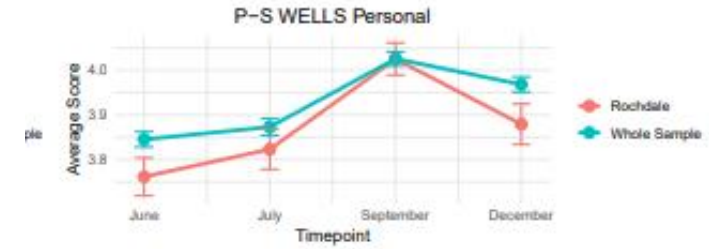
- Warehouse transition day – academic focus
- Question level analysis training
- Writing projects
- Book swaps
- Writing moderation training
- Pupil voice – New Year 7 in Autumn term

The current focus of the Transition task group is the transfer of accurate information from primary to secondary around the mental Health needs of Y6 pupils, attendance, suspension and exclusions.



Data Sharing

Alongside the PS Wells reports, the Local Authority shared targeted data with schools to support the Year 6 to Year 7 transition process. The transition group focused specifically on attendance, suspensions, and permanent exclusions, as these indicators often highlight the most vulnerable cohort of children during this critical period. By addressing these areas, schools can provide early interventions and tailored support to ensure a smoother and more successful transition for pupils at greatest risk.



Targeted transition

Additional well being offers

Summer visits EWOs – 170+ young people

Flux box

GRT – Flux box

Social prescribing offers

Inact

Anna Freud

The PS Wells pupil voice survey has provided a clear picture of how children feel about moving from Year 6 to secondary school.

Pupils are generally positive and excited about this next stage, while also expressing some natural concerns. Alongside our strong focus on mental health and wellbeing, these insights have helped us ensure that pupils and families feel supported and reassured throughout the transition process.

Headteacher

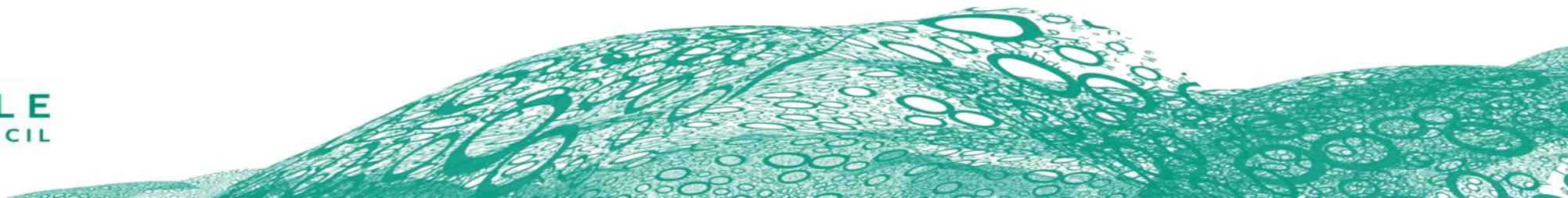
New interventions developed to offer support with Low mood & anxiety

My Happy Mind – targeted for Middleton schools

Back in the Game – Funded for all High schools – Transition in to Y7



ROCHDALE
BOROUGH COUNCIL



CYPP Raising Rochdale - Governance



Consultation & Analysis



This plan has been written to support the whole local system make a positive difference for children and young people in the issues that those children and young people have themselves identified.

The partnership's expectation is that the actions in this plan are picked up across its constituent parts - council teams, schools, colleges, health, police and others - providing 'golden threads' through those plans. The partnership itself will compile and maintain an audit of where each action is being pursued, by whom, and to what timescales, in order to measure progress and call in reports.



As the voice of children and young people has been the driver for the production of the plan, so too will it be the driver for evaluation of its impact. In addition to the evaluation that will take place through the partnership's audit, the role of the voice of young people will be strengthened, planned for by the Youth Voice Steering group and including continued survey and focus group work. The Youth Cabinet and members of the Youth Parliament will be directly involved, receiving and questioning reports on progress.

For more information, see rochdale.gov.uk/ChildrenAndYoungPeoplePlan



CYPP launch
Strategic steering groups
(Healthy, Safe, Successful and Be heard)
Health Alliance
SLCN
SEND alliance
Education task group
Transition steering group
RAEYPH & Pioneers Trust
YPMHST expansion
WSCA
Attendance strategy
Back in the game
Shine Bright
Flux

What did Children and Young People tell us.....

Strategic Priority Two: for children and young people to be healthy

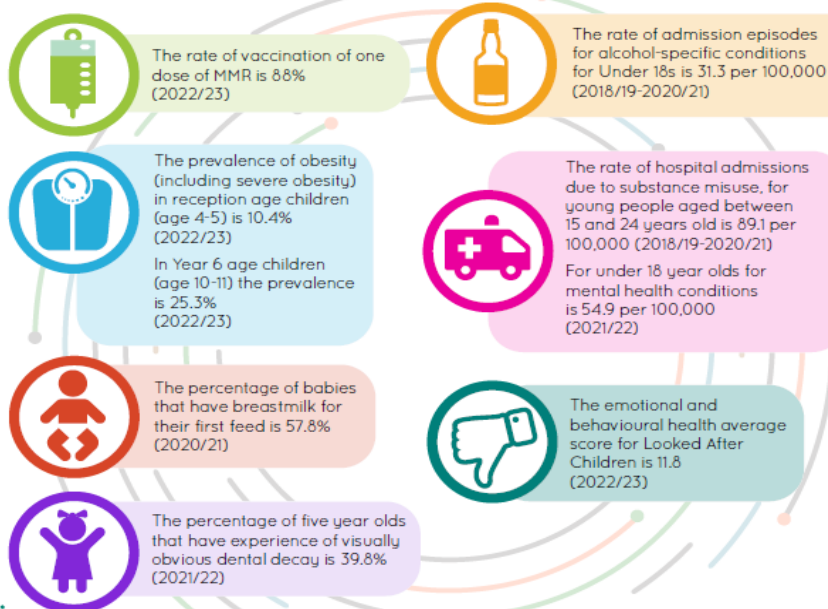
Health and wellbeing were rated at high priority by children and young people.

Whilst the partnership is aware of a wide range of opportunities and support for young people to build healthy lifestyles and access support when needed, and of the numbers taking part in such programmes, children and young people report not always knowing about these opportunities.

Their responses suggest a need for developing a greater consistency of approach across different organisations working with children and young people.

Actions in response are aligned with the council plan priorities, 'Improving population health and wellbeing at all ages and ensuring everyone has access to better care', and 'Everyone is succeeding and living well'.

Rochdale contextual data:



Feedback from young people:

59%

of young people were not told about local sexual health services in school
(Sexual Health survey 2023)

81.7%

(around 4 in 5) of young people in Rochdale rate their physical health as excellent, very good, or good
(2023 #BeeWell survey)

24.6%

is the level of mental wellbeing reported by boys in Rochdale, which is higher than girls (22.3) and those who describe their gender in a different way (e.g. non-binary)(23.5)
(2023 #BeeWell survey)

33.9%

(around 1 in 3) of young people in Rochdale meet the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines for physical activity of at least 1 hour per day
(2023 #BeeWell survey)

Top three barriers

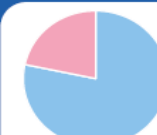
to being healthy that young people have identified in their community are -

- Finances
- Other people
- Drugs, smoking and alcohol

(Children and Young People's Partnership online survey 2023)

54.6%

(16 in a class of 30) of young people in Rochdale are getting enough sleep to feel awake and concentrate on school work during the day
(2023 #BeeWell survey)



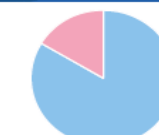
How often do you brush your teeth?

Once a day (21.8%)
Twice a day (78.2%)



Does anxiety stop you doing what you want?

Sometimes (48.8%)
Always (6.2%)
Never (31.4%)
Often (13.9%)



Do you know how to access support for your emotional health?

No (16.4%)
Yes (83.6%)



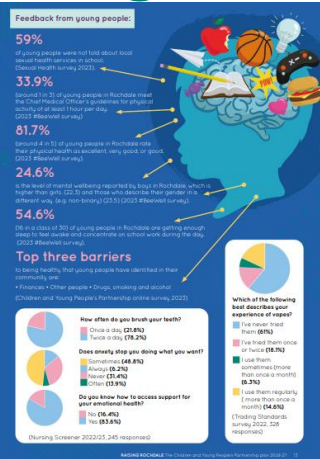
Which of the following best describes your experience of vapes?

- I've never tried them (61%)
- I've tried them once or twice (18.1%)
- I use them sometimes (more than once a month) (6.3%)
- I use them regularly (more than once a month) (14.6%)

(Trading Standards survey 2022, 328 responses)

(Nursing Screener 2022/23, 245 responses)

What are we planning to do:



Actions: what we are planning to do 2024-27

1. Public health and partners to ensure that everyone in the borough has opportunities for young people's physical activity and mental health, including family, friends, schools, services, and voluntary groups. Ensure that wellbeing messages and signposting to children and young people through young people's version of a 'mental health on a page' document that all groups can use and promote.
2. Increase engagement of all schools and academies in the Rochdale Health, Schools programme and pupil (or bonus, silver, gold or platinum award).
3. Promote the Whole School Approach to Mental Health and support from the Mental Health Support team across the borough such that all schools and academies have a named senior mental health lead as well as mental health first aiders, with existing organisations, services and others accessing the same training and adopting the same consistency of approach such that children and young people have the same high quality support in all contexts, based in the borough's trauma informed model.
4. Develop further initiatives such as the School Learning and Development Project's health questionnaire ensuring that outcomes inform practice and decision making. Strengthen the effectiveness of work on priorities, such as oral health, sleep hygiene, sexual health, drug and alcohol misuse and addictive gambling through engagement of further youth voice to develop approaches, including an age appropriate integrated curriculum of wellbeing where needed.
5. Promote the Access to Healthcare Programme post-Rochdale School and campaign pathway and development support webpages across all relevant partners.
6. Deliver the Access to Healthcare research project, using Quality, Roma and Teacher children and young people with SEND an opportunity to share their experiences of access to healthcare. Edge Hill University and Rother Valley Children's Hospital will publish outcomes nationally. Identify barriers to health and understand communities groups with difficulties, drawing on youth experience of access to healthcare.
7. Ensure young people are aware of the sexual health support available in the borough. Employer professionals to be able to support young people around issues such as health, relationships, consent and image sharing.
8. Implement a co-produced evidence based oral health improvement programme focused on the promotion of brushing, flossing, using fluoride toothpaste and adopting an environment with tooth friendly sugar free snacking and drinking.
9. Work with the University of Manchester to pilot the Pwells Scales to support wellbeing in the transition from primary to secondary school, such that a Rochdale-researched and evidenced tool is available for all schools and academies in the borough.
10. Increase the number of peer-trained KS2 Wellbeing Ambassadors and of secondary students gaining the Level Two Young Health Champions Award.
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22. Support schools and other places where children and young people are living, to become smoke free and to implement safe fire policies.
23. Provide training and support to help professionals and young people to identify the signs and risks of gambling, in partnership across Greater Manchester.
24. To support parents and children with ideas to develop a clear information source to support families with ideas linked to a marketing campaign promoting health, health.
25. Co-ordinate services to provide the right support and care at the right time to support families in getting help early (sexual health and care) and decrease the need to call on specialist services (community models of support) around neurodiversity, including pre and post diagnosis, community models of practice and support to support children who have common childhood conditions, ensuring that young people growing into adulthood have access to a consistent health offer that is easy to access and ensure they can easily access the information they require as they transition between services.
26. Promote healthy weight and ensure that the children and young people are able to become more active and well coordinated from maternity and childhood through to adulthood.
27. Focus work to promote health outcomes for children and young people with additional health needs, for example learning disability, autism or Physical Disability.
28. To help and co-ordinate, including with Family Hubs, support for families to give children the best start for life and protect their future health. This includes breastfeeding support and self support, increasing the use of childhood immunisations, and ensuring a range of parent education programmes, which will support in maintaining positive physical and mental health.
29. To include recognition of the impact that trauma and stress have on young people's health in the partnership's development of practice and support to support children who have common childhood conditions, ensuring that young people growing into adulthood have access to a consistent health offer that is easy to access and ensure they can easily access the information they require as they transition between services.
30. Design and implement a TRIVIE aligned to the partnership's health support offer for looked after children.

Action	Yr	Data	Quality	Impact
Ensure that wellbeing messages and signposting to support are expressed consistently to children and young people through a young persons' version of a 'mental health on a page'	1	No of hits on MH Padlets No of hits on Local Offer	Focus group feedback on satisfaction with Padlets	Beewell indicator – I know where to go to access support with my Mental Health
Increase the number of peer-trained KS2 Wellbeing Ambassadors and of secondary students gaining the Level Two Young Health Champions Award	2	Number of trained Wellbeing Ambassadors (KS2; Secondary) % achieving Young Health Champion Award	Pupil Survey – 'I know who my Wellbeing Ambassador is; I find my Wellbeing Ambassador helpful' Ambassador focus groups/questionnaires	Pupil survey – There is someone in school who I can talk to about my emotional wellbeing
Pilot the Pwells Scales to support wellbeing in the transition from primary to secondary school	2	Number of schools/pupils using Pwells Scale Onward referrals/support plans after use of Pwells	Pupil feedback on use of Pwells	Increase/decrease in Pwells score each year



Rochdale Pioneers Trust
Rochdale Association of Primary Headteachers
Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 Transition

Rochdale Transition Handbook 2024-25

Rochdale Transition Handbook 2024-25

The Rochdale Transition Handbook aims to provide a comprehensive guide to Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 Transition across the borough's Primary and Secondary schools. None of the procedures, systems or practices are statutory. All are commonly-agreed best practice which has been developed over many years and has proven success in enhancing and improving the Transition process for Rochdale's children.

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1 Key Dates and Deadlines 2024-25

Transition

Y6 Transition workshops
52 schools took up the offer with 2627

PS Wells Y6-Y7 Transition research project- UoM

I like the demonstration of the stress booklet.
I think it was good and came across on an understandable and friendly manner and to improve we could focus a bit more on the high school aspect and have a more interactive game.
I liked how they taught us different ways to relieve ourselves from anxiety.
I liked the water activity and breathing because they will really help me.
I liked the stress booklet thing.
I liked the breathing exercises.
I liked the booklets.
It was awesome.

I think that it was helpful for the children to realise that they all have some worries about their transition and that they weren't alone in feeling this way and learning to recognise the physical sensations that they might feel to help them identify the emotion.
The stress booklet was a really good visual for them to understand how stresses can be overloaded and discussing the strategies we can use to help ease this such as discussing the 5 ways to wellbeing. They must have really enjoyed it for them to clap they never do that 😊
Children's feedback comments are:
"I liked filling up the buckets with the balls it was a good way to visualise it"
"I liked the 5 ways to well-being it helped me and others to be calm"
"I liked how they cared about what we thought"



EYFS transition

Transition

[Home - Starting Reception](#)

Starting Reception

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Starting Reception

Your child's journey to school starts at home

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Get ready with teddy!



ROCHDALE
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Key Takeaways



For research: It is paramount that a longitudinal approach is taken over primary-secondary school transitions, with multiple data collection time points. As part of this, further modelling to address how much change in children's emotional wellbeing can be accounted for by primary-secondary school transitions, is needed.



For practice: Simultaneous change cannot be avoided over primary-secondary school transitions, but what we can do is develop children's awareness, knowledge and ability to cope with the multiple changes experienced over primary-secondary school transitions, through a gradual and "non-threatening" skills-based curriculum.



For policy: Our five policy recommendations provide a ready-made framework, and our tools and curricula are designed for scalability at minimal cost (e.g. [#P-S WELLS](#) and [#TaST 5-7](#) are free-of-charge and teacher-delivered within timetabled PSHE hours). At a time when the DfE is investing significantly in inclusion (£1.6bn Inclusive Mainstream Fund), attendance (RISE Hubs), and SEND reform (£1.8bn Experts at Hand), our programme offers a complementary evidence base that can help maximise the return on those investments.

Thank you for your contributions

For further information, see our **#P-S WELLS** website:

www.p-s-wells.org

Or contact us by email:

PS-wells@manchester.ac.uk

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And, of course, to all of the schools and Local Authorities who have participated in #P-S WELLS so far!



**P-S
WELLS**

Primary-Secondary School Transitions
Emotional Wellbeing Scale