

Norwich Opportunity Area Transitions

Final report



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While this report was commissioned by the Norwich Opportunity Area (NOA), the recommendations are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the NOA board.

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1. Introduction

This document is the last in a series of three reports that present an evaluation of the Norwich Opportunity Area transitions project work 2019 – 2022. The first report was published in July 2021: Kirkman, P., E Lithari, C Mangafa, S Tsegay, R Hunt, S Pratt-Adams (2021). Norwich Opportunity Area Transition Evaluation Interim Report 1. Norwich: NOA. The second report was published in June 2022: Kirkman, P., L Wheeler, S Tsegay, R Hunt, S Pratt-Adams (2022). Norwich Opportunity Area Transition Evaluation Interim Report 2. Norwich: NOA.

Our aims in this Final report are threefold: to present the outcomes of the final phase of the evaluation which sought to understand the impact of transitions activities on pupil outcomes, to draw together lessons which can be learned from the projects and their delivery, and finally to present recommendations based on our findings.

1.1. The Structure of the Report

As noted above, the current publication draws together the findings of the two project interim reports. The focus at this reporting stage is on the lessons that may be learned across the entirety of the transition project activities. Consequently, we focus here on the conclusions and implications of the previous phases. For further details of the methodologies adopted, data and findings, we refer the reader to the reports (Kirkman et. al. 2021; 2022a). Following a brief introduction to the evaluation process, in Section 2 we discuss the context of the Norwich Opportunity Area Transitions Projects and present key ideas that emerge from current education research literature on transfer and transitions. Section 3 moves on to outline the transitions projects that were carried out and reviews our conclusions about their impact. Finally, in Section 4 we discuss the outcomes of the evaluation including the Transitions Development Resources and present some recommendations and reflections.

1.2. The Evaluation Process

The following section outlines key aspects of the evaluation process as it has continued to emerge across the project in the light of the COVID pandemic and related challenges.

1.2.1. Evaluation design

The evaluation took place across two phases: February 2021 – September 2021, phase two: September 2021 – Oct 2022. We implemented an emergent approach to the evaluation design. This was due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both the implementation of the NOA projects, and also on the evaluation data collection and analysis process.

Phase one focussed on understanding the nature of NOA transitions activities and drew on goal (Scriven, 1981) and process (Moore et al., 2015) evaluation

methodologies. We took the view that understanding these activities was a collaborative activity (see constructivism in Crotty, 1998) and drew together ideas from practice and literature using an adapted constant comparative approach to analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and a rapid umbrella review (Coe. et. al., 2020).

Phase two sought to determine the impact of NOA transitions activities and to develop resources that would support their continued development and implementation. Owing to the absence of school data that would allow for statistical modelling of impact¹, we drew on data from phase one to estimate impact. In addition to a significant number of project documents and digital files (n=205), we analysed staff interviews (n=23), pupil focus groups (n=7) and a staff survey (n=20). To control for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the effectiveness each project, we estimated a 'COVID effect' for each project (see Kirkman et. al., 2022a pp15-18). Thus, what emerges from phase 2 is a 'best estimate' of likely impact given the success indicators drawn from project data and existing literature and based on

In the absence of adequate school-pupil data, we designed a tracking process that focuses on project review and delivery rather than pupil-level data. It is noteworthy that the collection of meaningful pupil-level data can be organisationally challenging, hence the lack of school data for this aspect of the evaluation. This type of data can also present statistical significance challenges when working with relatively small and contextually bounded sample. Thus, the evaluation and audit development tools which emerged from phase two provide a pragmatic and methodologically more robust approach to supporting ongoing development work than a school-based statistical tracking tool (see Kirkman et. al., 2022a).

¹ Agreement in principle was given by five participant secondary schools. However, procedural and capacity challenges precluded the delivery of sufficient data.

2. Norwich Opportunity Area and Transitions

The following section outlines the context of the Norwich Opportunity Area Transitions Projects and reviews findings that emerge from current education research literature on transfer and transitions.

2.1. The Local Context of the Projects

The Norwich Opportunity Area Transitions Projects was a local project, supported by the Norwich Opportunity Area Partnership Board within the wider National Opportunity Areas programme which was a 'Social mobility package' that aimed to: *"see local partnerships formed with early years providers, schools, colleges, universities, businesses, charities and local authorities to ensure all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential"* (DfE, 2016). Following the initial award of £6million of funding, the Norwich Opportunity Area Partnership Board set up four working groups were also established including one on 'transitions' (Crown Copyright, 2017).

The Transitions Working Group began in 2019 to work on a programme of activities aimed to improve exclusions rates for pupils moving from Y6 to Y7. While the evaluation found no explicit reference to the goals of the Opportunity Area in the notes of the Transitions Working group, for the purposes of the evaluation, the relevant priorities and targets were identified as: raising attainment, supporting children at risk of exclusion, providing information and support to young people, and to reduce the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils. Alongside these priorities, we identified several agreed "fundamentals for a *vulnerable* child" [emphasis ours] agreed by the Transitions Working Group as starting points for the design of transitions support projects and activities. These included: information sharing between schools, pastoral care, resilience training, and collaborative planning (source: Transitions group notes 30/04/19). Finally, the evaluation call identified student resilience and behaviour, academic and behaviour understanding, parent/carer engagement in the transition process, and value as specific priorities for evaluation. These NOA Board, Transitions Working Group and project evaluation priorities are illustrated in table 2.1.

Table 2.1: NOA Board, Transitions Working Group and project evaluation priorities.

Number	Priorities for Transitions Activities	Source
1	Raise attainment	NOA Board
2	Support children at risk of exclusion	NOA Board
3	Provide information and support for young people	NOA Board
4	Information sharing between schools	Transitions Working Group
5	Pastoral care	Transitions Working Group
6	Resilience training	Transitions Working Group
7	Collaborative Planning	Transitions Working Group
8	Resilience and academic behaviour	Evaluation priorities
9	Academic and behaviour understanding	Evaluation priorities
10	Parent/carer engagement	Evaluation priorities
11	Value	Evaluation priorities

2.2. The Research Context

The project review of the literature had a twofold purpose. Firstly, we sought to identify descriptions from transitions-related academic literature that would provide potentially helpful indicators of project efficacy. Indicators were constructed for each of the areas of focus articulated in the NOA Board priorities, Transitions Working Group priorities and evaluation project parameters. To this we added indicators emerging directly from academic literature. Our rationale for inclusion of this second set of indicators was the initial practical starting point for the transitions project work and the from diverse understandings of purpose that came from our analysis of project descriptions. This wider set of indicators allowed us to distinguish a greater range of potential project impact and outcomes. The indicators emerging from this process are presented in section 2.2.1. Secondly, we sought conducted a broader review to contextualise the evaluation project within a broader understanding of transitions. Three significant areas of transitions activity emerged from this work. These are presented in section 2.2.2.

2.2.1. Indicators of project efficacy

The following are definitions of the project indicators that were used to review the potential- and implementation-impact of NOA transition activities.

2.2.1.1. Student resilience and behaviour

Resilience is a dynamic process contingent on internal and external factors that leads to successful adaptation in challenging circumstances. Behaviours are manifest in teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions, framed by whole school, classroom, individual and personal factors (for example see Jindal-Snape and Miller, 2008; Chaplain, 2003).

2.2.1.2. Academic and behaviour understanding

Also called 'social competence', involves acceptance into social contexts (peer, classroom, school) and leads to feelings of self-determination. For example, to gain approval from teachers or peers, to cooperate with classmates or to meet a standard of achievement (for example see Wentzel, 2003; Bailey & Baines, 2012).

2.2.1.3. Parent/carer engagement in transition processes

Also sometimes referred to as 'parental involvement'. Falls into three categories: direct participation, academic encouragement, and expectations for attainment (for example see Chen and Gregory 2009, in Hanewald, 2013).

2.2.1.4. Value

'Public value' can be defined as delivering services, achieving social outcomes, and maintaining trust and legitimacy. In this context this can be thought of as i) delivering transitions projects, ii) achieving the priorities and targets of NOA, iii) maintaining engagement from pupils, parents, teachers, and school leaders (for example see Moore, 1997; Mintrom and Luetjens, 2017).

2.2.1.5. Student attainment

Grade outcomes of academic measures, equivalent to GCSEs at aged 15/16 and A-Levels at aged 17/18 in England and Wales. While statistically problematic at the level of the individual, attainment is often measured against predicted individual trajectories using data trends and normal distribution curves towards these outcomes (for example see West, et.al. 2010; Leckie and Goldstein, 2019)

2.2.1.6. Continuous professional development and support (CPD) for teachers

Training and/or support through courses, ongoing learning programmes or specialist provision to enhance the quality of teaching and/or relationship building skills (for example see Bailey & Baines, 2012; Cole et al., 2019)

2.2.1.7. System leadership support

Support for leaders to move towards a leadership approach through which they: a) facilitate conditions that enable others to foster social change b) see the 'whole system' c) use reflection and dialogue to move the focus from reactive problem solving to building futures (for example see Senge, 1990; Senge, Hamilton and Kania, 2015).

2.2.1.8. Fixed term and permanent exclusion

In 1986 in the UK, 'fixed-term' and 'permanent' exclusions were introduced as a last resort to remove a pupil from a school if they had been persistently or severely deviating from the school's behaviour policy (Education Act, 1986). A fixed-term exclusion may last for hours or days for a maximum of 45 days in an academic year. A permanent exclusion removes the child or young person (CYP) from the school's roll or transfers them to an alternative provision such as a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) (For example see Messeter and Soni, 2018).

2.2.1.9. Transfer and transition

These terms are sometimes used interchangeably. However, more focussed studies employ transfer to refer to the move from one school to another and transition to refer to other moves such as from one year group to the next within a school or personal changes such as house moves or new carers (see for example Galton et al. 1999; Reynolds, Miller and Weiner, 2003).

2.2.1.10. Disadvantaged pupils

While noting the transitions working group focus on the needs of a 'vulnerable child that's at risk of exclusion when going through a transition', we have also prioritised the term 'disadvantaged' as this encompasses a wider range of students and hence is more likely to capture the wider range of potential impact arising from the transitions projects. Disadvantage in the English school system is currently defined in relation to whether someone has ever had free school meal (FSM) eligibility over a six-year period is the measure. This is a socio-economic measure and while there are some students who are not identified by this measure, recent studies suggest that its predictive power is only mildly lower than other potential measures. Vulnerable children as defined as those who i) are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children and young people who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child, ii) have an education, health, and care (EHC) plan, iii) have been identified as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (see for example Ilie, Sutherland and Vignoles, 2017; DfE, 2021).

2.2.1.11. Building inclusive shared values and positive relationships

Inclusive values and systems at whole-school level (starting at 'the top') has been recognised as a significant factor impacting on exclusions and key factors of these 'inclusive' systems include caring school staff who attend to child and parent concerns, compassionate teachers who are able to perceive and support peer relationships and strong external support networks (for example see Cole et al., 2019; Coffey, 2013; Topping, 2011 Hamm et al. 2011).

2.2.1.12. Multi-agency collaborative support

Collaboration between the local authority, schools, external agencies, parent, and pupils is particularly significant in relation to the likelihood of successful interventions to support transfer, transitions and to prevent subsequent exclusions (for example see McCluskey et al., 2019; Evangelou et al., 2008).

2.2.1.13. Clear shared and enacted policy

Co-creation and co-design of policymaking 'in partnership' with stakeholders (school leaders, local authorities, parents, leaders, teachers), are more likely to result in a high degree of consensus and support (for example see McCluskey et al., 2019; Cooper, & Tiknaz 2007).

2.2.1.14. Local and school level support

Support from partners/collaborators within the community is significant in supporting individual schools, promoting consistency between schools and for drawing together and sharing regional expertise and intelligence (for example see Evangelou et al., 2008; Galton et al. 1999).

2.2.1.15. Focused support at different levels: whole-school, group, individual

A range of support and interventions that target individuals, groups of students and whole-school level provide for different student needs. Targeted interventions for particular identified individuals are also suggested (for example see Jindal-Snape and Miller, 2008; McGee et al., 2003; Pratt and George, 2005).

2.2.1.16. Organisational/administrative support

Positive relationships and good communication channels before, during and after transition key and teachers play a critical role. Regular information sharing including concerning individual children is an indicator of strong practice (see for example Coffey, 2013; Chedzoy and Burden, 2005).

2.2.1.17. Psychosocial support

Psychological support with the social aspects of transfer (e.g., making friends, maintaining friendships, fitting in, managing the fear of getting lost, avoiding being victimized) (for example see Chedzoy and Burden, 2005, Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013; Anderson et al., 2000).

2.2.1.18. Student voice/involvement in decision making

This is an aspect of transfer that appears to be neglected. However, there is significant and growing evidence of the importance in involving all stakeholders as equal partners in interventions and the need to communication with pupils rather than about them (for example see van Rens et al., 2018).

2.2.2. Three areas of focus during primary to secondary transitions

The following are the three areas of interest that arose from the wider review of a range of literature, including academic sources, and government and charity reports on transitions and support for school transfer. For further details see Kirkman et. al. (2021). These serve to contextualise the projects that follow.

2.2.2.1. Focus one: risk to wellbeing

The risk to mental health is particularly significant in the context of this project, given the impact of the COVID pandemic on current educational contexts and pupils. During periods of transition, key risk factors that can cause children to struggle are additional learning needs, mental health issues, behavioural issues, reduced or absence of parental support, anxiety, bullying or being in care (MHS, 2021). These children have lower levels of attendance compared to other groups, have greater difficulties forming friendships and are more likely to do not feel like they belong at school; they may also exhibit negative behaviours and have lower interest and progress in school than children who do not exhibit these risk factors. Transitions can damage psychological wellbeing, but despite that, not many internationally

reported interventions focus on emotional resilience (Bagnall, 2020). Most children report having difficulty adjusting not just to the new school setting but also to the new social groups, lower self-esteem being a significant contributing factor in those experiencing poorer transitions (West, Sweeting and Young, 2010). Building social relationships with other pupils and teachers is crucial for the sense of community in a school (Coffey, 2013) and arguably, good communication between schools will help in building that sense of community. A temporary pause (Galton, Morrison and Pell, 2000) or even regression (Pietarinen, 2000; Weiss and Baker-Smith, 2010) in academic progress is to be expected, within the year after the transition (Weiss and Baker-Smith, 2010). Although this dip in attainment is attributed to different factors in multiple countries, studies broadly agree that pupils can be supported to develop academic and behavioural involvement and a sense of belonging.

2.2.2.2. Focus two: parental involvement

LaBahn (1995) suggests that a successful parental involvement in school consists of two interconnected points: active participation and commitment; it is with active participation and commitment that parents can support their children's' smooth transition and help them achieve success. There is extensive literature supporting the notion that parental engagement has a positive impact on pupils' learning outcomes. At the same time, it is clear that the nature of parental engagement changes significantly as pupils enter secondary school (Muller, 1995; Mac Iver et al., 2015). This change may be due to parents' beliefs that their children need to be more autonomous, their difficulty in helping with homework and explaining complex curricula or high school teachers' beliefs that parents are disinterested in supporting their children (Simon, 2004). Sheldon (2007) found that schools' systematic efforts in engaging parents can improve school attendance and decrease disciplinary actions. Mac Iver et al. (2015) investigated how such systematic efforts and strong home-school partnerships can support school transitions and academic success and found that parents valued the importance of transition activities, such as organized school visits, parents' meetings, academic support to parents, English language lessons to EAL families, orientation meetings, and schools' setting expectations for attendance, behaviour, and progress before the start of the school year. These studies exemplify how substantial home-school partnerships can have a positive effect on pupils' transition in high school. Wei-Bing Chen and Anne Gregory (2009) argue that parents who model appropriate behaviours and positive attitudes toward school positively impact pupils' perception of school. Parents who demonstrate their own valuing of education by showing an active interest in school activities and offering positive reinforcement can support pupils' academic development. Taken together it is clear that home-school partnerships, teachers' expectations from parents, and parents' experiences of and engagement with schooling can all contribute to pupils' academic progress and behaviour at the start of high school.

2.2.2.3. Focus three: School-based responses

Anderson et al., (2000) illustrate that age-related or developmental characteristics of pupils is arguably a less important factor to consider than the organizational demands placed on them. In addition, Bagnall et al., (2020) demonstrate the significance of achieving an appropriate balance between exposure to school

transition provision and consistency during the transition period. In line with Hammond (2016), they note that prior insight into secondary school life can be beneficial with appropriate support and limits but may also cause anxiety and feelings of overwhelm if appropriate support is unavailable. Thus, schools need to be mindful of the degree to which their provision maintains consistency and gives appropriate support for pupils, while also considering the degree of exposure to new contexts pupils face, and the content of the transitions support activities themselves. Schools tend to view transitions as a time of apprehension for pupils (Evangelou et al., 2008) arising from the need for pupils to manage change and adapt to a different and perhaps more challenging school environment. These challenges are often related to new or different academic structures and requirements as well as social interactions with pupils and teachers (Rice et al., 2001). As a result, schools tend to adopt strategies which help to mitigate either pupil apprehension, understanding of the new structures and requirements, or both.

Successful school transition appears to require coordinated efforts from various stakeholders, with a particular emphasis on parents, pupils and teachers (e.g., Anderson et al., 2000; Bailey & Baines, 2012; Coffey, 2013). Alongside this, schools play a significant role in providing experiences and information that can alleviate apprehension and promote understanding of the destination school requirements. The most frequently cited strategies are toolkits, school visits and summer schools. Toolkits are sets of resources that aim to support successful transition and include information booklets, workbooks, activities, and questionnaires (Evangelou et al., 2008; Rice et al., 2021). Some focus on attainment gains as an indicator of successful transitions (e.g. McGee et al., 2003; Riglin et al., 2013; Bharara, 2020). Visits between schools, both for staff and pupils are highlighted as opportunities for positive school visits (Anderson et al., 2000; Evangelou et al., 2008; Jindal-Snape et al., 2019) although Bharara (2020) notes the lack of evidence for the success of these programmes. Summer schools provide opportunities for pupils to meet other new pupils, gain experience of a new school, receive help with building supportive relationships and understanding the expectations of their new school and to provide targeted support (Anderson et al., 2000; Evangelou et al., 2008). There is some evidence to support the use of this type of differentiated support (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019).

3. NOA Transitions Projects and their Impact

Section 3 begins by outlining the transitions projects that were carried out, presenting definitions of each project including details of the resources involved. After this we review the evaluation project conclusions about their impact.

3.1. Transitions Projects

Fourteen discreet transitions projects were identified and described during phase one through analysis of data from documents, interviews, and subsequent verification discussions. These are: The Bridging Project, CPOMS, Common Transfer Document, Interschool Visits, Parent Information Evening, Booklet, Summer Schools, STAR survey, ELSA, Peer mentoring, Young Minds, SEN CPD, Transitions week, Other Resources, and Transitions Working Group. Each is discussed in turn.

3.1.1. Bridging Project

The Bridging Project was completed in autumn 2020 (end of February 2020). In this project the English Department of two secondary schools collaborated with three Junior Schools. This intervention was created due to the fact that there were different approaches were used when teaching the primary versus secondary English curriculum and students were not engaged in learning. The lessons, teaching resources and lesson plans for the English lessons are available on the website (NOA, 2021a). This project was facilitated by inter-school visits which enabled staff to understand the gaps in the curriculum which could benefit from a bridging project. As well as the English project, the Maths project has been taken up to be developed further by the local Maths Hub who produced a 'Theme Park' bridging resource and Farmyard Maths resource in collaboration with schools across Norwich.

3.1.2. CPOMS

CPOMS is a safeguarding software package for schools. Using this package, teachers can comment on their key areas of concern. There is also space to add extra elements and a variety of tabs that can be used, to provide different data views. The aim of using CPOMS across all schools was to improve communication between schools by getting every Norwich school using the same safeguarding software. CPOMS was chosen as this was already used by most of the NOA schools. The NOA paid for schools to change to this system. Not all schools participated due to the policies of Academy Chains.

3.1.3. Common Transfer Document

The Common Transfer Document was collaboratively designed and comes with a best practice document which contains guidelines for good transition seems to be very helpful. The common paperwork is an excel sheet with key information about the child. It has a number of tabs to be filled in relating to: the secondary school the

child will go do, their name and surname; details of the teacher completing the form, the statement 'this child will settle in well at secondary school'; the tables that are filled in are: academically, socially with peers, socially with teachers, to new routine; SATS in maths, reading and writing; information about SEND, EAL, CLA, safeguarding, young carer; any concerns about the child; information that might assist their class teacher not listed elsewhere; attendance; pupil premium; free school meals; and, concern for the safer school team. All this information provided gives teachers the opportunity to pass down a significant amount of information to the new school. Since it is an excel spreadsheet, it is free to use and can be shared via providers such as OneDrive. All schools are sent the document and the instructions on how to use it. All NOA high schools apart from one have used the new document with their feeder primary schools this summer for cohort 2020-2021'. From the NOA evaluation survey sent to all schools, the Common Transfer Document was scored easy to use, beneficial and helpful with school planning, and it eased communication with primary schools after the request of information had been made.

3.1.4. Interschool Visits

Staff members join schools to observe practice, build relationships, make notes, and design collaborative projects. The intention of these visits was to encourage communication and understanding so key staff could see what life was 'really like' in the secondary school for primary staff, or primary school for secondary staff. 11 primary schools sent staff to various secondary schools and staff from most secondary schools visited up to 8 primary schools. Some schools also engage in additional visits outside the remit of the transitions project visits.

3.1.5. Parent Information Evenings

This Parents evening (admissions) project was delivered in September 2019 in a NOA community centre and was a drop in event which sought to encourage Y6 parents to look at multiple schools when applying for high schools. 5 of the NOA high schools were present at the event. The aim was to help prevent oversubscriptions to popular schools and to help raise the profile of under subscribed schools. The Council admissions team were present to explain the process involved. A guide (NOA, 2022a) was produced to support parents. The open evening was well attended by parents.

Some primary schools and secondary schools also run their own information evenings which provide parents with key updates on transfer to Y7. Several use data from the STAR survey to inform these evenings. The intention was for the STAR survey (NOA, 2022b) to be sent out prior to the evening so the primary could gauge the groups biggest concerns and then address them in the meeting. The success of their event would then be measured in the survey being sent out again to compare results. Resources the school could use for this event were also produced (NOA, 2022c).

3.1.6. School Information Booklets

Transition Spring 2020 (NOA, 2020a): A guide to current practice in Norwich Opportunity Area schools' is a booklet designed to share good practice between schools, with the intention of encouraging school visits and exchange of ideas. There are a lot of good practice examples around the NOA area, but these are not always shared; this is where the booklet becomes very useful. 17 out of the 40 schools asked successfully contributed to this booklet. The booklet was intended as a 'good practice' document but became a 'snapshot of current practice'. The turnaround for the booklet was very tight. A *Parent Guide Transition* booklet was also used during summer 2020 since transitions, school visits and open evenings could not be scheduled due to Covid. This drew on information from the School Transition & Adjustment Research Study (STARS) (UCL, 2021a). A template for a *Y7 Welcome Booklet* was also produced NOA, 2020b) in lieu of interschool visits being cancelled because of COVID. These were repeated in summer 2021 when schools could not hold visits once more and includes a pupil evaluation form at the end of the booklet. Norfolk County Council has bank of additional resources for transition to secondary school, such as transition booklets (NCC, 2021).

3.1.7. Summer Schools

This is a common practice and is in line with the government initiative (DfE, 2013) which started in September 2011 (with the first schools starting their participation in 2012), was aimed at children on free school means (disadvantaged) and looked after pupils and provided targeted support in their primary to secondary school transition. The summer schools ran during the summer holidays, with the main aims being to prepare pupils socially and emotionally and to improve their learning engagement. Main activities involved team building, arts, and sports. Through these experiences, children become familiar with the school premises and staff, while staff members get to know more about their new pupils (including identifying additional needs). Schools were able to design their programmes based on the needs their future Y7 cohort had, and they could decide on the activities to be offered, how the participation days would be blocked. Non-disadvantaged pupils were also offered this opportunity, if eligible pupils turned down a place or if there was surplus funding; non-disadvantaged pupils made up 37% of the attendees.

3.1.8. STAR survey

The team behind the STARS programme define the primary to secondary school as successful when: 'A successful transition involved functioning well in two areas: 1) being academically and behaviourally involved in school and 2) feeling a sense of belonging to school' (UCL, 2021a) which were measured by primary and secondary school teachers, using a custom scale developed by the researchers. These concerns tend to get better once the transition has happened. Interestingly, they found that children's self-control is associated with both positive classroom behaviour, academic attainment, and also positive health outcomes (this trait is also positively linked to parental warmth with long term effects). High level of parental concerns affected how children settled academically to their new schools. Parents

need to be sensitive when sharing their own concerns. Friendship stability was important to the children undergoing transitions and it can have an impact in academic attainment, conduct and prosocial behaviours. The aim of this project was to provide baseline data that would inform project development, and which would also inform evaluations.

3.1.9. ELSA - Emotional Literacy Support training

Emotional literacy support assistants (71 learning support assistants) were trained in November 2020 by EPSS Norwich (educational psychologists Norfolk/Suffolk County Council). They are a licensed training provider who run weekly training sessions. Training is now complete and currently LSAs are practising the ELSA early intervention with pupils with SEMH/trauma experiences that are waiting for CAMHS assessment. There is a dedicated website on ELSA (ELSA, 2022) with educational resources and training courses opportunities. Examples of things covered on the course are social skills, emotions, bereavement, social stories and therapeutic stories, anger management, self-esteem, counselling skills such as solution focus and friendship.

3.1.10. Peer mentoring

After visiting all the high school on their transition days in summer 2019, it was observed that all the schools had some sort of buddy system or similar for their new Y6 visitors. Peer mentoring was a way to establish and embed this practice and give better and more thorough training and confidence to those buddies and to encourage schools to start to use peer mentoring more widely across other year groups and when the Y6 started at the school as the new Y7. This was run by Essex Community CIC early this year (2021) and has not yet finished. Training was intended to help older pupils to support younger pupils: initially Y8 supporting Y7/6. This project has been expanded to include additional age groups and training moved online in response to COVID-19 restrictions.

3.1.11. Young minds

Young Minds is an organisation focusing on mental health for young people. Young Minds was introduced to offer support to teachers to better support parents of those less resilient children, as it was thought by supporting those less resilient parents they could in turn better support their children. The course offered by YoungMinds (2022) involves understanding resilience and its importance (alongside relevant theories behind resilience) and teaches those taking it how to build resilience in the young people they work with. This includes introducing activities that build resilience and building resilient practice in the school settings. There are also academic resilience practices that can be offered, which would benefit the most disadvantaged pupils.

3.1.12. SEND Training

Facilitators/ Educational Psychologists have developed training packages around SEN for school staff. SEN resources included a booklet and training programme as well as webinars.

3.1.13. Transitions Week

An agreement between primary and secondary schools in the Norwich Opportunity Area to streamline transition visits for Year 6 pupils led to most visits being held being within the same two weeks, including one week specifically for vulnerable students. In addition to easing planning for transitions this minimises disruption to learning for year 6 pupils. Despite the original intention, not all schools were able to commit to the same days and timeframe.

3.1.14. Other Resources

Other transition resources were created by the outreach team at the UEA with input from NOA and SEN advisor at Norfolk County Council (UEA, 2022).

3.1.15. Transitions Working Group

The transitions working group was set up to bring together some stakeholders (teachers, school leaders, local agency representatives) to develop and implement strategy around transitions project work. We included the transitions work in our list of 'project definitions' as it emerged in phase one as a significant resource for the staff involved, and one which the early data suggests meets some of the evaluation criteria.

3.2. NOA Transitions Projects' Impact

Each of the fourteen opportunity area projects were reviewed drawing on staff and pupil perspectives, links to wider literature and the evaluation criteria (above). Overall evidence for the impact of the project is reported as strong, weak, or moderate. In each case, the degree of impact for each project classified as either highly likely, likely or unlikely. The strength of the evidence to support this conclusion is classified as Strong, moderate or weak. For further details of the methodology and detailed project scores on the evaluation indicators see Kirkman et. al (2022a).

3.2.1. Bridging Project

The Bridging Project was highly likely to have impacted positively on areas such as transfer, academic understanding, attainment, organisational support and the psychosocial support of the children. There is strong evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of academic behaviour and transfer.

3.2.2. CPOMS project

The CPOMS project was highly likely to have impacted positively on areas such as transfer, organisational support, support at a whole school and local level with particular support for disadvantaged pupils. There is moderate evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of organisation, transfer and communication between schools and supporting those more vulnerable.

3.2.3. Common Transfer Document

The Common Transfer Document is highly likely to have impacted positively on areas such as transfer, organisational support, support at a whole school and local level with particular support for disadvantaged pupils. There is moderate evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of organisation, transfer and communication between schools and supporting those more vulnerable,

3.2.4. Interschool Visits

The Interschool visits project is highly likely to have impacted positively on areas such as transfer and academic understanding. However, there is weak evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of communication and contact between schools and school staff.

3.2.5. Parent Information Evenings

The ELSA training is highly likely to have positively impacted on many areas such as emotional support, support for disadvantaged pupils and student resilience and behaviour. There is strong evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of pupil wellbeing and psychosocial support.

3.2.6. School Information Booklets

The Information Booklets are highly likely to have impacted positively on areas such as transfer, student behaviour and support for disadvantaged pupils. However, there is weak evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of pupil support, transfer, and communication.

3.2.7. Summer Schools

Summer Schools are highly likely to have impacted positively on multiple areas such as transfer, student resilience, value, and multi-level. focused support. There is strong evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of transfer, team building, communication between schools and supporting those more vulnerable.

3.2.8. STAR Survey

The STAR Survey project is highly likely to have impacted positively on areas such as transfer, organisational support, student resilience and behaviour and academic understanding. There is moderate evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of fostering a sense of belonging and behaviour understanding.

3.2.9. ELSA - Emotional Literacy Support training

The ELSA training is highly likely to have positively impacted on many areas such as emotional support, support for disadvantaged pupils and student resilience and behaviour. There is strong evidence of this evaluation of impact on its target areas of pupil wellbeing and psychosocial support.

3.2.10. Peer Mentoring

The Peer Mentoring project is highly likely to have positively impacted on areas such as psychosocial support, student voice and student behaviour. There is moderate evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of supporting those more vulnerable and building resilience.

3.2.11. YoungMinds Training

The YoungMinds Training is highly likely to have impacted positively on areas such as CPD for teachers, support at a whole school and local level with particular support for disadvantaged pupils. There is moderate evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of building student resilience and supporting staff development.

3.2.12. SEND Training

Although this project was explored, the lack of data around participation and impact means that the evaluation team were unable to make an evidence-based assessment of its impact. It may be that the staff involved chose not to participate in the data collection and so this project was rendered invisible. It appears from the lack of evidence that this project did not have a widespread impact. However, it may have had an impact with targeted staff or schools.

3.2.13. Transition Week

The Transitions Week is highly likely to have impacted positively on areas such as transfer, value and support for disadvantaged pupils. There is weak evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas of school transfer and building communication between schools. This lack of evidence is largely due to many schools not proceeding with Transitions Week as planned due to COVID restrictions.

3.2.14. Transition Working Group

The Transitions Working Group is highly likely to have positively impacted on areas such as leadership support, building shared values and local and school level support. There is strong evidence to support this evaluation of impact on its target areas, bringing together stakeholders and opening up lines of communication.

3.2.15. A note on the impact of COVID-19

The degree to which the changes in the context of the projects arising from the COVID-19 pandemic is unclear. However, we constructed a model to estimate the likely impact using evaluation survey responses. COVID impact was conceptualised as the aggregate difference between teacher expectations of project effectiveness and teacher reports of impact of delivery in the light of COVID (for further details see Kirkman et. al., 2022a). Table 2.5b shows this 'COVID effect' for each project. The impact is presented as a negative percentage which reflects our expectation that teachers perceptions of the effectiveness of implementation will increase in a positive direction approximately in line with this magnitude if projects take place in 'normal' circumstances.

Table 3.2.15: Estimated COVID effect for each transitions project

Project	Estimated Covid Impact
The Bridging Project	-20% ²
CPOMS	-5%
Common Transfer Document	-15%
Interschool Visits	-55%
Parent Information Evenings	-30%
School Information Booklets	-10%
Summer Schools	-30%
STAR survey	-30%
ELSA - Emotional Literacy Support Training	-40%
Peer Mentoring	-65%
YoungMinds Training	-30%
SEND Training	-35%
Transitions Week	-40%
Transition Working group	-20%
Average	-30.4%

² In normal/non-Covid times we would expect teacher perceptions of the effectiveness of the projects to increase by this number (i.e. – 20% more effective for the Bridging Project). Other rows should be read in a similar way.

3.2.16. *Summary of the NOA Transitions Projects' Impact*

Table 3.2.16 draws together the likely impact of the fourteen NOA Transitions projects reviewed as part of the evaluation. Each project is listed in turn alongside the likely impact of COVID on its implementation during the timeframe of the evaluation (see section 3.2.15) and an estimation of the strength of the evidence used to support our evaluation of impact. Each of the eighteen impact indicators (see section 2.2.1) are listed in turn for each project and are scored as 2 (highly likely to impact in this area), 1 (likely to impact in this area) and 0 (unlikely to impact in this area). These are colour coded for ease of reference (green = highly likely, orange = likely). A 'likely overall impact' score is listed – this is the aggregate score of projects across the eighteen possible project indicators. A total for each impact indicator is also given at the bottom of each column. These outcomes are discussed further in section 3.2.17.

We advise readers to keep in mind that the likely overall impact scores should be balanced with the impact of COVID, the strength of the evidence and the degree to which the projects targeted impact areas that were covered by other projects. Successful suites of activities will attain good coverage across all of the impact indicators. Notably strong projects in this regard include the Summer Schools, Emotional Literacy Support Training and the Transition Working group.

Key to Impact Indicators on table 3.2.16

1. Student resilience and behaviour
2. Academic and behaviour understanding
3. Parent/carer engagement in transition processes
4. Value
5. Student attainment
6. Continuous professional development and support
7. System leadership support
8. Fixed term and permanent exclusion
9. Transfer and transition
10. Disadvantaged pupils
11. Building inclusive shared values and positive relationships
12. Multi-agency collaborative support
13. Clear shared and enacted policy
14. Local and school level support
15. Focused support at different levels
16. Organisational/administrative support
17. Psychosocial support
18. Student voice/involvement in decision making.

Table 3.2.16: Summary Impact of NOA Transitions Projects across all Impact Indicators

Project	Estimated Covid Impact	Strength of evidence	Impact Indicators																		Likely overall Impact
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
			Degree of impact: Highly Likely = 2, Likely = 1, Unlikely = 0																		
The Bridging Project	-20%	Strong	1	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	16
CPOMS	-5%	Moderate	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	2	2	1	1	0	2	2	2	0	0	15
Common Transfer Document	-15%	Moderate	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	2	2	1	1	0	2	2	2	0	0	15
Interschool Visits	-55%	Weak	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	10
Parent Information Evenings	-30%	Strong	0	0	2	2	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	17
School Information Booklets	-10%	Weak	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	11
Summer Schools	-30%	Strong	2	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	2	1	2	0	21
STAR survey	-30%	Moderate	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	13
ELSA - Emotional Literacy Support Training	-40%	Strong	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	1	2	2	2	2	1	30
Peer Mentoring	-65%	Moderate	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	2	17
YoungMinds Training	-30%	Moderate	2	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	14
Transitions Week	-40%	Weak	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	14
Transition Working group	-20%	Strong	1	0	0	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	0	2	2	2	0	0	22
Support across each indicator (totals):			18	13	4	17	5	9	13	15	23	22	13	4	2	12	16	14	14	18	

N.B. SEND training does not appear in this list due to the lack of data.

3.2.17. Suite of Transitions Projects Impact Summary

Across all fourteen projects the degree to which the 'suite' of activities impacted upon each of the evaluation indicators (see section 2.2.1) was assessed as shown in table 3.2.14³. These are evaluated as either secure, stable, limited or very limited. For further details of the methodology used to determine these results, see Kirkman et. al (2022a).

Particular strengths of the suite of projects evaluated include the support provided for disadvantaged pupils and the focus on activities that targeted year 6 to year 7 transfer in particular. Aside from 'Parent/carer engagement' in the transition processes, the evidence suggests that three other identified priorities of the Transitions Working Group ('Student resilience and behaviour', 'Academic and behaviour understanding' and 'Value') were all secure in their impact, at least in principle (the impact of COVID on transitions project plans must be acknowledged alongside this).

Table 3.2.17: Impact coverage of the NOA transitions projects

Focus	Impact in this area
Student resilience and behaviour	Stable
Academic and behaviour understanding	Stable
Parent/carer engagement in transition processes	Very Limited
Value	Stable
Student attainment	Very Limited
Continuous professional development and support	Limited
System leadership support	Limited
Fixed term and permanent exclusion	Limited
Transfer and transition	Secure
Disadvantaged pupils	Secure
Building inclusive shared values and positive relationships	Limited
Multi-agency collaborative support	Very Limited
Clear shared and enacted policy	Very Limited
Local and school level support	Limited
Focused support at different levels	Stable
Organisational/administrative support	Limited
Psychosocial support	Stable
Student voice/involvement in decision making	Very Limited

Limitations included the degree to which parents were meaningfully engaged in transitions activities and processes, and the lack of coordination and coherent policy from school senior leadership teams across the Opportunity Area.

There was a notable advantage to projects and pupils where school leadership engaged meaningfully and in a sustained way with transitions activities. However,

³ It should be noted that impact will vary according to specifics of delivery across pupils, staff and location.

a noticeable lack of sustained engagement and consistency was also evident across the wider group of NOA schools. This created a 'lottery' of experience for pupils. Nevertheless, it is also clear that this situation has improved over the course of the Opportunity Area Transitions work, in no small part due to the coordinating efforts of the Transitions Working Group and some key individuals who help to galvanize support for pupils and projects.

Other key areas noted for development arising from this stage include the support for student attainment across transitions, and the coordination of multi-agency collaborative support to facilitate good or best practice more consistently and in a sustained way.

A final significant area for the development of transitions activity coverage from this phase of the evaluation was the involvement of pupils in decision making about their transitions processes and projects. Opportunities for consultation were missed in the early stages of the projects and a general lack of awareness of what support was or had been available was felt across the pupil and parent data that was accessed. This can also be extended to involving parents who were most often just 'recipients of information'. Using consultation groups, open forums, and parental representatives on working groups and/or committees, parents can be helpful resources of intelligence, providing insight into childrens' experiences.

Further areas for consideration are the use of a clear research-base for project work and planning. The example of the STAR survey serves to demonstrate that when projects have their basis in robust evidence, they are more likely to have a sustained and significant impact on practice. While evidence was only rated 'moderate' for impact on focus areas, this reflected the limited feedback from secondary schools about this project (perhaps highlighting the coordination issue noted above). However, it was clear from the use of the STAR survey in some primary schools that this was a powerful tool for early intervention with parents. The identification of success criteria in the planning stage can help to concentrate efforts towards intended outcomes. This process also promotes clarity of focus across collaborative projects and in different contexts. Project documents that describe the project, aims, objectives, resources and target audience can be useful in fostering understanding, and in refining project plans before the delivery and evaluation stage.

4. Outcomes, Recommendations and Reflections

In this final section, we introduce the suite of Transitions Development Tools which were developed in response to phase one of the project. Following this, we present six recommendations based on the findings of the evaluation and some final reflections.

4.1. Transitions Monitoring and Development Resources

An original objective in the transitions evaluation brief was to develop a school tracking tool which would have a twofold purpose; firstly, to monitor the impact of transitions activities on pupils in general and disadvantaged students in particular; secondly, to provide feedback that would allow schools to make evidence informed decisions about the ongoing development of transitions support.

However, two significant concerns emerged in relation to this area of the brief. Firstly, there are questions due to the lack of methodological validity when applying statistical data that has validity in large data sets to small groups of students (i.e., using 'general trends' to predict the 'success' of individual students or of small groups of students). Secondly, there were concerns about the balance between schools' capacity to produce and analyse complex statistical data in a meaningful way, and the degree to which any meaningful insights would emerge from this work. Put another way, we asked: 'Would efforts to analyse these complex data sets, however simplified, really be helpful? Would schools gain insights from this analysis that would help to improve their transitions work?' A further issue which arose as we moved deeper into the project was the absence of the school-level pupil data needed to establish a baseline from which to approximate 'normal' expectations in the target areas of resilience, behaviour, academic attainment, and academic and behaviour understanding. As a result, it was agreed that it would not be helpful to develop a statistical data tracking tool. Instead, we produced a set of materials that would serve to fulfil the original aims of the brief; to monitor impact and to provide evidence to make informed development decisions.

The resources in the NOA Transitions Development Tools (Kirkman, et. al. 2022b, c, d, e and f) are designed to be used to help school transitions leaders to conduct an evidence-based review of current support for transitions activities as well as planning for future development. In acknowledgement of the limited staff capacity in this area, the resources are designed to be used in their entirety or focused towards particular areas of need and/or concern. The areas for review are drawn from the transitions evaluation criteria (above) as they provide a consistent framework which is appropriate for the NOA context (although we feel these will also be helpful and transferable for consideration by schools beyond this context).

The development tools adopt a variety of evidence collection and analysis strategies to address some of the limitations of particular approaches. For example, the resources support a review of *what* and *how* processes work AND

what *outcomes* are produced, as well as encouraging teachers to examine *quality* as defined by goals together with *what* we might call less well-planned outcomes or 'side-effects'. The tools can be used at any time, together or in isolation, and in any order. The resources are separated into four areas: current context and needs, current management structures, communication, and relationships, current coverage, and current projects and outcomes.

Audit workbook 1: current context and needs aims to help schools to identify areas of need and to generate evidence to help them draw conclusions about these areas of need in relation to school transfer and transition in the school community. *Audit workbook 2: current management structures, communication, and relationships* aims to help schools to understand who is involved in planning, managing, running, attending and evaluating their transition activities. It aims to help them to identify key individuals and groups whose views and needs may be absent or over-emphasised by their current processes. *Evaluation workbook 1: current coverage* aims to help schools to understand the coverage of provision across the range of transitions activities that they run. It aims to help them to identify areas of provision that would benefit from further development, or which require a disproportionate amount of the available resources. *Evaluation workbook 2: current projects and outcomes* aims to help schools to examine the specific projects and activities that they use to support transitions in detail, and to understand whether they lead to successful outcomes. It aims to help them to identify areas that are high quality, and which are in need of review, development and/or replacement. Together these resources provide a range of approaches that will help schools to monitor the impact of transitions activities, and which will help them to generate the evidence needed to make informed development decisions.

4.2. Recommendations

In the following section, we present a series of recommendations to support the ongoing development of transitions work in the NOA area and which come out of the transitions evaluation. We realise that not all stakeholders will agree with every recommendation. However, we are hopeful that many of the key contributors to transitions work will take up many, if not all, of the recommendations. While we are acutely aware of the wider range of organisations and individuals who carry a responsibility for effective school transitions, we have respectfully framed the recommendations towards schools in recognition of the strategic role they hold moving forward. We trust that the accountability they retain for their pupils' progress and development is incentive enough to take up this mantle within ever changing local contexts.

4.2.1. Recommendation 1: schools should work together to increase the range and frequency of stakeholder engagement in transitions activity planning and delivery.

Across the evaluation, we have seen evidence of engagement with a variety of stakeholders who have an interest in effective transitions support. However, it is clear that pupils and parents, particularly those from more disadvantaged

backgrounds, are underrepresented in relation to intelligence gathering and decision making about the planning and delivery of projects. It is also evident that primary schools, as a proportion of schools in the Opportunity Area, are less well represented in relation to strategic decision making. The Transitions Working Group began the work of drawing together key stakeholders, but there is still more to do in this regard.

We also recommend that, where possible, schools collaborate to make greater use of external specialists, particularly in relation to project planning, as they can help to bring the expertise necessary for developing projects in an evidence-informed way, and can help with identifying clear success criteria and instruments to measure outcomes (see also recommendations 3 and 4). Work with external specialists can also help overcome some of the political tensions arising from potential collaborations between schools and Multi-Academy Trusts who are perceived or who perceive themselves as being in competition with each other. Thus, we recommend that schools work together to increase the range and frequency of stakeholder engagement in transitions activity planning and delivery.

4.2.2. Recommendation 2: schools should continue with and expand on their existing transitions project work in a more targeted way.

It is clear from the evidence reviewed during the evaluation that all of the projects developed as part of the NOA Opportunity Area Transitions have the potential to be effective. However, the degree to which they have been effective at achieving specific outcomes is less evident. This is because the aims and outcomes of each of the different projects and activities were not well-defined at the conception of the work. As a result, across the fourteen projects, we see significant support in certain areas, such as for pupils identified as disadvantaged and for inter-school transfer, but much less evidence of support in areas such as parent/carer engagement in transition processes, multi-agency collaborative support, clear shared and enacted policy, and targeted support for student attainment. The indicators of project efficacy developed for this evaluation (see section 2.2.1) provide an indication of current areas of strength and areas for improvement (see sections 3.2.16 and 3.2.17). However, these can be supplemented with further areas of need that may be identified and understood further using the Transitions Monitoring and Development Resources discussed in section 4.1. Consequently, we recommend that schools continue with and expand on their existing transitions project work in a more targeted way.

4.2.3. Recommendation 3: schools should use a clear evidence-base for transitions project work and planning.

At the outset of the transitions project planning stage, there was a lack of evidence-based understanding and articulation of need. Instead, the Transitions Working Group developed a list of 'fundamentals' that became the stimulus for project planning. While some high-level statistical data was referenced (e.g., school exclusion counts), this did not support the design of targeted interventions.

In the absence of a robust and focused set evidence of need, many projects lacked clear logic to link the specific activities with anticipated outcomes related to identified areas of need. It is likely that greater insights from a *wider* variety of stakeholders into the barriers and opportunities for development around transitions would have speeded up the process of implementation as well as potentially increasing project effectiveness. In addition, drawing on research-evidence in the planning stage would have assisted in selecting appropriate interventions. Where this did happen, projects were more effectively tailored to the needs of the region. In addition, in the absence of evidence, assumptions were made around the willingness of stakeholders and schools to share practice, and to engage with the work in a sustained way, and around the capacity of schools to engage with and deliver projects. As a result of an overreliance on goodwill and existing relationships, some schools did not participate in numerous activities, and, as such, opportunities to incentivise further collaboration and sustained engagement were missed. As a result, we recommend that, going forward, schools use a clear evidence-base for transitions project work and planning.

4.2.4. Recommendation 4: schools should develop and use clear success criteria linked to each project delivery.

Many of the transitions projects lacked clear success criteria. This hampered efforts to review their effectiveness during implementation and to modify them to achieve the same or similar outcomes in the light of challenges that arose from the COVID pandemic. Identifying clear success criteria for new and existing activities at a school level allows activities to be evaluated internally during and after each delivery, and with greater ease. This type of goal-based focus helps to concentrate efforts towards intended outcomes. It is evident that the NOA transitions projects were effective in practice. However, the degree to which they were effective in addressing the most significant challenges of the region is unclear (see also the previous recommendation). Together with logic mapping (e.g., see Hills, 2010), that demonstrates the anticipated link between inputs, processes and outputs, in an explicit theory of change, clear success criteria help to provide a greater sense of purpose across collaborative projects as they can be written into project plans that describe the project, aims, objectives, resources and target audience. Hence, we recommend that schools now move to develop and use clear success criteria linked to each project delivery. These may be individual to each school or shared across a group of schools as appropriate in response to the needs identified.

4.2.5. Recommendation 5: school senior leadership teams should develop and coordinate their efforts through shared policies and collaborative planning.

One of the evident successes of the NOA transitions project work was the formation and work of the Transitions Working Group. This project opened opportunities for collaboration that were not previously possible. At the same time,

both school engagement and project effectiveness were frequently determined by the seniority or operational capacity of the working group attendees. Parties that have sufficient seniority to contribute meaningfully to policies and decision making are also more likely to bring stability to medium- and long-term strategic planning. At the very least, schools should seek consistency in staff involvement as many activities are contingent on effective working relationships and rely on institutional memory for projects delivery. Frequent changes in staffing negatively impact on an organisation's capacity for delivery, which creates inconsistency of opportunity for pupils. Clear shared and enacted policy is a strong indicator of effective transitions practice, so this needs to be written and agreed at a level of seniority that facilitates meaningful implementation. Alongside this, sustained engagement and reliability in implementation is contingent upon the policies and planning being appropriate for all parties. Consequently, it is essential that their development draws on the expertise of both Primary and Secondary phases, as well as specialist expertise where appropriate. Such work with specialists can also help overcome some of the political tensions that may arise from potential collaborations between schools and Multi-Academy Trusts who are perceived or who perceive themselves as being in competition with each other. So, we recommend that school senior leadership teams move to develop and coordinate their future efforts through shared policies and collaborative planning.

4.2.6. Recommendation 6: schools, and other stakeholders where possible, should incentivise and commit to ongoing engagement that includes evidence gathering, monitoring and the development of ongoing work.

A final aspect of the evaluation process highlighted the need for consistency in the ongoing engagement from all stakeholders. Across the transitions work, more systemic developments were inhibited by shifting priorities in light of COVID. However, the reduction in the resources available for transitions work this brought about also served to highlight some of the dangers of targeting significant funding towards dedicated staff time for a relatively small group of people. A context where 'the system' (i.e. all staff and stakeholders) acknowledges their collectively responsibility for supporting transitions work is ultimately in a better position to deliver results. This can be supported through incentives that focus on evidencing successful transition work and on monitoring and development activity. In the absence of accountability for the effective use of resources, there is little incentive to sustain deeper engagement. Such incentives could, for example, take the form of payment delays until completion or additional payments for monitoring and development work. These incentives should be planned at the whole project design phase. The absence of meaningful incentives to sustain engagement was evidenced in the current study, aside from a few notable exceptions, by a significant reduction in ongoing school involvement in collaborative ongoing development and evaluation work.

Alongside this, schools need to further develop robust systems to gather and collate meaningful data apart from that relating to attainment. While attainment scores are helpful summative measures, they do not reveal the many factors that impact on student successes. Further, they are often statistically problematic at a

student level. Collecting and using a greater variety of evidence, with an awareness of the limits of different forms of evidence, will allow schools to make more evidence-informed decisions about a much wider range of activities linked to pupil outcomes. This evidence will feed into decisions about many aspects of student development, as well as informing ongoing transitions project monitoring and development work. Thus, we recommend that, going forward, schools, and other stakeholders where possible, incentivise and commit to ongoing engagement that includes evidence gathering, monitoring and the development of ongoing work.

4.3. Final reflections

Over the course of this evaluation project, we have been fortunate to speak with many committed teachers, support staff, school senior leaders, local organisations, charities, parents and pupils. At the start of the transitions work, none could have predicted the immense challenges that would arise from working and supporting children in the Norwich Opportunity Area through the COVID pandemic. Yet, amidst these difficulties, we have seen numerous examples of project activities that clearly demonstrate impact across multiple areas of need. We were disappointed not to hear more from parents and pupils, yet this was in keeping with the general trends we observed around transitions engagement in the NOA. On occasion, we also witnessed a damaging local climate of intense competition and resource hoarding by some stakeholders. Yet, set alongside this, we have also witnessed an extraordinary generosity of spirit, a sense of hope and purpose, an inspiring belief in building better opportunities for young people, and exceptional professionalism and expertise in the face of deeply challenging circumstances. To those who have given their time, shared your stories and offered your expertise: it has truly been a privilege to speak with you and we thank you for your service.

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