



**Supporting Children Through Transitions in Early Childhood Education in  
England: Perspectives of Educational Psychologists and School Staff**

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## Abstract

This study explored the perspectives of school staff and educational psychologists (EPs) regarding two normative, vertical transitions that take place within the early years of children's education in England: the transition from nursery to Reception (YR); and the transition from YR to Year One (Y1). A wealth of international literature (e.g. Shields, 2009; Boyle et al., 2018) has explored the important issue of children's transition to compulsory schooling (YR in England), the success of which can have long-term implications for children's development (e.g. Hugo et al., 2018; Margetts, 2009). Furthermore, in England research has shown that the subsequent transition to more formal learning in Y1 can be challenging (e.g. Sanders et al., 2005; White & Sharp, 2007). Three focus groups were conducted with sixteen members of school staff in one school and semi-structured interviews were carried out with six EPs to provide a timely update to existing research and to address gaps in the literature. Participant's views towards both of these transitions were sought, with a particular focus on: emotional factors; neighbourhood and community influences; how to support children with additional needs; and the past, present and future role of EPs. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Five main themes were identified for staff: 'supporting social and emotional wellbeing'; 'the jump up to Year One'; 'caring about partnerships with parents'; 'our hands are tied'; and 'targeted support for additional needs'. Five main themes were constructed for EPs: 'starting school is key'; 'Year One: a highly significant transition'; 'anxiety'; 'collaborative approaches to support'; and 'an evolving role for EPs over time'. The findings are discussed and a range of implications for EPs working in early years settings and schools are described.

## Summary

This thesis consists of three distinctive parts:

- The first, 'Part A', is a major literature review which sets the context for the present study. Significant terminology is outlined and the key theoretical perspectives which are relevant to this area are explored. This is followed by a critique of selected empirical literature, which leads to a description of the rationale for the current research.
- The second section, 'Part B', is an empirical paper which details the background rationale, methodology, results, discussion, strengths and limitations of the present study.
- The third and final section, 'Part C', is a critical appraisal which is separated into two parts: a reflective and reflexive account of the research and research practitioner; and the contribution that the present study has made to knowledge.

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### List of Abbreviations

<b>EP</b>	Educational Psychologist
<b>EPS</b>	Educational Psychology Service
<b>PEP</b>	Principal Educational Psychologist
<b>ECE</b>	Early Childhood Education
<b>EYFS</b>	Early Years Foundation Stage
<b>KS1</b>	Key Stage One
<b>N</b>	Nursery
<b>YR</b>	Reception
<b>Y1</b>	Year One
<b>CT</b>	Class teacher
<b>TA</b>	Teaching Assistant
<b>LSA</b>	Learning Support Assistant
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>EDMT</b>	Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition
<b>FG</b>	Focus Group

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## **Part A: Major Literature Review**

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 *The importance of the early years of life*

The early years of a child's life have long been considered a foundation for his or her future life outcomes (Tickell, 2011). Research suggests that the phase of life up to the age of eight constitutes a developmental period marked by a range of cognitive, physiological, social and cultural changes (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; UNCRC, 2006; Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008). In particular, the results of neuroscientific research point to the first three years of life as being fundamentally significant for the development of brain pathways, which go on to influence a child's long-term development (Gerhardt, 2014). Crucially, the effect of positive experiences during this period on children's health and well-being into adulthood has been highlighted (Center on the Developing Child, 2010).

Significant cultural variations are evident across countries regarding the specific age range which constitutes the 'early years' of life. Resultantly, the expectations, norms and practices associated with this stage vary considerably (e.g. Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Tayler, 2005). In 2006 the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) published 'A Guide to General Comment 7: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood'. Within this, the committee outlined a working definition of 'early childhood' as:

...all young children: at birth and throughout infancy; during the preschool years; as well as during the transition to school... (p. 35)

However, the UNCRC (2006) also drew attention to variations in local customs and educational structures regarding when children transition to compulsory schooling; across the world this takes place between the ages of four (e.g. in Northern Ireland; Walsh et al., 2010) and seven (e.g. in Finland; Ahtola et al., 2011). For this reason the UNCRC suggested that early childhood should be considered as "the period below the age of 8 years" (p. 36). This is the definition that this thesis incorporates.

## ***1.2 Experiences within early childhood education (ECE)***

Within the vital early years, one important aspect of children's lives is 'early childhood education' (ECE); in which children make their first steps into educational settings outside of the home. A large body of research indicates that a child's early educational experiences are important for his or her future life trajectories, including their healthy development and educational attainment (Field, 2010; Tickell, 2011). Importantly, it has been suggested that "experiences and patterns of achievement established in the early years continue to hold significance well into a child's future" (Kennedy, Cameron & Greene, 2012, p. 28). Thus, effective early childhood education has the potential to impact positively on a child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical development (Taggart et al., 2006; Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017). In England, there is a history of high-profile government policies and initiatives aimed at targeting early intervention in early years education (e.g. Every Child Matters, 2003; Faulkner & Coates, 2013).

A range of influential experiences take place within ECE, including a number of important organised transitions such as the start of compulsory and/or formal schooling. Seidman & French (2004) position such 'normative' transitions as important crossroads that can "dramatically affect psychological development, including psychopathology, and future life opportunities" (p.1144). Furthermore, Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead (2008) argued that the transitions that take place during this stage of life have consequences for children's current and long-term wellbeing. Thus, it is crucial that a range of key adults, from parents to policy makers, carefully consider young children's experiences through transitions in ECE and seek to support these effectively (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002).

The issue of starting school is relevant not only to the field of education but also to areas such as social policy, health and psychology, since it is widely acknowledged that good transition experiences at this age benefit many parts of a child's development (Dockett & Perry, 2013). Historically there has been widespread international attention directed at transitions in ECE, within research and policy. In England the provision of support to children and families through experiences of



transition has been consistently highlighted as vital in multiple government documents such as the Allen Report (Allen, 2011) and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) & Disability Green Paper (DfE, 2011). More recently, the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) code of practice (DfE, 2014) emphasised the importance of engaging in an integrated approach to supporting “better transitions between life stages and settings, including from early years to primary education” (p.48). Whilst introducing a special issue of the journal ‘Early Years’ focused on transitions in this educational stage, Peters and Dunlop (2014) stated that:

The time of transition being one of both challenge and potential provides a fascinating site for research into a range of issues and this research can offer important messages for early years practice. (p. 323)

In addition to the start of compulsory and/or formal schooling, there are many other transitions that a child might experience during ECE. In many countries the educational system is such that children are likely to have had several experiences of non-compulsory education prior to their commencement of compulsory schooling. Accordingly, this increases the number of transitions they must navigate, adjust to and learn from (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002). In reflection of this, research has examined the transitions occurring within early childhood settings (e.g. O’Farrelly & Hennessy, 2014) and the move to pre-school special education (e.g. Podvey & Hinojosa, 2009). Research has also been conducted in England to explore a further transition that children experience the academic year after they start compulsory schooling; the transition into the more formal Key Stage One (KS1).

### ***1.3 Structure of the literature review***

This literature review is focused upon two critical transition points occurring within ECE: the move from pre-school settings, such as nursery (N), into the first year of compulsory schooling, such as Reception (YR); and, in England, the move from the last year of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (YR) into the first year of KS1 (Year One, Y1). In line with the UNCRC’s (2006) definition the term ‘ECE’ will be used throughout this review to refer to the period of education catering for children below the age of eight years. In England this covers all of the EYFS and KS1. However, it is

important to highlight that the term ECE is used by educationalists and researchers in reference to a variety of age ranges; for example, in some cases ECE is used solely to refer to educational provision for children of pre-school age.

Three questions guided the review of literature that follows:

- i. Which theoretical perspectives and/or models are evident within literature pertaining to the two identified transitions?
- ii. How are these transitions viewed by key stakeholders and in what ways should children be supported through them?
- iii. What role have educational psychologists (EPs) had in supporting these two transitions?

The review begins by exploring the concept of transition, including how to define the notion and the theoretical perspectives of educational transitions which have guided work in this area to date. The review then moves on to conduct a critical analysis of empirical literature related to the two key transition points detailed above. Subsequently, research on the role of EPs working within the early years is considered, with a focus on the involvement of EPs in transition work in ECE. The review concludes by illustrating how the current research aims to address gaps in the literature and by outlining the research questions.

#### ***1.4 Searches and sources of information***

The framework outlined by Gough (2007) was used to guide the systematic process of selecting and critiquing relevant and high-quality literature for inclusion in the review (a visual representation of this process is outlined in appendix A). Several major electronic search engines were used to search for literature: British Education Index (BEI), Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and PsychINFO. The UK government website for The Department for Education was also searched: [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk). Key terms that were used in searches included: 'early childhood education', 'transition', 'starting school', 'formal schooling', 'compulsory schooling', 'key stage one', 'kindergarten', 'early years', 'nursery', 'Reception', 'pre-

school', 'Year One' and 'educational psychologist'. Various combinations of key terms were searched in order to expand and refine the results as necessary (appendix B details the search terms used and results). Reference lists and citation lists of relevant studies were also searched to find further papers for consideration. Searches were carried out in different stages (e.g. to find starting school research; transition to Y1 research; research on the role of the EP) to identify appropriate literature for each of the three questions that guided the review.

### ***1.5 Inclusion and exclusion criteria.***

Research was considered for inclusion within the review based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

#### ***1.5.1 Inclusion criteria***

- Relevant to answering at least one of the review questions
- Literature focused on the English education system was prioritised although literature from other UK and international locations was also considered for inclusion; work originating from locations with the same school starting age as England was prioritised for inclusion
- Needed to be focused on transitions in the context of ECE
- Any type of research method including both quantitative and qualitative designs as well as systematic review papers
- Research carried out between 1998-2019 was included, however where a large body of literature existed (e.g. 50+ papers), research carried out in England and/or during the last ten years was prioritised for inclusion
- Literature originating within peer reviewed journal articles was prioritised although individual chapters in peer-reviewed edited book collections, unpublished doctoral theses and UK government documents and/or research reports were also considered

### **1.5.2 Exclusion criteria**

- Literature not related to the context of education
- Literature not related to transitions taking place in ECE
- Literature focused exclusively on school readiness without reference to the process of transition
- Literature without an explicit methodology

After an initial process of screening, literature which met the inclusion criteria were further evaluated for quality and relevance, as part of the systematic process of Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence framework, in order to decide which literature would be included in the final review (see appendix A).

### **1.6 Additional information regarding the search for starting school literature**

At the initial stages of searching, the concept of 'transitioning to school' was considered broadly to include any literature focusing on the move from non-compulsory to compulsory education. Early searches returned a large number of results which indicated that there is a long history of global attention and investment focused on the matter of transitioning to school. It is possible to access a wealth of international literature on the subject, including numerous large-scale reviews (e.g. Boyle, Grieshaber & Petriwskyj, 2018; Dockett & Perry, 2013; Skouteris, Watson & Lum, 2012; Hirst et al., 2011; Peters, 2010; Vogler et al., 2008). Research has explored various aspects of this transition from multiple theoretical perspectives (Boyle et al., 2018), including: the influence of child characteristics on 'readiness' for school (e.g. Blair & Raver, 2015); communication between educators (e.g. Hopps, 2014); children's perceptions of the transition (e.g. Eskelä-Haapanen, 2017); family involvement (e.g. Miller, 2015); and the influence of siblings (e.g. Dockett & Perry, 2013), amongst other areas.

An exhaustive historical review of international literature in this area was beyond the scope of this thesis and was also not considered to be directly relevant to the context of English education, due to the variation that is evident across countries (e.g. in

terminology used, school structures, school starting ages and cultural contexts) (as described in section 3). Therefore, subsequent searches were narrowed to find literature originating within England for detailed analysis due to the direct relevance to the English school system and the work of EPs. However, due to the limited amount of English literature in this area the inclusion and exclusion criteria (as described in section 1.5) were also applied to the international literature which resulted in a large number of studies being considered in terms of their capacity to inform the current English literature. Thus, research originating within the last ten years (2009-2019) was prioritised for inclusion although older studies were also included where relevant (e.g. Fabian & Dunlop, 2007) (see appendix B and section 2.1.2 of Part C for further detail regarding the search process).

## **2. Educational Transitions**

Before the empirical research into ECE transitions is evaluated, the next part of this literature review will set the context by exploring the construct of 'transition' and the theories and models that have been produced in an attempt to understand the nature of transitional processes.

### ***2.1 Defining transition***

The online Oxford Dictionary (2018) outlines 'transition' as "the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another". However, a search of transitions literature within the fields of psychology and education illustrates that the construct of transition is multidimensional and that there is not one universal definition of the term (Vogler et al., 2008). Indeed, transition has been described and conceptualised in numerous and varied ways (e.g. Kennedy, Cameron & Greene, 2012; Crafter & Maunder, 2012; Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Lam & Pollard, 2006; Vogler et al., 2008). There are unifying elements to these definitions, notably the idea that transition is a complex notion which cannot be easily observed or studied. Secondly, the sense that transition involves forms of change. Furthermore, the position that transition looks different depending on a range of factors.

Psychologists and researchers in the field of early education generally emphasise transition as a process rather than a single event (Kennedy et al., 2012). Kagan and Neuman (1998) discriminated between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' transitions. Vogler et al. (2008) described horizontal transitions as "the movements children... routinely make between various spheres or domains of their lives (e.g., everyday movements between home and school or from one caretaking setting to another)" (p.2). Alternatively, vertical transitions were referred to as "key changes from one state or status to another, often associated with 'upward' shifts" (p.2). Thus, the transitions from nursery to YR and then YR to Y1 can be considered as vertical, normative transitions.

The definition of transition that will be utilised throughout this thesis is as follows:

...the word 'transition' is referred to as the process of change that is experienced when children (and their families) move from one setting to another. For example, when a child moves from home to pre-school, or from pre-school to school. It includes the length of time it takes to make such a change, spanning the time between any pre-entry visit(s) and settling-in, to when the child is more fully established as a member of the new setting. It is usually a time of intense and accelerated developmental demands that are socially regulated. (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002, p.3)

## ***2.2 Theoretical perspectives of transitions in ECE***

A range of theories regarding how children develop underpin and form the foundations of transitions research. Indeed, there are several key theoretical perspectives that are evident within the body of literature that pertains to the issue of transitioning to school (Boyle et al., 2018; Vogler et al., 2008). It is therefore important to examine the key theoretical perspectives at the outset of this review in order to reflect on the influence that these have on the empirical literature which follows.

### ***2.2.1 Developmental***

Developmental theoretical approaches to transition are underpinned by the ideas of 'stage' theorists such as Jean Piaget (Piaget, 1964) who theorised that children actively progress through a series of essential, invariant stages of cognitive growth

and development (Gray & MacBlain, 2015). This perspective positions childhood as a time when children grow and mature across physical, mental, cognitive and socio-emotional domains (Vogler et al., 2008) in a universal, organic manner (Boyle et al., 2018); that is, children follow identical developmental pathways, albeit at varying times, regardless of the culture that they are situated within (Gray & MacBlain, 2015). It is important to note that Piaget's theory of development has been criticised, in part: for being rigid and inflexible; due to the methodological limitations within the qualitative research that was carried out to support the theory (e.g. lacking participant detail and generalising from a small sample); and for failing to recognise the role of a child's environment and features such as individual differences, race, gender and motivation on learning (Gray & MacBlain, 2015).

From a developmental theoretical perspective, transitions within ECE are viewed as "hierarchical progressions through stages associated with chronological age" (Boyle et al., 2018, p.172). Although not referring specifically to transitions in the early years, Seidman and French (2004) described developmental transitions as "gradual and evolutionary", varying considerably between individuals across time. One example of a strand of research in this area that is heavily influenced by a developmental theoretical perspective is the idea of 'school readiness', which focuses on the measurement (e.g. Hughes et al., 2015) and development of child characteristics, such as self-regulation skills (e.g. Sammons et al., 2013) and effortful control (e.g. Hall & Lindorff, 2017), as being central to the success of a child's school start.

### **2.2.2 Sociocultural**

The core principle of sociocultural theories of development is that historical, social and cultural contexts shape children's individual development; children are theorised to actively construct their meanings of the world as a result of their interactions with these varied contexts (Vygotsky, 1978; Boyle et al., 2018). Children are said to learn through social interactions (e.g. with caregivers, peers, teachers, etc.) situated within socio-cultural environments (Vogler et al., 2008). Vygotskian sociocultural perspectives are evident within, for example, the statutory EYFS in England. The

EYFS (DfE, 2017) promotes the importance of adults creating play environments that foster children's development through mutual, interactive activities involving 'sustained shared thinking'; in which adults scaffold children's learning experiences so that they are able to work within their own unique 'Zone of Proximal Development' (Roberts-Holmes, 2012).

It has been argued that transitions can "be best understood using a sociocultural framework" in which "transitions are complex and multi-faceted and invariably involve changes to self-identity born out of uncertainty in the social and cultural worlds of the individual." (Crafter & Maunder, 2012, p.10). Lam and Pollard (2006) proposed a conceptual framework for understanding the transition to school from a primarily sociocultural theoretical perspective. The essential tenet of their theory was the view of children being capable (Babić, 2017), 'active agents' (Huf, 2013) during the process of transitioning from home to school:

...kindergarten is the first early childhood education setting in which young children make sense about 'school' as a place to learn and about themselves as 'pupils'. In this transition, children cross a cultural boundary from home to kindergarten and, in fact, they commute between the two cultural settings (Lam & Pollard, 2006, p.123)

Sociocultural viewpoints suggest that the extent to which the transition to school is challenging for children depends on the degree of 'gap' between the school culture and that of the ECE setting a child previously attended (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). Connected to this, sociocultural theorists have generated the idea that transition symbolises: a metaphorical 'bridge' between pre-school settings (or the home) and school; a child's 'rite of passage' into a new life stage; and a significant time of 'border crossing' (see Huser, Dockett & Perry, 2013 for an overview of these theories). Thus, from this perspective, effective support for children during transition might involve bridging the gap between settings, for example through provision of continuity in key elements of the ECE setting and school.



### **2.2.3 Ecological**

Ecological theoretical perspectives of transition are systemic approaches which, according to Vogler et al. (2008) place “greater emphasis on the links between individuals, macro social processes and historical changes” (p. 4) compared to socio-cultural approaches which focus on the child’s proximate environment. Ecological perspectives are underpinned by the principles of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and, subsequently, the bioecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). These pioneering theoretical ideas have been hugely influential and continue to be highly regarded in the arena of psychological theory and research (Kennedy et al., 2012).

Within this theoretical perspective, children’s development is viewed through a lens which emphasises connections and interactions between various layers of influence, from the proximal, individual level to distal, wider social structures. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that “an ecological transition occurs whenever a person’s position in the ecological environment is altered as a result of a change in role, setting, or both.” (p.26). From this position, given the young age of children in ECE settings and therefore the close involvement of key adults, transitions involve not only the child’s skills, roles and identity developing but also that of their parents and family, as adjustments are made in supporting the child. Ecological perspectives of transition can therefore hold important practical benefits for parents, teachers, support services and, importantly, for children themselves, through a focus on adaptation to change in everyone concerned rather than simply the young person.

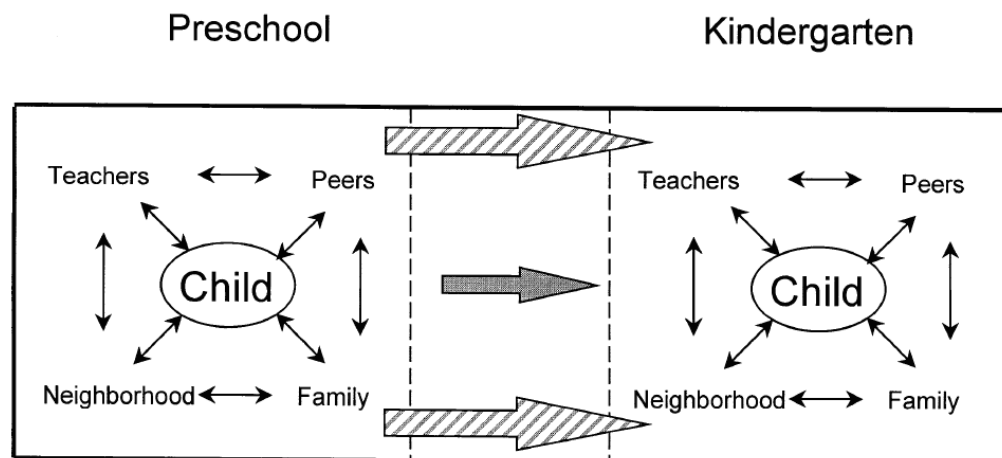
Kennedy et al. (2012) drew attention to the applicability of ecological approaches to the issue of starting school, and in particular highlighted the challenge of possible ‘culture shock’ arising when a child enters school. They posited that this can occur if there is a mismatch between the cultural values in the home and school settings. For example, if a child’s parents emphasise the importance of following a teacher’s instructions above all else whilst the teacher expects the child to display independence and initiative (Kennedy et al., 2012).

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (EDMT) was developed in North America by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) to illustrate how “links among child, home, school, peer, and neighborhood factors create a dynamic network of relationships that influence children’s transition to school both directly and indirectly” (p.492). Whilst this model (see Figure 1) originates from research in North America, it is arguably applicable to transition practices in England as the components are transferable to English school settings and cultures. Children transition from pre-school to formal schooling (termed Kindergarten) at the age of five in North America; in England, this is equivalent to the transition from YR to Y1 in England (see section 3 below).

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) outlined a range of models which they argued are evident within various conceptualisations of the transition to school: the ‘child-effects’, ‘direct effects’ and ‘indirect effects’ models. They criticised these approaches for failing to describe how significant relationships develop and influence transition over time and instead proposed the ‘dynamic effects model’, which emphasises the importance of:

...the interconnectedness of relationships among child characteristics; and peer, family, school, and neighborhood contexts—and how these connections develop and change” (p.501).

**Figure 1: The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (image reproduced with permission from Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000, p.497)**



Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) theorised that the quality of these relationships, and the cumulative effect of these on children, families and the school system *over time*, contribute to positive outcomes or risk factors during transition. An example would be the indirect effect of the quality of teacher-parent relationship over time on a child's transition. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) suggested that "frequent contact, agreed-on goals, and a focus on supporting the child and the child's development of skills" (p.501) are key factors in supporting positive transitions, one of the outcomes of which was referred to as "school competence". This theory highlights the importance of schools developing their practices to be 'ready' for children, which contrasts with the well-researched notion of 'child readiness' being paramount.

#### **2.2.4 Summary**

It is clear that a range of theoretical perspectives are evident within the vast literature that exists on transitions in ECE. This diversity of perspective has influenced the focus of research conducted and, over time, it appears that the emphasis has shifted from a fundamentally developmental theoretical lens (Vogler et al., 2008) towards ecological and sociocultural concepts of transition, which now dominate the literature (Boyle et al., 2008).

The decision was made to adopt the theoretical perspective of the EDMT within this thesis due to the model's strong emphasis on the multifaceted, intricate and broad influences on children's development through times of change. This, it is argued, contrasts with other perspectives which do not provide a holistic enough representation of the complexity of human life. A key strength of the EDMT is the way in which it explicitly builds upon other existing models in order to more fully represent the transition process. Furthermore, the approach of the EDMT respects the possible direct influences of children, including their unique characteristics and the important right they have to express their own views and to engage in authentic, agentic participation in matters that affect them. Alongside this the EDMT also reflects the ongoing influence that a wide variety of other individuals, relationships and systems have on the process of change; crucially, the EDMT provides a comprehensive

illustration of how such influences have the potential to interact in complex ways over time in order to affect children's transition experiences. Hence, this conceptualisation leads to a multitude of possibilities for intervention, which is particularly relevant to the work of EPs.

### **3. Setting the context**

So far, this review has established the importance of early educational experiences and explored theoretical models of transition relevant to ECE. The focus will now move to a critical examination of empirical research focusing upon transition points in ECE. Prior to this, the range of terminology used across the transitions literature in ECE will be explored with the aim of illuminating the multiple and varied differences that are evident, since this has implications for the evaluation of research in this area. Furthermore, an outline will be given of the system in place in English ECE in order to provide clarity around the context of the present study.

#### ***3.1 Disparity in terminology used to describe stages in international ECE***

Whilst arguing for the importance of research into the issues involved in early educational transitions, Dunlop and Fabian (2002) stated that "... there are cultural differences in the ages of transition, provision and curriculum ideology" (p.1). For example, Vogler et al. (2008) asserted that a focus on chronological age as a method through which to define stages of childhood reflects the social norms of Western culture. Indeed, the structure of educational stages within early years education and the language used to describe these stages varies across countries and continents. As a result, there is a huge variety of terminology used across theoretical and research literature depending on the origins of the research; acknowledgement of this difference is important when seeking to critique literature originating from a variety of international locations.

To further add to this complexity, there are instances when the same terminology is used across different literature and yet these refer to provision for children of contrasting ages. For example, in England the term 'pre-school' refers to non-

compulsory forms of educational provision for children aged three to four (which vary in context, size and type), whereas in Sweden the term 'pre-school class' describes the non-compulsory class for six-year-old children which bridges the pre-school stage and compulsory schooling (Ackesjo, 2014).

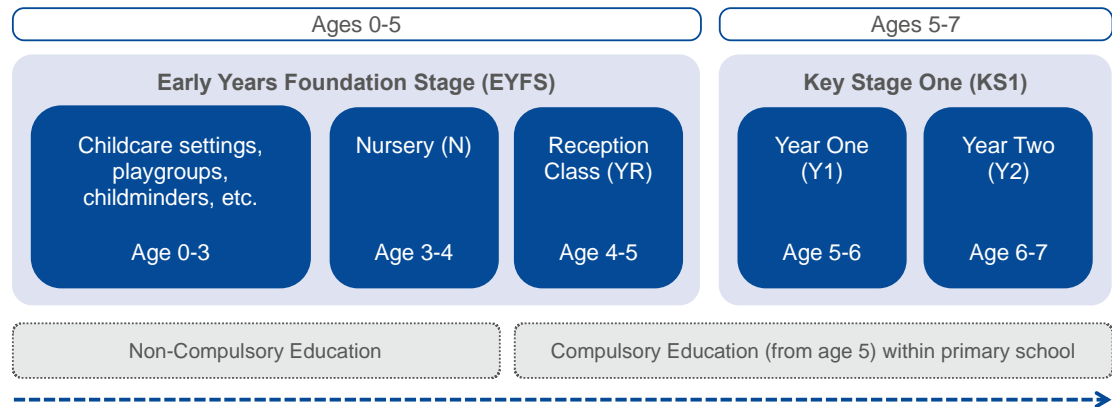
Another key issue arising from the literature is a disparity in the meaning of the terms used when referring to 'starting school' depending on the origins of the research. In some literature the term 'transition to school' is used to refer to the move from non-compulsory to compulsory education, as in England, in others it appears to target the move from play-based to formal educational settings. In many European countries these two areas coincide, so that the transition to compulsory schooling also corresponds with a change in pedagogy towards more structured, adult-led forms of learning (Sanders et al., 2005). In other countries, such as England, these changes happen at different points; YR, which children must transition to by their fifth birthday, is the first year of primary school, however, it is not until the following year, Y1, that children transition from the play-based EYFS to the more formal National Curriculum at the age of six. In this way, YR can be framed as a bridge year between ECE and primary school in England (Dubiel & Kilner, 2017; Huf, 2013).

It is therefore clear that a thorough review of national and international literature in this arena is challenging and, therefore, at the outset requires an elucidation of relevant educational structures and terminology.

### ***3.2 The structure of ECE in England***

The focus of this thesis is on the English education system which is where the current research took place. Figure 2 outlines the structure that is currently in place for educating children between the ages of 0-7 in England. As stated previously, the focus of this literature review is on two transition points taking place within this system: the move from nursery to YR; and the move from YR to Y1. A brief summary of the EYFS and KS1 will now follow in order to provide further contextual information regarding the context of this review.

**Figure 2: the structure of Early Years education and the first Key Stage of compulsory schooling in England, including the age ranges and terminology used**



### **3.2.1 The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)**

The EYFS is the phase of education in England catering for young children from birth to five years of age (DfE, 2017). The EYFS originated in 2000 when it was named ‘The Foundation Stage’ and it provided for children aged three to five years. Under the Childcare Act 2006 it was established as the EYFS and extended to also cover the birth to three age range. According to the Department for Education (DfE, 2017) the EYFS is designed to be an integrated framework of standards for good practice when supporting children’s learning, development and care. It is a statutory requirement that the EYFS is used by all Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education) registered educational settings and early years providers, including childminders, nurseries, pre-schools and schools.

The EYFS is centred around a play-based pedagogy (White & Sharp, 2007) which focuses on several areas of learning, as outlined in table 1. However, it is worth highlighting here that variation in good practice exists across school settings (Hood, 2013) and that YR has been criticised for being too formal, with teachers under increasing top-down pressure to prepare children for the demands of KS1 in what has been termed a process of ‘schoolification of the early years’ (Ang, 2014).

The final year of the EYFS is YR, which children attend between the ages of four and five. It is, however, most common for all children to start school at the beginning of YR, regardless of their age. Therefore many children start school at the age of four in England despite it not being compulsory to do so. Since school becomes compulsory at the age of five in England, it is during YR that children are said to have formally ‘started school’ in a Primary School setting.

**Table 1: the areas of learning which comprise the EYFS in England**

EYFS Areas of Learning	
Prime Areas	Communication and language
	Physical development
	Personal, social and emotional development
	Literacy
	Mathematics
	Understanding the world
	Expressive arts and design

### **3.2.2 Key Stage One (KS1)**

The EYFS ends at the end of YR, when children are assessed against a range of ‘Early Learning Goals’ at the age of five. Following this, children enter Y1, the first year of KS1 of the National Curriculum (NC). In total the NC consists of five key stages spanning thirteen years. The start of KS1 marks a transition away from the play-based pedagogical approach which characterises the EYFS towards the subject-based curriculum of the NC (White & Sharp, 2007). For reference table 2 shows a list of the subjects which comprise the KS1 curriculum.

**Table 2: the subjects comprising KS1 of the National Curriculum in England**

Compulsory Subjects in KS1
English
Maths
Science
Design and technology
History
Geography
Art and design
Music
Physical Education
Computing

### **3.2.3 Summary**

The terminology used within international research in the field of ECE transitions differs considerably according to variables such as location and culture. There are also numerous disparities evident across the literature regarding the meaning of key terms used (e.g. 'pre-school'; 'starting school'). In light of this, this section of the review has made clear the educational context that is the prime focus of this literature review: ECE in England which consists of the EYFS and KS1. Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate the considerable differences in curricular content of the EYFS compared to KS1. This difference is summarised by Hood (2013):

Superficially, in the UK, settings for three- to five-year-old children are more informal with children as groups or individuals often choosing their activities, while the classrooms of children aged six and above appear more formal with more time spent doing things as a class. Within each of these contexts, there is a full continuum of potential initiation by teachers and children, but it is accepted that the EYFS is more child-centred while KS1 classes will be more teacher-centred. (p. 1183)



With the differences between the EYFS and KS1 in mind, this review will now examine available literature related to how children experience the transition from pre-school to school and, in England, the transition into Y1.

#### **4. The transition to compulsory schooling: a review of empirical literature**

##### ***4.1 Why is this transition important?***

Throughout the world, young children and their families anticipate the start of school with expectations and hopes, as well as concerns. (Laverick, 2008, p.321)

The most emphasised transition in the field of ECE is the move to compulsory schooling, which has been described as “a key issue in early years’ education” (Huf, 2013, p. 61). Harper (2015) argued that starting school is a “developmental milestone” (p. 654) and it has been suggested that this period is the first major ecological transition taking place in a child’s life (Lam & Pollard, 2006). In 2014, O’Farely and Hennessy stated that “school commencement is undoubtedly amongst the most significant milestones in early childhood” (p. 329). There is consensus amongst international literature that children’s future learning and social experiences at school are influenced significantly by the process of transitioning to school (e.g. Hugo et al., 2018; Margetts, 2009).

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) argued that the transition to school can be viewed as a “sensitive period for later school success” (p.494) as development is affected by a variety of influences through this time and small changes can have large effects on future trajectories. Skouteris, Watson and Lum (2012) highlighted that, for some children, navigating a smooth transition to school can be difficult as children are required to adapt to changing environments as well as changes in pedagogical approaches. Researchers (e.g. Dunlop & Fabian, 2002) have emphasised the shared responsibility for supporting young children’s positive transitions to school. With this in mind, the question arises of how best practice in this area has been defined; that is, considering the salience of this transition, it follows that the issue of how to support it to be a successful transition is highly important.

During initial searches of the literature it was noted that some strands of research in this area have used the measurement of biological markers, such as cortisol levels, to measure children's responses to the challenge of transitioning to school and, in addition, consider skills such as 'effortful control' (e.g. Hall & Lindorff, 2017; Parent et al., 2019) and 'self-regulation' (e.g. Blair & Raver, 2015) as being influential to the success of a child's transition. These approaches can be criticised for seeking to research the complex ecological process of transition using reductionist methods based only on physiological and parental report measures. From Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective of development and Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's (2000) EDTM, this positivist approach to research does not focus sufficiently enough on environmental, contextual and time-sensitive aspects of human development (Podvey & Hinojosa, 2009). In contrast, research that seeks to explore the transition to school from ecological and/or sociocultural perspectives is concerned with the perceptions, experiences and practices of key stakeholders involved in the transition. In line with the theoretical perspective of this thesis, the EDTM, the following questions therefore guided the search of literature for inclusion within this part of the review:

- What has research communicated about the experience of transitioning to school (e.g. YR)?
- How can the process of transitioning to school (for all children and for those with additional needs) be supported effectively?

## ***4.2 Research in England***

Three empirical papers were identified that explored the transition to compulsory schooling within English school settings. The findings of these papers will now be outlined before a supplementary overview of international research findings is given.

### ***4.2.1 Home-school partnerships during the transition to school***

Shields (2009) conducted semi-structured interviews with six parents to gain their perceptions of their relationships with staff through their child's transition from nursery to YR in England. Parents were interviewed during the first term of YR and were asked

to reflect back on their experiences with nursery staff as well as describe their perceptions of relationships with professionals in their child's new school setting (e.g. how involved and important they felt and their views on transition arrangements). The research sought to explore parents' perceptions of differences between their experiences in the two settings. Shields reported that parents felt less involved in their child's learning after the transition to school and that they felt more negatively about their relationship with school staff: "Most parents felt that they had a more distant and less reciprocal relationship with their child's teacher than they had had with their key worker at nursery" (p. 237).

From the EDMT of transition, the results indicated that the discontinuities in parents' relationships with staff over time led to a reduction in parents' perceptions of being partners in their child's education. The small-scale study by Shields provided qualitative insight into the experiences of parents during their child's transition to school; Shields argued that the voices of this participant group had not been represented previously and therefore this study addressed a gap in the literature. However, the study did not provide detail regarding the method of data analysis used and the results thus appear to be somewhat anecdotal in nature; two of the interviews were presented in the form of a case study account (though not explicitly described as such) and the remainder of the results were portrayed as a "compilation of comments" (p. 244). This indicates a lack of a rigorous, systematic methodology which limits the validity of the findings and thus suggests that further research to gain the views of parents in this area would be beneficial.

In a later study, Potter, Walker and Keen (2013) provided a case study of the 'Fathers Transition Project'; a project in the North of England which sought to actively engage fathers during the process of their child transitioning from N to YR (on the same school site) by offering them regular opportunities to engage in "male-oriented activities and men-only groups" (p. 77). The aim of engaging fathers was to "enhance their children's enjoyment, achievement and learning at this critical early stage of development" (p.77) and to maintain fathers' subsequent involvement in their child's schooling. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data were gathered to gain

information regarding levels of attendance and to explore the views of fathers (n=5), grandfathers (n=2), project workers (n=12) and children's centre staff (n=11) using semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A grounded theory approach was used to analyse data. Potter et al. reported a significant increase in fathers' engagement during the nine-month long project and benefits in terms of: better rapport with school staff after the project; fathers' increased participation in children's learning; and closer parent-child relationships. All of these factors can be viewed as key interactions within the EDT and the results therefore suggest that interventions/programmes aimed at fostering parental involvement (particularly that of 'harder to reach' fathers) during transition can have positive effects on these interactions over time, thus benefiting the transition process.

Finally, Cartmell (2017) undertook an ethnographic study to explore school staff's (teachers, support staff, head-teacher, governing board), parent's and children's experiences of starting school and to consider the discourses surrounding the transition in terms of the implications these have for stakeholders' actions. Participants attended one school in the North West of England. Cartmell used a multi-modal approach to data collection incorporating a variety of approaches: semi-structured interviews with parents and their child at two time points (pre-YR entry and the end of YR); in-depth participant observations over time; conversations with children, school staff and parents; and reviewing of written documents (e.g. school handbooks; home-school agreements; pupil reports; National Curriculum documents; and council documents).

Cartmell reported that several parents within this study felt excluded from the process of supporting their child adjust to school during the move to YR. This contrasts with the principles of ecologically oriented theories which position parents as intrinsic to the process of transition. Furthermore, it was found that the experience for children during this transition involved developing their identity as a new school child, which was influenced by being instructed to follow new routines and rules within an authoritarian school ethos in which the adults held the power.

Cartmell concluded that schools should provide parents with well-defined information about the ways in which parental support is expected during the transition to school. Alongside this, Cartmell advocated for the importance of “democratic relationships” (p.366) between staff and parents in which both groups learn from one another during the transition process, thus removing the “peripheral position” (p.366) of parents evident within the study which, Cartmell argued, reflects a view of staff as “experts” and parents as “novices” (p.366). Democratic relationships would strengthen the mesosystem interactions between parents and staff during this critical transition, for example by fostering an environment in which “the ‘ins’ and ‘outs’ of school life” (p.370) are understood by all.

The studies by Shields (2009), Potter et al. (2013) and Cartmell (2017) indicate that fostering close relationships with parents and promoting parental involvement with school activities and children’s learning are key ways in which parents and children can be supported by teachers during the transition to school. These findings are reflected in international research (e.g. Walsh, Romo & Jeon, 2018; Harper, 2015; Dockett, Perry & Kearney, 2011) indicating that one of the central influences on successful transition to school is family involvement. Furthermore, it has been argued that professionals have a role in supporting not only children’s adjustment but also that of their parents during the complex ecological process of transitioning to school (e.g. see Webb, Knight & Bush, 2017, for an Australian example).

#### ***4.2.2 Provision for children with additional needs***

International research has suggested that some children are particularly vulnerable during the transition to school, such as those who are economically deprived (C4EO, 2010; Peters, 2010), those who are “linguistically diverse” (Peters, 2010, p. 34) and those with special educational needs (SEN) (Harper, 2015; C4EO, 2010, Peters, 2010), amongst others. To the awareness of the researcher, in the context of England there have been few published studies specifically focused on how to support children with additional needs during the transition to school. This is surprising given that within the English SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) specific reference is made to

supporting “smooth transitions to school nursery and reception classes” (p.90), which emphasises the significance of the issue. Research in this area is particularly relevant when considering the application of findings to the work of EPs in England.

Table 3 provides an overview of the recommendations for how to support children and young people with additional needs during transitions, within two documents published by the DfE in England (DfE, 2015; DfE, 2018) and the findings of a UK paper by Connolly and Gersch (2016). Several common themes are apparent within these recommendations, namely, the importance of: providing multi-agency support that is tailored to the unique needs of children and their families; appropriate sharing of information; effective preparation and planning; and professionals engaging in sensitive approaches which reflect an awareness of the complex feelings that can arise during the transition process. Findings within international research mirror these points (e.g. Rous et al., 2007; Peters, 2010; Daley, Munk & Carlson, 2011; Hutchinson et al., 2014). For example, Peters and Dunlop (2014) highlighted the need for “strengths based partnership approaches” (p.327) in order to provide appropriate differentiation (e.g. of policies, the curriculum, pedagogical approaches and systems) for children and families with complex needs.

#### ***4.2.2.1 A note regarding the use of labels***

It is important to highlight that there is discussion within international literature around the use of language when referring to children with additional needs during the transition to school (Dockett, Perry & Kearney, 2011). It has been argued that the term ‘vulnerable’ focuses on the possibility of failure or negative experiences and disregards the presence of opportunities during the process of change. Dockett et al. instead used the term “families with complex support needs” (p. 3), arguing that this avoids the stigma connected with labels such as ‘vulnerable’, ‘disadvantaged’ or ‘at risk’:

The terminology of complex support needs acknowledges the challenges faced by families, focuses on the interaction of different problems and highlights ways in which families, with appropriate support, can draw on their own strengths to make positive changes in their lives. (Dockett et al., 2011, p.3)

**Table 3: details the key recommendations made by policy and research in the UK regarding support for children with additional needs during the transition to school (salient points have been highlighted in bold for ease of the reader)**

Author(s) and key details	Key recommendations
<p><b>DfE (2015)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SEND Code of Practice: statutory guidance on the responsibilities of LAs, health organisations and educational settings towards those with SEN aged 0-25 (e.g. duties, policies and procedures)</li> </ul>	<p>“Partners [...] should aim to provide <b>personalised, integrated support</b> that delivers positive outcomes for children and young people, <b>bringing together support across education, health and social care</b> from early childhood through to adult life, and improves planning for transition points such as between early years, school and college... “ (p.39)</p> <p>“SEN support should include <b>planning and preparing for transition</b>, before a child moves into another setting or school. This can also include <b>a review of the SEN support being provided</b> or the EHC plan. To support the transition, <b>information should be shared</b> by the current setting with the receiving setting or school. The current setting should <b>agree with parents the information to be shared</b> as part of this planning process (p.88)”</p>
<p><b>Prodger &amp; Smith (2018)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A working party report that was funded by the government, named “A celebratory approach to assessment in the early years”</li> </ul>	<p>This document highlighted the use of tools such as ‘<b>the one page profile</b>’, a document used to <b>share important, personalised information</b> about a child, to support effective transitions for children with SEN.</p>
<p><b>Connolly &amp; Gersch (2016)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An Irish study that sought to gather the perspectives of parents (five mothers and one father) of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who were starting primary school</li> <li>Used semi-structured interviews</li> <li>Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)</li> </ul>	<p>Connolly and Gersch (p. 257) outlined several implications for EPs and other professionals <b>supporting children with ASD</b>, and their families, during the transition to school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“<b>parent and child-centred</b>” approaches are paramount;</li> <li>an awareness of <b>the range of feelings that parents may have</b> during the transition is necessary;</li> <li>understanding that <b>parents can face “difficulty and uncertainty”</b> when considering which school they would like their child to attend due to their “sudden entry into an unfamiliar world of special education” and/or their anxiety around the “impact of stigma and fear of bullying and exclusion” is key;</li> <li>awareness of, and sensitivity to, <b>what parents consider when searching for their child’s school placement</b> is needed (e.g. access to social opportunities as well as academic ones);</li> <li><b>supporting parents in ways which “inspire confidence and hope”</b> (e.g. through a personable approach) is key in order to address potential “power differentials with parents”;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>home-school meetings</b> prior to the transition and afterwards, “to discuss concerns and strategies”, would be useful;</li> <li>• parents would benefit from the support of a “<b>key liaison person</b>” to ensure their participation in the process of transition; and</li> <li>• awareness and understanding of “<b>the complexity of the lives of parents of children with ASD</b>”, would be beneficial.</li> </ul> <p>(see section 6.2 for further detail regarding the study)</p>
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This position fits well with the principles of the EDMT and moves attention away from a within-child deficit model when considering support for children who have additional needs. As Dockett et al. stated, “the collective term, children with special needs, cloaks considerable diversity” (p. 46). The term ‘children with additional needs’ is used within this thesis to encompass any characteristics of the child, family, school or wider system which result in a child needing additional support during transitions in ECE. Specifically, the term ‘SEN’ is used according to the following definition:

A child or young person has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her (The Children and Families Act, 2014, Part 3, Section 20 (1))

#### ***4.2.3 Children’s perspectives on the transition to school***

Since children are at the centre of the complex, dynamic transition process (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) it is arguably crucial to consider how they experience the process of transitioning to school. Therefore, a number of international researchers have focused on capturing the views of children (e.g. Harrison & Murray, 2015; Eskelä-Haapanen et al., 2017) from an ‘empowerment perspective’ which engages children as active participants in the research process (Loizou, 2011). Fabian and Dunlop (2007) highlighted the potential for feelings of excitement during the process of change due to the opportunities that present for new social interactions and new contexts for learning. They also suggested that confusion, anxiety and apprehension can be triggered due to the unknown elements that often accompany change. Fabian and Dunlop argued that children should be provided with support to navigate transition and develop resilience through the process.



The present literature review did not identify any studies conducted in England focused specifically on ascertaining the views of children regarding the transition from pre-school settings (e.g. nursery) to YR (the start of compulsory schooling), which indicates a gap in the literature.

### ***4.3 Reviews of international literature***

Reviews (published between 2009-2019) of international literature will now be considered in order to illustrate a broad overview of the key themes that have emerged within global research in this area, with a focus on the markers of successful transitions as well as what can be done to support successful transitions to school. Five reviews were considered (Boyle et al., 2018; Dockett & Perry, 2013; Skouteris et al., 2012; Hirst et al., 2011; and Peters, 2010). Although it is acknowledged that the findings of these reviews will each have been influenced to some degree by the interpretation and/or biases of the researchers conducting them, it was felt that considering several reviews would minimise the effect of this on the summary provided.

#### ***4.3.1 A multitude of themes***

In the most recent review, Boyle et al. (2018) produced a comprehensive 'integrative review' of recurrent trends across international research on the transition to school carried out between 2000-2015. One of the strengths of this review is its clearly detailed, systematic methodology which adds validity to the conclusions drawn. Boyle et al. identified six recurring themes: "relationships"; "readiness"; "transitions activities"; "pedagogy"; "power"; and "policy" (p. 174). This indicates how diverse the themes within this area of research are; a thorough review of all areas is beyond the scope of the current review. Key findings from several reviews, regarding what successful transitions are and how they can be supported, have therefore been represented in figure 3 and table 4 below.

### 4.3.2 What are the markers of a successful transition to school?

[...] it can be argued that what constitutes a successful or unsuccessful transition to school has less to do with the presence or introduction of discontinuity in itself and more to do with how children, families, schools and communities interact and support each other, how prepared they are for the transition, and how successfully they cope with and adjust to the changes. (Hirst et al., 2011, p.10)

There is no universally recognised technique for measuring a child's 'successful' transition to school (Nicholson, 2018), however much research has aimed to identify the markers for this. Margetts (2009) argued that "adjustment to the new school situation is a critical outcome of successful transition" (p. 311). Peters (2010) examined research on successful transitions from ECE to school with regards to children's learning and achievement. Peters gave an explicit overview of several "overlapping and interconnected themes" (p.15) that were identified amongst the literature regarding the features of a successful transition to school, as shown in figure 3. These themes demonstrate the complex nature of the transition to school and the multitude of outcomes which are arguably difficult to measure using quantifiable tools.

**Figure 3: shows the themes identified by Peters (2010, p.15) regarding the features of a successful transition to school**



Importantly, Peters (2010) highlighted the caveat that what is regarded as ‘success’ during the transition to school is dependent on numerous factors, including the theoretical view of the research and which individual’s perspectives are captured (e.g. pupils, families, teachers). Peters also emphasised the complexity of factors that feature within transition experiences and the diversity that is evident within and between groups of children. For this reason Peters argued that an examination of various perspectives and long-term learning trajectories taking place over time is needed when seeking to consider ‘success’ during transition processes, rather than a focus on individual markers (e.g. skills and signs of adjustment). Hall and Lindorff (2017, p.2) pointed to the “fragmented and sometimes contradictory evidence” in this area of research, arguing that further research is needed to create a unified knowledge base that can support successful school starts for more children.

#### ***4.3.3 How can successful transitions to school be supported?***

In light of the research around what constitutes a successful transition to school, the question follows: what can be done to facilitate successful transitions? (e.g. what is best practice and how do key stakeholders work together?).

##### ***4.3.3.1 The debate around school readiness***

It is pertinent to stress here that debated perspectives of ‘readiness’ (Dockett & Perry, 2013) inevitably influence the approaches used when supporting children during the transition to school. For example, strategies aimed at developing children’s skills in order to foster a successful transition indicate that a ‘child readiness’ view is held, wherein the responsibility for adapting to the culture of the new school setting lies with the child (e.g. the child must adjust to the expectations, structures and norms of the school environment) and is influenced by features of the child. This arguably narrow perspective has been criticised for failing to account for the variance in children’s trajectories (Kennedy et al., 2012), yet it has also been suggested that a ‘school readiness’ agenda remains clear within the English political landscape:

The DfE formulates readiness from the perspective of children as learners able to take advantage of opportunities presented by school [...] The DfE stance (if applied in specific ways) would appear to ignore the evidence that to be successful, support for young children in transition must also target environmental factors and is not solely dependent on a tick-list of child behaviours. (Kennedy et al., 2012, p.21)

Alternatively, those strategies and approaches which focus more broadly on what the systems around the child (e.g. teachers, parents and the wider school community) can do to adjust and cater for each child's unique needs during the transition to school can be conceptualised as valuing the importance of 'Ready Schools' (Pianta et al., 1999); that is, what schools, families and communities can do to be ready for children (Dockett & Perry, 2013). This approach to support is arguably more useful for EPs who work with key adults around the child (Kennedy et al., 2012) and is also more in line with the ecological perspective of the EDMT. Hirst et al. (2011) advocated for "comprehensive, multi-dimensional notions of readiness for school", arguing that these "recognise multiple aspects of readiness, including children's readiness and the school's readiness for and responsiveness to children, and the support of the family and community" (p. 12).

#### ***4.3.3.2 Supporting children during the transition to school***

A wealth of literature has sought to identify what can be done to support positive transitions to school, from a variety of perspectives of 'readiness' (Hirst et al., 2011). An overview of findings from several research reviews published within the last ten years is outlined in table 4. These indicate that a huge number of strategies, focused on various systems around the child, have the potential to support children's successful transitions, although the extent of the effectiveness of these strategies is not always reported. In line with the principles of the EDMT, the importance of fostering positive relationships between all involved so that respectful, open partnerships can develop appears to be a key theme across the literature. Working together (i.e. teachers; teachers and parents; by involving children in meaningful ways) is also central to the transition process. Importantly, complex approaches to

transitions support, informed by the unique needs of each child (Ma, 2019) and his or her family, are vital. As Dockett and Perry (2013) stated:

[...] this interest [in the transition to school] can also increase the pressure to identify ‘ what works’ . Evidence from effective transition experiences suggests that there is no single best model. Rather, research emphasises the importance of contextually and culturally relevant approaches that focus on relationship-building among all of those involved in the transition to school. At a time when we are becoming more aware of the complexity of transition, we need to be wary of attempts to simplify it by reducing it to a series of practices or actions. (p. 172)

**Table 4: Key research findings regarding how to support successful transitions to school outlined within reviews (2009-2019) of international research (key points are highlighted in bold for the ease of the reader)**

Author(s)	Key review findings
<p><b>Dockett &amp; Perry (2013)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian review of trends within international literature carried out between 2005-2012</li> <li>• A critical evaluation of ‘tensions’ apparent across the literature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Argued that <b>broader perspectives</b> of readiness that encompass “child, school and community factors” (p. 172) provide scope for a wider range of transition practices to be used.</li> <li>• Highlighted the importance of “<b>recognising the diversity of experiences and backgrounds</b> of children and their families” (p. 172) in contrast to focusing simply on, for example, developing children’s <b>literacy and numeracy skills</b>.</li> <li>• Whilst <b>parents and teachers</b> show an awareness of working together, they <b>do not always do so</b>.</li> <li>• The experience of their child transitioning to school can be <b>stressful</b> for parents; therefore, <b>providing support to parents</b> is key.</li> <li>• “While the nature of transition programmes varies considerably, they tend to extend <b>over time</b> rather than focus on the first day of school” (p.169)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Skouteris, Watson &amp; Lum (2012)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian research review of all relevant international research conducted prior to January 2012</li> <li>• Defined ‘pre-school’ settings as all childhood services</li> <li>• Focused on the influence of <b>collaborative relationships</b> between teachers, parents and children on transition outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Discontinuity in learning experiences</b> between pre-school and primary school (e.g. amount of free-play; level of structure; formality of environment) requires children to adapt; this can be challenging for some children.</li> <li>• <b>Continuity in pedagogical approach</b> (e.g. teaching practices and philosophies) between pre-school settings and primary schools results in more successful transitions: <b>collaborations between staff</b> are a key part of a “wider support system” that includes <b>effective joint-working between professionals, parents and children</b>; <b>understanding children’s prior learning experiences</b> and building on these is important; and provision of <b>many transition activities is more effective</b> than few.</li> <li>• <b>Teachers are fundamental</b> to easing the transition: good practice includes collaborative activities between professionals (e.g. face to face meetings; joint planning; information sharing) for all children; <b>mutual respect between</b></li> </ul>

	<p><b>teachers</b> of different age groups is needed to facilitate effective working relationships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Family support</b> is key and requires <b>partnership work with teachers</b>: parental involvement supports teachers' knowledge of children's interests and strengths; <b>ensuring that parents receive resources and information</b> that can foster involvement with the transition is important.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hirst et al. (2011)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature review conducted for the 'KidsMatter Transition to School Parent Initiative'</li> <li>• Developed by the Australian Psychological Society and funded by the Australian government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School <b>staff have a primary role</b> (e.g. through <b>promoting partnership work</b> with parents and services; <b>supporting parents</b> to develop children's <b>socio-emotional skills</b>; <b>targeting "potential barriers to participation"</b> (p.6); fostering children's and parent's feelings of <b>belonging</b> and <b>connection</b> to the new school;</li> <li>• <b>Parents and carers</b> also have an important role: they need to be supported to feel <b>confident</b>; have <b>knowledge and understanding</b> of school systems; and feel able to become involved with the <b>school community</b>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Peters (2010)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An extensive, detailed review focused primarily on literature carried out in New Zealand but also incorporating other nations such as Australia, Canada, the UK, the USA and some other European countries</li> <li>• Literature from 2004-2009 included</li> <li>• Commissioned by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Implications for staff</b> seeking to support children's successful transitions were outlined as: "<b>working with the child</b>" (e.g. the microsystem; by making links between learning in ECE and school); "<b>sharing information</b>" (e.g. through familiarisation activities such as visits to new school); "<b>working with families</b>" (e.g. by establishing positive home-school partnerships); and "<b>personal qualities of teachers</b>" (e.g. a proactive, positive, enthusiastic and confident attitude).</li> <li>• A range of <b>support for teachers</b> was highlighted as necessary to maximise the success of children's transitions: "<b>time and support to become ethnographers of culture</b>" (e.g. support to develop cultural understandings); "<b>small class size</b>"; "<b>a flexible curriculum</b>"; "<b>training and professional development</b>"; "<b>acknowledge the special role of the new entrant teacher</b>"; and "<b>resourcing for transition activities</b>".</li> <li>• "As well as <b>respectful, reciprocal relationships</b>, to enhance continuity between early childhood education and school, teachers in both sectors need to have knowledge of the curriculum and pedagogy of both ECE and school" (p. 62)</li> <li>• <b>Implications for parents and families</b> seeking to support children's successful transitions were outlined as: "<b>early childhood education</b>" (e.g. ensure that their child attends ECE); "<b>foster friendships</b>" (e.g. to develop their social skills, as having friends supports successful transitions); "<b>networking with other parents and caregivers</b>" (e.g. to provide support and foster out of school friendships); "<b>rich learning experiences</b>" (e.g. to support school readiness); "<b>opportunities to find out about school before they start</b>" (e.g. requesting school visits); "<b>get involved with the school</b>" (e.g. sharing information about home culture); "<b>expectations</b>" (e.g. have positive expectations of children as learners); "<b>health checks</b>" (e.g. ensuring their child does not have unidentified hearing problems); "<b>routines</b>" (e.g. support new sleep patterns prior to school start); and "<b>advocate for children</b>" (e.g. if problems arise).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The benefits of <b>providing support to parents and families via parenting programmes</b> (e.g. to reduce 'parental distress' during the transition) were highlighted.</li> </ul>
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#### **4.4 Summary**

There is a scarcity of empirical research focused upon children's, parent's and teacher's perceptions of the transition to compulsory schooling (YR) in England. Furthermore, there is a lack of English research examining how to support successful transitions to school for all children and for those with additional needs. This is despite the focus within government documents (e.g. DfE, 2015; DfE, 2018) on the importance of supporting educational transitions for children with SEN.

It is possible that the reason for the lack of research is that in many other countries the transition to compulsory schooling (or primary school) coincides with a move to a formal curriculum, which in England does not take place until the following year when children enter KS1. This transition, whilst potentially viewed as a less distinctive transition, has received specific research attention in its own right (see section 5).

Whilst there is a plethora of international research in the field of starting school literature, regarding what constitutes a successful transition and how to support children to have positive experiences, the applicability of findings to the English school context is limited due to variations in school starting ages and curriculum structures which vary widely across other countries. The findings of this international research are therefore limited in generalisability to England.

### **5. The transition to Key Stage One in England: a review of empirical literature**

#### **5.1 Why is this transition important?**

In England, children experience a further transition when they move from YR into Y1 at the age of five. Whilst the transition to YR is the transition to compulsory schooling, the subsequent move to Y1 can be viewed as the transition to formal schooling. An explicit exploration of this transition is highly important when seeking to support

children most effectively during transitions in ECE, since research has shown that the transition to Y1 presents a number of distinct challenges for children, teachers and parents. For example, in a research report for the DfE, Brooker et al. (2010) found that, of all the transitions taking place within English ECE, headteachers and YR teachers were most concerned about the transition from YR to Y1. Sanders et al. (2005) argued that:

The fact that the transition to more formal learning does not coincide with the transition to school in England offers both opportunities and challenges...However, there is a danger that the move to Year 1 may not be sufficiently recognised by school staff as a time of anxiety for children and their parents. (p.2)

The following questions guided this part of the review:

- What has research communicated about the experience of transitioning to Y1?
- How can the process of transitioning to Y1 (for all children and for those with additional needs) be supported effectively?

Due to the limited amount of literature focusing exclusively on the transition to Y1, the time frame for inclusion within this review was widened meaning that research conducted between 2004 and 2019 was selected.

## ***5.2 The issue of discontinuity across pedagogies***

Research into the experience of transitioning from YR to Y1 has generally focused on issues of discontinuity arising from the change to a more formal curriculum that is associated with the transition (e.g. Fisher, 2011).

In 2004 Ofsted conducted a detailed review into the practices involved in the transition from the Foundation Stage (now the EYFS) to KS1. To do this, twenty-eight schools across nine local authorities were visited. Teaching sessions were observed, pupil work was examined and discussions were held with school staff, parents and pupils at two time points: spring term of YR; and the subsequent autumn term of Y1. Focal points for review included the degree of “appropriate progress” (Ofsted, 2004, p.1) pupils demonstrated, in areas such as social skills and learning, and school



management of the transition process. Table 5 illustrates the aspects of successful transitions highlighted by Ofsted and, in contrast, the issues identified through the review.

**Table 5: Key findings of the study by Ofsted (2004) (salient points have been highlighted in bold for ease of the reader)**

Identified features of successful transitions to Y1	Identified issues
A <b>whole school approach to fostering continuity</b> between the EYFS and KS1	A lack of attention regarding <b>how to link EYFS pedagogy with the subject-based KS1</b> , which resulted in <b>“abrupt transitions</b> to more formal approaches” (p.2). This was sometimes due to <b>timetabling pressures</b> and a <b>focus on national tests</b> at the end of KS1
<b>Positive contributions from Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCo)s</b> , particularly through <b>target setting</b> and <b>curriculum monitoring</b>	A particular <b>focus on literacy and numeracy progression</b> resulted in <b>less time</b> for <b>creative and expressive</b> subjects areas
Effective use of <b>teaching assistants (TAs)</b> to “contribute to <b>assessment</b> , support <b>pupils with special educational needs</b> , provide insights into the <b>needs of individuals</b> and maintain <b>established routines</b> ” (p.2)	Insufficient <b>involvement of subject coordinators</b> in transition planning
<b>Effective communication with parents</b>	<b>Assessment arrangements</b> were not always efficient and were impacting upon <b>school admission age</b> by increasing the likelihood of children starting school at age four instead of five.

The findings from the Ofsted (2004) review provide evidence for the importance of ecological aspects of the transition to Y1 on positive outcomes; organisational features such as the involvement of key staff (not only teachers but also SENCo)s, TAs and subject coordinators all had important roles in transition planning), communication with parents and approaches at the level of the whole school were all emphasised. The salient issues identified were largely related to discontinuities in curriculum and pedagogical approaches, but also included other systemic factors such as timetabling issues and external pressures at a national level (e.g. due to testing arrangements).

As a result of this inspection, Ofsted outlined a series of recommendations for good practice in schools; effective school organisation, curriculum continuity, appropriate

assessment and recording of children's progress were all highlighted as critical. One strength of the review was the wide range of data collection methods used (e.g. observation, examination of written work, discussion with key individuals) which helped to triangulate the perspectives of various individuals. However, the method of data analysis was not described and so it is unclear how the findings were drawn out from such a sizeable data set. It is also questionable how such a large and potentially diverse set of data were reduced to a set of general statements regarding this transition. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that Ofsted is a UK government organisation who arguably had a biased interest in the focus of the inspection and the outcomes highlighted. This contrasts with the peer-review process which published empirical research studies are subjected to and thus caution must be exercised when interpreting the results.

In another government commissioned report published in 2005, Sanders et al. conducted a large scale review of children's, parent's and teacher's perspectives on the transition to Y1. The report focused on practical features of the transition (e.g. what was happening and how individuals would like things to improve). Three data collection methods were utilised: a review of literature from 1993-2003; telephone interviews with Foundation Stage Coordinators and Y1 teachers in sixty schools (from a national sample); and case study visits (during the summer term of YR and autumn term of Y1) to twelve schools from the interview sample, during which interviews took place with children, parents, school staff and governors.

The results were in line with the findings of Ofsted (2004); navigating a change in pedagogy from play-based to structured learning, with the associated increase in expectations of pupil's self-management skills, was the most prominent issue for teachers. Children also emphasised the impact of this change on their enjoyment of learning, although conversely "some welcomed the learning challenges presented in Year 1" (p.1). Parents highlighted a wish for more knowledge around the expectations of Y1 and an opportunity to meet the Y1 teacher prior to the start of the year. Sanders et al. detailed the main strategies used by schools to ensure children's smooth transitions to Y1 as broadly related to three areas: induction processes; practices that

enhance continuity; and good communication between key stakeholders (see table 6). Importantly, teachers identified “children who were younger/less mature, were less able, had special educational needs or spoke English as an additional language” (p.3) as having a higher likelihood of difficulty through the transition; Sanders et al. concluded that support should be given to these groups of children, though, critically, they gave no details regarding what this support might look like.

**Table 6: Strategies identified by Sanders et al. (2005) that were used to facilitate a smooth transition to Y1**

Strategies	⇒ an <b>induction process</b> for children transitioning into Y1 (e.g. through visits)
	⇒ <b>efforts to ensure continuity of practice</b> (e.g. routines, activities, expectations and access to play-based resources) between YR and Y1
	⇒ <b>good communication</b> between <b>staff</b> (e.g. through meetings between YR and Y1 staff), <b>parents</b> (e.g. through communication between staff and parents) and <b>children</b> (through discussions with pupils about their views of Y1).

The reports by Sanders et al. and Ofsted are now over thirteen years old and the results must therefore be considered with an awareness that the surrounding political and social contexts have since changed significantly; for example, there has been a change in government since their publication, with resultant changes in educational policy and practice. This limits the applicability of the findings to the present day.

Since the publication of the reports by Ofsted (2004) and Sanders et al. (2005), there have been a number of published empirical research papers focused exclusively on the transition to Y1 in England. For example, Fisher (2009) aimed to explore whether the transition to Y1 “has been made especially difficult by contrasting pedagogies” (p. 132). The focus for the study was on children’s views of themselves as a learner. Fisher made use of an open-ended question that sought to find out the feelings of a random sample of 2,381 children, 420 parents and 94 teachers (YR and Y1) in one

LA about the transition to Y1. Schools were sent the question and asked to forward it to relevant teachers and parents, who sent written responses back. Children were given child-friendly versions of the question with space to record a picture.

Fisher reported consistency in the concerns raised by YR and Y1 teachers, these included: “children being bored/restless”; “children not having enough time to play”; “teachers feeling generally uncomfortable about current practices”; “explicit mention of the constraints of the literacy strategy”; and “differences between Foundation Stage and Year 1 being too pronounced” (p. 138). Views were also consistent among parents regardless of whether their child was in YR or Y1 at the time they gave their response; parental views were said to vary between feeling that the transition to Y1 was/would be too difficult, to feeling that the transition was/would be a positive opportunity in which their child could benefit from access to a more formal curriculum. Fisher noted that parents were more negative about the transition if their child was a boy. For children’s views, Fisher found that children generally expressed a sense of “looking forward to” Y1 (p. 140), however some negative views were also expressed and these were categorised as “leaving behind what is loved and familiar” and “anxiety about what is to come” (p. 141), which included a focus on the maintenance of friendships being key. This finding is supported by that of Huf (2013) who found that being part of an established culture of peers, developed during YR, supports children during the transition to the formal curriculum of Y1.

However, the study by Fisher (2009) can be criticised for several reasons. Firstly, the use of postal questionnaires as a method of data collection posed difficulties; for example, Fisher acknowledged that this led to sample bias, in that schools who viewed the transition negatively were more likely to send a response back (thus skewing the results towards negative views of the transition). Also, there were no clear guidelines around how to introduce the pupil questionnaire to children which is likely to have resulted in variability, thus reducing the validity of conclusions drawn regarding children’s views. The study also lacked a clear method of data analysis. Notably, the categorisation of responses into percentages suggests a view of

knowledge that can be quantified, compared and contrasted, which is arguably at odds with the principles of qualitative research.

In a study with a contrasting design to that of Fisher (2009), Orlandi (2014) engaged in an ethnographic approach by carrying out regular naturalistic observations of nine children (in three different schools) over three years from nursery to the end of Y1. The aim was to explore children's experiences of school. Interviews were also conducted with the children and staff to check the researcher's interpretations of the observations. Orlandi suggested that the children valued social aspects of play experiences and the well-being gained through opportunities to learn outdoors. Children felt negatively about "abrupt interruptions to the play in which they were becoming engrossed" (p. 303). Orlandi also found that YR and Y1 teachers experienced 'conflicting pressures' which impacted upon their confidence and the children's experiences. These included the need, and desire, to engage in effective early years practice (e.g. by respecting and following children's interests) alongside the pressure to "complete tasks, achieve objectives and control the children's learning to be certain of progress towards targets and to provide evidence of attainment for others" (p. 304). In conclusion, Orlandi advocated for the provision of "critically reflective" professional development opportunities for teachers to support them through these challenges.

More recently, Nicholson (2018) found that top-down pressure, or the 'downward push' of National Curriculum requirements, affected teacher's pedagogical decision-making as they made efforts to bridge the discontinuities between YR and Y1; children in the study were prepared for Y1 by formalising their learning experiences in the final term of YR. This indicated that the expectations of the more formal National Curriculum impacted upon the delivery of the EYFS. However, the study had a small sample of only two teachers and twenty-three children; the use of thematic analysis as the method of data analysis on the sample of two interviews is questionable and therefore limits the reliability of the conclusions drawn.

The research findings outlined thus far indicate that the discontinuity between pedagogies across these two stages of education (EYFS and KS1) in England represents a systemic issue that has the potential to impact upon children via the resultant effect on the mesosystems around them; for example, the requirement to provide a formal curriculum in Y1 leads to teacher's feeling pressured, which thus results in abrupt transitions that are less smooth experiences for children.

### ***5.3 Children's perspectives on the transition to Y1***

White and Sharp (2007) elicited the views of seventy children regarding the transition to Y1 as part of a wider study involving case study work in twelve schools. Semi-structured interviews, supported by children's drawings, were conducted in the summer term of YR and autumn term of Y1 with children who were selected by their teachers to represent a balance of gender, birth date, and achievement level. The sample also consisted of a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This variety of sample is a strength of the study. Whilst there were a range of views, it was found that children generally viewed the transition as positive in the sense of it being an opportunity to 'get bigger' or 'grow up'. Alternatively, many of the children described changes in teaching methods negatively and this impacted upon their enjoyment of Y1. For example, there was a change in the language children used regarding school activities, from the value of 'play' in YR to 'hard work' in Y1, though this was noted to be less apparent in children attending a school where a play-based approach was continued from YR into Y1.

The findings of the study by White and Sharp (2007) add to those by Sanders et al. (2005) by providing further evidence that teachers, parents and children share the view that the change in curriculum between YR and Y1 is a challenging aspect of the transition. Importantly, the findings demonstrate that children's views of school can be negatively affected by their transition experience, which has important implications for school professionals looking to support them. These findings are also supported by the recent study conducted by Nicholson (2018). An exploration of the factors that influence whether children view the transition as an opportunity or challenge would be

beneficial in future research. One drawback to the study by White and Sharp (2007) is that the data were gathered a considerable time ago, as with many other studies in this area, which again limits the applicability of the findings to the present day since the social, political and policy contexts surrounding the topic have now changed.

#### ***5.4 A developmentally (in)appropriate curriculum?***

In many parts of Europe children continue to have access to a play-based curriculum at an age when children in England are transitioning into the more formal KS1. For example, in Nordic countries such as Sweden the transition to formal schooling takes place when children transition out of a voluntary pre-school class to school at the age of seven (Ackesjö, 2014). Awareness of this cultural disparity in age of provision has led to a broader debate around what form a developmentally appropriate curriculum should take for children of this age range (e.g. Walsh et al., 2010). The issue of pedagogical discontinuity between the EYFS and KS1 has led some educators in England to seek to extend play-based learning opportunities into KS1. For example, Fisher (2011) detailed an action research project conducted with twenty YR and Y1 teachers aiming to foster 'developmentally appropriate practice' in their classrooms and to evaluate the impact of such practice on Y1 outcomes.

Examining the transition to Y1 within the English education system involves an acknowledgement of the question: why is there a move away from a play-based approach to learning in England at the end of the EYFS when children are five or six years old? From an ecological theoretical perspective, it is arguably important to recognise that this is a socially and politically derived decision which can be viewed as a macrosystem impact upon children, parents and educators.

#### ***5.5 Summary***

The transition to the more formal education of Y1 in England has been researched to a greater degree than the transition to compulsory schooling (e.g. nursery into YR) in England. Research indicates that discontinuity, or tension, between the pedagogical approaches in the EYFS and KS1 is the key challenge during this transition, for

teachers, parents and children. However, further research would be beneficial, particularly regarding how to support a successful transition to Y1 for children with additional needs.

## **6. Relevance to Educational Psychology**

So far, this literature review has:

- Highlighted the importance of ECE for a child's future wellbeing and school success;
- Explored relevant theoretical perspectives of educational transitions; and
- Systematically reviewed the empirical literature on two key transition points in English ECE

Lastly, the focus will now shift to research on the work of educational psychologists (EPs) in relation to transitions in ECE in England.

### **6.1 *The role of the Educational Psychologist working in the early years***

Research in this area is highly relevant for EPs who have a clear role to contribute to early years work (Kelly, 2000; Dennis, 2003; Farrell, 2006; Shannon & Posada, 2007). For instance, the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2015) in England states that EPs should be involved in supporting children with SEN in the early years, for example “to identify effective strategies, equipment, programmes or other interventions to enable the child to make progress towards the desired learning and development outcomes” (p.88). Despite this, a search for literature focused on EPs working in the early years context returned relatively few results when compared to other aspects of EP's work. Most recently, Douglas-Osborn (2017) conducted an Action Research study to explore the role of the EP in one early years setting. Reflecting on the model of practice that was developed as a result of the project, Douglas-Osborn argued that EPs could make a larger contribution to the early years sector by “providing a more holistic and intensive approach to supporting practitioners” (p.406). One context in



which this could occur is through the provision of support to schools regarding transitions in ECE, through the lens of the EDMT.

## **6.2 Educational psychologists and transitions in ECE**

Involvement in work connected to transitions is an important aspect of the role of the EP. One of the 'Standards Of Proficiency' (SOP) for practitioner EPs outlined by the Health Care Professions Council (2015) is to "understand change and transition processes at the individual, group and organisational level" (p.17). This responsibility is reflected in the body of EP literature that explores various aspects of transition. For example, research has focused on risk and resiliency during the transition from primary to secondary school (e.g. Bailey & Baines, 2012), the experiences of pupils with SEN transferring to mainstream secondary school (e.g. Neal & Frederickson, 2016) and, more recently, transitions relating to the post-16 age range (e.g. Morris & Atkinson, 2018).

Strikingly, a review of available literature demonstrates that research into the topic of transitions in the field of British Educational Psychology has focused most heavily on transitions other than the move to YR or Y1. In contrast, there is a distinct lack of empirical research into the practical and emotional support that EPs give to individuals and organisations regarding transitions in ECE. More specifically, to the researcher's awareness there has been no published research that has examined EP involvement with or perspectives towards the transition to KS1. This is surprising given that EPs are in a unique position to improve school effectiveness, at individual, group and systemic levels (Fox, 2009) and, as described above, that EPs have a key role within both early years settings and transitions work generally. It could be argued that, as part of a child's exosystem, EPs are ideally suited to working closely with the mesosystems in a child's world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); those systems which greatly influence the success of children's transitions (Boyle & Wilkinson, 2018).

A discussion paper written by Kennedy et al. (2012) stands out through its specific and unique focus on the EP role with issues linked to the transition to school. The authors suggested that psychological theory and research can be used by EPs at

several levels of intervention, with the principles of Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's (2000) EDMT at the core of their work, to "minimise the potentially adverse impact" (p.20) of transitions for young children. Examples given included: supporting staff in early years settings to develop transition programmes; supporting parents through conducting 'preparation for school' workshops; and engaging in individual work focused on promoting smooth transition processes for children with additional needs. Kennedy et al. also gave case study examples of processes, practices and methods of record-keeping being carried out across one local authority (LA) with the aim of supporting all children to be school-ready and all schools to be ready for pupils transitioning to school. They concluded by arguing that EPs could have a useful role in conducting research to evaluate the kinds of transition interventions described within the case studies, in light of their detailed knowledge of research design and evidence-informed practice. As Kennedy et al. (2012) stated:

Because of their expertise in adopting interactionist perspectives and applying problem-solving frameworks, educational and child psychologists can provide insight and support to parents, schools and other agencies to ensure that transitions in the early years are successful, smooth and exciting experiences for children. (p.28)

Although not focused exclusively on the role of the EP in early years transitions, another paper by Byrnes (2012) considered the involvement of EPs in supporting early years transitions as part of a wider project aimed at promoting effective partnership work with parents during transitions. Byrnes described the EP role in the context of supporting parents of children with Downs Syndrome, a group who are potentially vulnerable during the transition to school due to their complex SEN. Byrnes emphasised the key role that EPs can have in "shaping the assessment and understanding of children at the earliest stage" (p. 83) in order to contribute to vital early intervention efforts (Allen, 2011). The work of EPs in one LA in England was described, which included: supporting children with complex needs by coordinating and attending School Entry Planning meetings; chairing regular multi-agency meetings; and attending community-based pre-school parent support groups in order to help parents with their concerns in an informal setting. The positive outcomes of this work were summarised by Byrnes as follows:

[...] evaluative comments and project outcomes emphasise the value of providing well co-ordinated and family focused services for children and their families at times of transition. EP partnerships with parent support groups impact positively on parental confidence and support professionals in allaying parental concerns at pivotal moments in children's lives. (p. 81)

Lastly, Connolly and Gersch (2016) conducted a study in Ireland to gain the perspectives of parents (five mothers and one father) of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) regarding their child's transition to school. Semi-structured interviews were used and data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Connolly and Gersch concluded with implications for the work of EPs, arguing that they have an important role in supporting pupils with ASD during the transition to school (see table 3 for an outline of key findings). They argued that although EPs do not have time to assume the role of transition coordinator for families and children, instead EPs have the skills to highlight the findings of research studies regarding parent's perspectives and to support other professionals to be keyworkers for parents.

One strength of the research articles by Kennedy et al. (2012), Byrnes (2012) and Connolly and Gersch (2016) is the insight given into some of the work that EPs have carried out in England in this area, which, as stated previously, is an extremely under-researched area. Conversely, there are several drawbacks to the papers. Kennedy et al. focused most heavily on the role of EPs supporting ECE transitions at the systems level of the LA and did not address in detail how and when EPs might actively support such transitions through their day-to-day work with schools, parents and children. Furthermore, the paper by Byrnes is limited in detail and the direct views of the EPs within the LA were not represented. It is therefore unclear how individual EPs constructed their role and how far they felt that they were making an impact on the aims described. Arguably this also holds true for the discussion by Kennedy et al. as well as the paper by Connolly and Gersch, thus indicating that there is a gap in this area.

### **6.3 Summary**

Since research shows that transition experiences within ECE can have long-term impacts on children's developmental trajectories (e.g. C4EO, 2010), it is surprising that there is a dearth of literature which focuses explicitly on the role of EPs in supporting school professionals and parents with issues pertaining to these transitions. Additionally, the research that has been conducted is now several years old which arguably limits the applicability of the findings to the present social and political contexts that influence the English education system. Furthermore, no research was identified during this review in the arena of EP work on the transition from YR to Y1, despite this being an area of focus for educational research and government attention.

In conclusion, as research indicates that ECE transitions are significant experiences for all school aged children, their parents and their educators, then it is argued that further research into the nature of the EP role in this area would be highly valuable (e.g. how EPs perceive the transitions and their knowledge regarding how to work with schools and children at this time, particularly children with additional needs).

## **7. The present research**

### **7.1 Rationale**

Following on from the evidence analysed throughout this literature review, the current study sought to provide a timely update to existing research in England (e.g. Shields, 2009; Sanders et al., 2005; Kennedy et al., 2012) and to examine identified gaps in the literature.

To the researcher's knowledge there is a distinct lack of literature carried out in England concerning transitions in ECE, which is surprising given that children experience not one but two salient transitions during this time. Specifically, there is a dearth of empirical literature which focuses on the experience of starting compulsory schooling (YR) in England. Thus, it was decided that two vertical and normative ecological transitions that take place during ECE in England would be explored in the present research: the move from N to YR, and the move from YR to Y1. The decision

to engage in a holistic consideration of both transitions was key; past research has looked at one transition or another rather than viewing them as continual processes taking place during children's ECE (which would be in line with a more ecological approach to transition). Therefore, the aim of the study was to explore both of these transitions distinctively as well as together in order to build on existing research. From an ecological and dynamic perspective, this presented a unique opportunity to explore how the interactions between children's ecologies change and develop over time through two normative transitions.

The study sought to explore, on a small scale, the perceptions of school staff and EPs in order to provide one example of professionals' views in this area. Clearly, the processes involved in ECE transitions have been constructed in numerous complex ways across the literature reviewed. From a social constructionist position, a question follows regarding how school staff and EPs themselves are perceiving and experiencing the concept of transition. It is argued that an examination of this is important since these professionals work to support young children through transition processes and the views they hold in relation to effective practice, in turn, will impact upon their practice. The present study therefore sought to explore these views, and, specifically, to consider whether these reflect an ecological view of children's development in line with the EDMT.

Furthermore, it was noted that much of the literature in this area of research appears to be written as fact; that is, in a way that suggests that there are known truths that can be captured about transition (e.g. which school practices are effective?). However, the current study questioned whether such facts exist and instead sought to examine individuals' views of transition within a qualitative research design. Specifically, the study focused in on several areas that had received little focus in prior research:

- The emotions that arise during transitions in ECE and how these might influence the dynamic interactions taking place between key individuals within the transition ecologies; it was felt that an exploration of the emotions that arise during the

transition process could lead to important insights into the experience for parents, teachers and children, thus leading to implications for action.

- The neighbourhood and community influences that school staff and EPs perceive to be salient during ECE transitions.
- The ways in which support can be given to children who have been identified as 'vulnerable' during these transitions; as there is little research in England focused on the types of support given to children with additional needs during these transitions.

The study was deemed to be highly relevant to the practice of EPs due to the key contributions they are able to make to early years transitions work and, alongside this, the gap in the research literature regarding EP's perceptions of their role in this area.

## ***7.2 Research questions***

With a specific focus on two key ecological transitions that take place during ECE in England (the move from nursery to YR, and the move from YR to Y1), this study sought to explore the following six research questions:

1. What are the views of class teachers, support staff and EPs regarding the transition from nursery to Reception?
2. What are the views of class teachers, support staff and EPs regarding the transition from Reception to Year One?
3. Which emotional factors are perceived to arise during these transitions?
4. Which neighbourhood and community factors are perceived to influence these early transitions?
5. What kinds of 'additional support' are perceived to be important for children who are considered to be vulnerable during these transitions?
6. How do EPs view their past, current and future role in supporting these transitions?

The perceptions and experiences of school staff (class teachers and support staff) and EPs working in one urban English LA were sought for each research question, to

“allow for multiple factors affecting the quality of transition experience to be considered concurrently” (Kennedy et al., 2012, p.24). The study aimed to establish implications for the practice of EPs working holistically within early years and school settings to support transitions in ECE.

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## **Part B: Empirical Study**



## 1. Abstract

This study explored the perspectives of school staff and educational psychologists (EPs) regarding two normative, vertical transitions that take place within the early years of children's education in England: the transition from nursery to Reception (YR); and the transition from YR to Year One (Y1). A wealth of international literature (e.g. Shields, 2009; Boyle et al., 2018) has explored the important issue of children's transition to compulsory schooling (YR in England), the success of which can have long-term implications for children's development (e.g. Hugo et al., 2018; Margetts, 2009). Furthermore, in England research has shown that the subsequent transition to more formal learning in Y1 can be challenging (e.g. Sanders et al., 2005; White & Sharp, 2007). Three focus groups were conducted with sixteen members of school staff in one school and semi-structured interviews were carried out with six EPs to provide a timely update to existing research and to address gaps in the literature. Participant's views towards both of these transitions were sought, with a particular focus on: emotional factors; neighbourhood and community influences; how to support children with additional needs; and the past, present and future role of EPs. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Five main themes were identified for staff: 'supporting social and emotional wellbeing'; 'the jump up to Year One'; 'caring about partnerships with parents'; 'our hands are tied'; and 'targeted support for additional needs'. Five main themes were constructed for EPs: 'starting school is key'; 'Year One: a highly significant transition'; 'anxiety'; 'collaborative approaches to support'; and 'an evolving role for EPs over time'. The findings are discussed and a range of implications for EPs working in early years settings and schools are described.

## 2. Introduction

This research sought to explore the views and experiences of school staff (class teachers and support staff) and educational psychologists (EPs) regarding two normative transitions that take place within the early years of children's education in England: the transition from nursery to Reception (YR); and the transition from YR to Year One (Y1). The following literature review illustrates the rationale for the research and concludes with the research questions which guided the study.

### ***2.1 The importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE)***

The early years of a child's life are considered to be a foundation for his or her future life outcomes (Tickell, 2011). Research has suggested that the phase of life up to the

age of eight constitutes a developmental period marked by a range of cognitive, physiological, social and cultural changes (e.g. Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; UNCRC, 2006; Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008). Importantly, the effect of positive experiences during this period on children's health and well-being into adulthood has been highlighted (Center on the Developing Child, 2010). That is, experiences that take place within the early years of a child's life, including those in early childhood educational settings, can have long-lasting effects on his or her development.

The term 'early childhood education' (ECE) was defined by the UNCRC (2006) as incorporating those stages of education which support children below the age of eight; this is the age range therefore encompassed by the present study. However, it is important to highlight that the term ECE is used by educationalists and researchers in reference to a variety of age ranges; for example, in some cases ECE is used solely to refer to educational provision for children of pre-school age.

In England, in light of the definition by the UNCRC, ECE includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Key Stage One (KS1). The EYFS caters to children from birth to five years of age and is an integrated framework that sets out the standards for good practice in supporting children's learning, development and care (DfE, 2017) in all Ofsted registered educational settings (e.g. childminders, pre-school settings, nursery and YR classes). The final year of the EYFS is YR, which children attend between the ages of four and five. It is during this year that children start compulsory schooling in a Primary School setting in England. Following YR, children enter Y1; the first year of KS1 of the National Curriculum (NC), which in total consists of five key stages spanning thirteen years.

The NC is characterised by a more formal subject-based curriculum. This stands in contrast to the play-based pedagogical approach of the EYFS (White & Sharp, 2007) that focuses on several 'areas of learning'. However, YR has been criticised for being too formal due to teachers being under increasing top-down pressure to prepare children for the demands of KS1 in what has been termed a process of 'schoolification of the early years' (Ang, 2014).

## **2.2 Theoretical perspectives of transition**

Transitions are one of many salient experiences that children go through during the course of their ECE. The term 'transition', in the context of ECE, can be defined as follows:

...the word 'transition' is referred to as the process of change that is experienced when children (and their families) move from one setting to another [...] It is usually a time of intense and accelerated developmental demands that are socially regulated. (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002, p.3)

'Transition' has been conceptualised in numerous and varied ways across a range of theoretical and research literature in the fields of education and psychology. Developmental theoretical approaches are underpinned by the ideas of 'stage' theorists such as Jean Piaget (Piaget, 1964) who theorised that children actively progress through a series of essential, invariant stages of cognitive growth and development (Gray & MacBlain, 2015). Such theories position transitions as "hierarchical progressions through stages associated with chronological age" (Boyle, Grieshaber & Petriwskyj, 2018, p.172). The strand of research that is concerned with the measurement and development of 'school readiness' characteristics (e.g. Hughes et al., 2015; Sammons et al., 2013; Hall & Lindorff, 2017) reflects this developmental theoretical perspective.

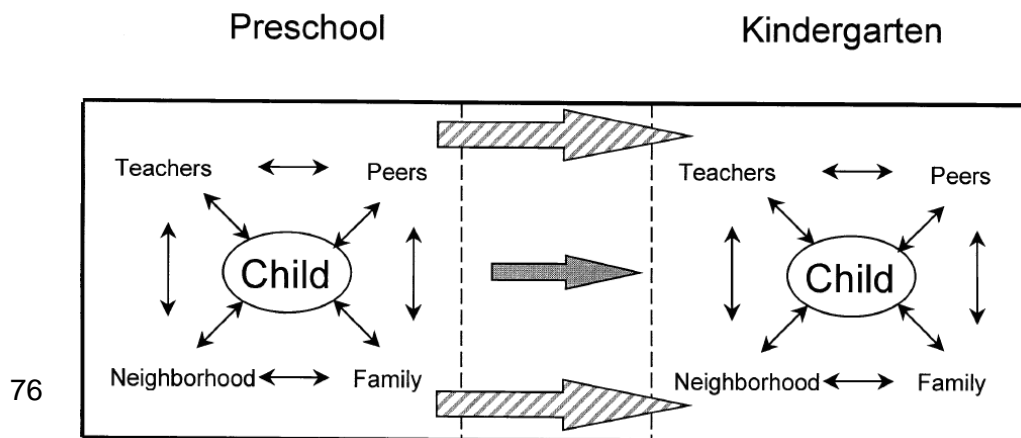
Alternatively, sociocultural theories of development argue that historical, social and cultural contexts shape children's individual development; children are theorised to actively construct their meanings of the world as a result of their interactions with these varied contexts (Vygotsky, 1978; Boyle et al., 2018). Sociocultural theorists (e.g. Lam & Pollard, 2006; Babić, 2017; Huf, 2013) have generated the idea that transition symbolises: a metaphorical 'bridge' between pre-school settings (or the home) and school; a child's 'rite of passage' into a new life stage; and a significant time of 'border crossing' (see Huser, Dockett & Perry, 2013 for an overview of these theories). Thus, from this perspective, effective support for children during transition might involve bridging the gap between settings, for example through provision of continuity in key elements of the ECE setting and school.

### 2.2.1 The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (EDMT)

Ecological theoretical perspectives of transition are systemic approaches which, according to Vogler et al. (2008) place “greater emphasis on the links between individuals, macro social processes and historical changes” (p. 4) compared to socio-cultural approaches which focus on the child’s proximate environment. Ecological perspectives (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) have been hugely influential and continue to be highly regarded in the arena of psychological theory and research (Kennedy et al., 2012). From this position, given the young age of children in ECE settings and therefore the close involvement of key adults, transitions involve not only the child’s skills, roles and identity developing but also that of their parents and family, as adjustments are made in supporting the child.

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (EDMT) (figure one) was developed by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) to illustrate how “links among child, home, school, peer, and neighborhood factors create a dynamic network of relationships that influence children’s transition to school both directly and indirectly” (p.492). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) theorised that the quality of these relationships, and the cumulative effect of these on children, families and the school system *over time*, contribute to positive outcomes or risk factors during transition. An example would be the indirect effect of the quality of teacher-parent relationship over time on a child’s transition.

**Figure 1: The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (image reproduced with permission from Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000, p.497)**



### ***2.3 The transition to school***

Research has explored a range of transitions that take place during ECE. However, the most heavily researched internationally is the transition to compulsory schooling. There have been multiple reviews of international literature published on this topic (e.g. Boyle et al., 2018; Dockett & Perry, 2013; Skouteris, Watson & Lum, 2012; Hirst et al., 2011; Peters, 2010; Vogler et al., 2008). These reviews have indicated that a huge number of strategies, focused on various systems around the child, have the potential to support children's successful transitions, although the extent of the effectiveness of these strategies is not always reported. In line with the principles of the EDMT, the importance of fostering positive relationships between all involved so that respectful, open partnerships can develop is a key theme across the literature. Working together (i.e. teachers; teachers and parents; by involving children in meaningful ways) is also central to the transition process. Importantly, complex approaches to transitions support, informed by the unique needs of each child (Ma, 2019) and his or her family, are said to be vital.

In England, there have been few empirical studies focused exclusively on the transition to YR; however, the findings of research that has been conducted (Shields, 2009; Potter, Walker & Keen, 2013; Cartmell, 2017) indicate that fostering close, equal relationships with parents and promoting parental involvement with school activities are important practices for school staff to engage in. Connolly and Gersch (2016) emphasised the importance of engaging in "parent and child-centred approaches" (p. 257) when supporting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

### ***2.4 The transition to Key Stage One (KS1) in England***

Notably, the transition to the more formal education of Y1 in England has been researched to a greater degree than the transition to compulsory schooling (e.g. nursery into YR) in England. Research (e.g. Ofsted, 2004; Sanders et al., 2005; Fisher, 2009; Orlandi, 2014; Nicholson, 2018) has indicated that discontinuity, or tension, between the pedagogical approaches in the EYFS and KS1 is the key challenge during this transition, for teachers, parents and children. However, there is a need for

further research to explore this area further, particularly regarding how to support a successful transition to Y1 for children with additional needs.

### ***2.5 The role of the Educational Psychologist***

Involvement in work connected to transitions is an important aspect of the role of the EP. Since research shows that transition experiences within ECE can have long-term impacts on children's developmental trajectories (e.g. C4EO, 2010), it is surprising that there is a dearth of literature (see Kennedy et al., 2012; Byrnes, 2012; Connolly & Gersch, 2016) focused explicitly on the role of EPs in supporting school professionals and parents with issues pertaining to the transition from nursery to YR. Additionally, the research that has been conducted is now several years old which arguably limits the applicability of the findings to the present social and political contexts that influence the English education system. Furthermore, no research was identified during this review that focused on EP work relating to the transition from YR to Y1, despite this being an area of focus for educational research and government attention.

### ***2.6 The present research***

This exploratory study sought to provide a timely update to existing research (e.g. Ofsted, 2004; Sanders et al., 2005; Kennedy et al., 2012) and to examine identified gaps in the literature in this area. With a focus on the transition from nursery to YR and the subsequent transition from YR into Y1 in England, the study aimed to address the following six research questions (RQs):

1. What are the views of class teachers, support staff and EPs regarding the transition from nursery to Reception?
2. What are the views of class teachers, support staff and EPs regarding the transition from Reception to Year One?
3. Which emotional factors are perceived to arise during these transitions?
4. Which neighbourhood and community factors are perceived to influence these early transitions?

5. What kinds of 'additional support' are perceived to be important for children who are considered to be vulnerable during these transitions?
6. How do EPs view their past, current and future role in supporting these transitions?

The definition of transition outlined by Dunlop and Fabian (2002) was embraced and the research design was underpinned and guided by the EDMT (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) due to its holistic and multi-faceted representation of the transition process. The views, experiences and practices of school staff and EPs were sought for each RQ, to "allow for multiple factors affecting the quality of transition experience to be considered concurrently" (Kennedy et al., 2012, p.24). The study sought to establish implications for the practice of EPs working in early years settings and schools.

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1 Research Paradigm and Design***

This study was underpinned by a social constructionist approach to research (Burr, 2003). This epistemological stance posits that societal discourses are at the core of how individuals interpret their experiences and create meaning from them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, the present research aimed to explore transitions in ECE from the underlying position that “knowledge is sustained by social processes” (Burr, 2003).

A qualitative design formed of two parts was used to address the RQs with the aim of collecting rich data that represented the perceptions of school staff and EPs.

##### ***3.1.1 Part one: school staff***

Three separate focus groups, lasting 45-60 minutes, were conducted with groups of nursery, YR and Y1 school staff working within one inner-city primary school (see 3.2.1). This method was chosen as it allowed “explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Morgan, 1996, p.2).

##### ***3.1.2 Part two: EPs***

Semi-structured interviews lasting 45-60 minutes were conducted with six EPs. The use of interviews enabled the researcher to ask a range of open-ended questions whilst giving the EPs the space and time to speak in rich detail about their experiences.

Different data gathering procedures were used for each participant group, primarily due to the differences in participant’s professional roles. It was felt that semi-structured interviews would be the most effective method through which to gather in-depth, detailed perspectives regarding the role of the EP over time and EP’s experiences of supporting children with additional needs. Interviews allowed the researcher to ask open-ended, probing questions and follow up key comments in



detail. The confidential nature of a semi-structured interview was important as it allowed EPs the space to share complex, confidential information that was relevant to their experiences. Furthermore, the nature of the convenience sample of EPs was such that it would not have been possible to conduct FGs due to there being insufficient numbers of EPs within the EPS to constitute adequate numbers of FGs for thematic analysis.

In contrast, FGs were deemed to be a more effective method for gathering the perspectives of school staff. It was felt that FGs would maximise the possibility of exploring a multitude of perceptions, as the group context would support staff to feel confident to share their views and build on one another's ideas. Furthermore, school staff in multiple-form entry schools plan and engage in transition practices as part of a team; it was therefore felt to be most appropriate to explore their collaborative experiences as a group rather than individually within interviews.

### ***3.2 Participants and recruitment***

The research took place in the LA where the researcher was working on practice placement as a trainee EP. Geographically this covered a large city in England.

#### ***3.2.1 Inclusion criteria***

All mainstream schools within the LA were asked (via email) to participate, providing that they met the following criteria:

- must be at least two-form entry to allow for sufficient numbers of focus group participants; and
- must have an attached nursery class to enable access to nursery staff views

Inclusion criteria for participants were as follows:

- all qualified class teachers, TAs and LSAs within the selected school were invited to participate, regardless of number of years' experience or full/part time status.

- EPs were required to have a minimum of one year of experience as a qualified EP.

### **3.2.2 Exclusion criteria**

- The link EP for the selected school was not invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews in order to avoid any ethical issues that could arise as a result (see Part C).
- EPs with an Early Years specialism, now or in the past, were excluded as it was felt that the inclusion of their views could bias the resulting data.

### **3.2.3 Part one: school staff**

Only one school in the LA gave consent to participate and was therefore selected. This inner-city primary school: is three-form entry (larger than average); has an attached nursery class; serves a diverse community (e.g. over half of pupils speak English as an additional language); and has higher than average numbers of pupils who are disadvantaged, have SEN and/or disabilities (as outlined in a recent Ofsted report for the school).

Information letters and consent forms were given to eligible school staff by the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) within the school, with consent from the head teacher (the school gatekeeper). Efforts were made to ensure that staff did not feel pressured or obligated to take part. Specifically, participation was organised on an 'opt-in' basis; the information sheets, consent forms and SENCo stressed that participation was entirely voluntary and that there would be no negative impact on staff members if they chose not to participate. All staff were given two weeks to consider the information provided and decide whether or not they would like to take part.

In total sixteen members of school staff participated in three focus groups. Each focus group consisted of a mix of class teachers (CTs), Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). (See tables 7 and 8 for details of participants

and their number of years' experience). In total, ten CTs (each year group included two teachers who work on a part-time job-share basis), two TAs and four LSAs took part. The nursery focus group was the smallest due to limited numbers of staff agreeing to participate, however this still constituted a majority of the overall number of nursery staff available within the school and it was therefore considered sufficiently representative of the nursery team.

**Table 7: shows the total participants in each focus group and the numbers of staff with each job role per group**

Focus Group	Total	Class teachers (CT)	Teaching Assistants (TA)	Learning Support Assistants (LSA)
Nursery	3	2	1	0
Reception (YR)	8	4	1	3
Year One (Y1)	5	4	0	1
All	16	10	2	4

**Table 8: shows the job role and number of years of experience for each participant in the focus groups**

Participant	Job role	Years' experience
N CT 1	N class teacher	34
N CT 2	N team leader, N class teacher	20
N TA 1	N Teaching Assistant	5
YR CT 1	EYFS team leader and YR class teacher	9
YR CT 2	YR class teacher	30
YR CT 3	YR class teacher	2 years 6 months
YR CT 4	YR class teacher	2
YR TA 1	YR Teaching Assistant	17
YR LSA 1	YR Learning Support Assistant	15
YR LSA 2	YR Learning Support Assistant	4 weeks
YR LSA 3	YR Learning Support Assistant	2
Y1 CT 1	Y1 class teacher	6
Y1 CT 2	Y1 class teacher	4
Y1 CT 3	Y1 class teacher	2
Y1 CT 4	Y1 class teacher	4 weeks (NQT)
Y1 LSA 1	Y1 Learning Support Assistant	2

### **3.2.4 Part two: EPs**

Six EPs were interviewed from a total of fifteen EPs working within the LA. The six EPs who were interviewed were those who gave informed consent to participate. Three EPs had doctoral training whilst three had masters level training (see table 9).

EPs within the service were invited to participate in the study via an information letter and consent form sent to them via email; of the eight EPs who gave informed consent, six were selected using an online random number generator and interview arrangements were made for a time that was convenient to them.

**Table 9: shows the number of years' experience and type of training of each participant EP**

Participant	Years' experience	Form of EP training
EP1	11	Doctorate
EP2	8	Doctorate
EP3	2	Doctorate
EP4	19	Masters
EP5	29	Masters
EP 6	14	Masters
	Mean = 13.8	

## **3.3 Measures**

### **3.3.1 Part one: school staff**

The researcher created a focus group schedule (appendix C) containing fifteen questions structured loosely around the six RQs. The questions were designed to gain staff views on transition practices and experiences with a particular focus on additional support for vulnerable pupils, emotional factors, neighbourhood and community influences and the role of other agencies, such as the Educational Psychology Service (EPS).

### **3.1.1 Part two: EPs**

The semi-structured interview schedule (appendix D), constructed by the researcher, contained nineteen questions structured loosely around the six RQs. From the position of the EDMT, it was important to consider how the EP role might have changed over time, and how this might have affected EP involvement with the transitions being focused upon. Therefore, questions were designed to explore past and present experiences of the EP role as well as future possibilities for the role.

### **3.3.2 Pilot study**

Materials were piloted prior to commencement of the study to evaluate the accessibility of question language and to improve face validity where necessary. Focus group questions were piloted with one class teacher. None of the questions were adapted following the pilot as these were all deemed to be clear and concise. Interview questions were piloted with one EP and the data from this interview were included in the results. The question 'What does the term 'transition' mean to you?' was added to the beginning of the interview following feedback from the pilot interview. It was felt that this would provide the EPs with a more explicit opportunity to orient to the topic of transition by reflecting upon their construction of the term prior to focusing in on early years work specifically.

## **3.4 Procedure**

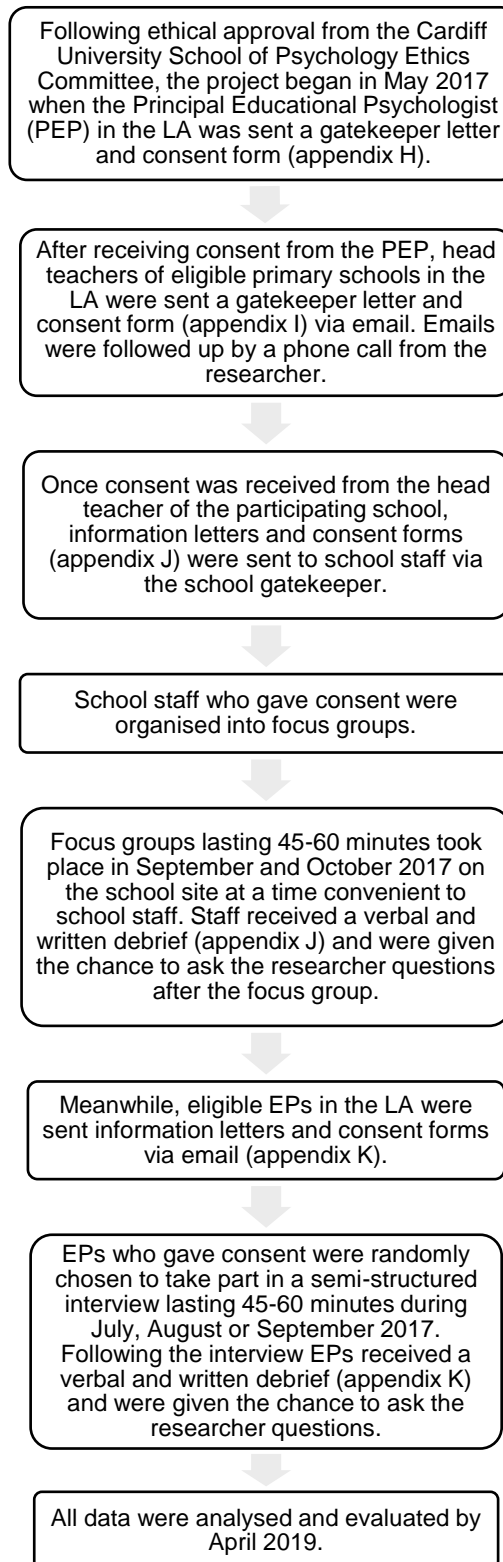
Figure 4 details the procedure that was undertaken.

## **3.5 Ethical considerations**

### **3.5.1 Informed consent**

All participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any point, until two weeks after data had been collected, when it was anonymised. It was considered that the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) could have concerns around the use of data and how the purpose

**Figure 4: The procedure that was conducted through the research process**



of the research would be explained to participants. Within participant information forms it was therefore emphasised that data collected would be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University rather than on behalf of the LA. It was also highlighted that the implications of the research would be general in nature and would not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the LA.

### ***3.5.2 Anonymity and confidentiality***

In all parts of the study, a confidentiality clause was used to highlight that individual responses would not be recorded by name and/or shared unless there was a concern for pupil safety. The researcher explained that any information causing concern would be shared with the designated safeguarding officer in the school or LA. A set of confidentiality principles were also established with participants at the start of focus groups. For example, school staff were reminded that ideas shared must stay within the group. Furthermore, it was emphasised that feedback regarding results of the research would be thematic in nature and would not identify specific staff, parents, EPs or the LA.

### ***3.5.3 Data protection***

Focus groups and interviews were recorded using a dictaphone and transcribed anonymously within two weeks. After this the original recordings were deleted. All transcribed data were kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of participant names. At the start of the focus groups and interviews it was highlighted that data collected would be used for research purposes only. It was also made clear that all anonymous data would be kept indefinitely following the guidance of Cardiff University.

### ***3.5.4 Well-being***

All participants were reminded that they did not have to answer any questions which made them feel uncomfortable. Participants were given opportunities to ask questions about the study both prior to and after participation. They were given both the

researcher's and the research supervisor's contact details on the information sheet so that they were able to get in touch for further details about the study following participation.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Both parts of the study were analysed separately using 'theoretical thematic analysis', in order to "unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.9). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of coding and analysis were followed for each analysis (appendix E). Data was coded for the six RQs in order to provide a detailed analysis of these aspects of the data rather than a "rich description of the data overall" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.12), although the researcher also remained open to coding pertinent aspects of the data which did not fit within the RQs. Data was analysed for both data-derived, semantic themes and researcher-derived (Braun & Clarke, 2013), latent themes, in line with the constructionist epistemological position of the research design. This approach involves theorising the "underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations" that underpin the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.13). (Part C provides further detail about the data analysis process).



## 4. Results and discussion

The results of the two separate thematic analyses of school staff focus groups and EP interviews are presented below.

### **4.1 Part one: school staff themes**

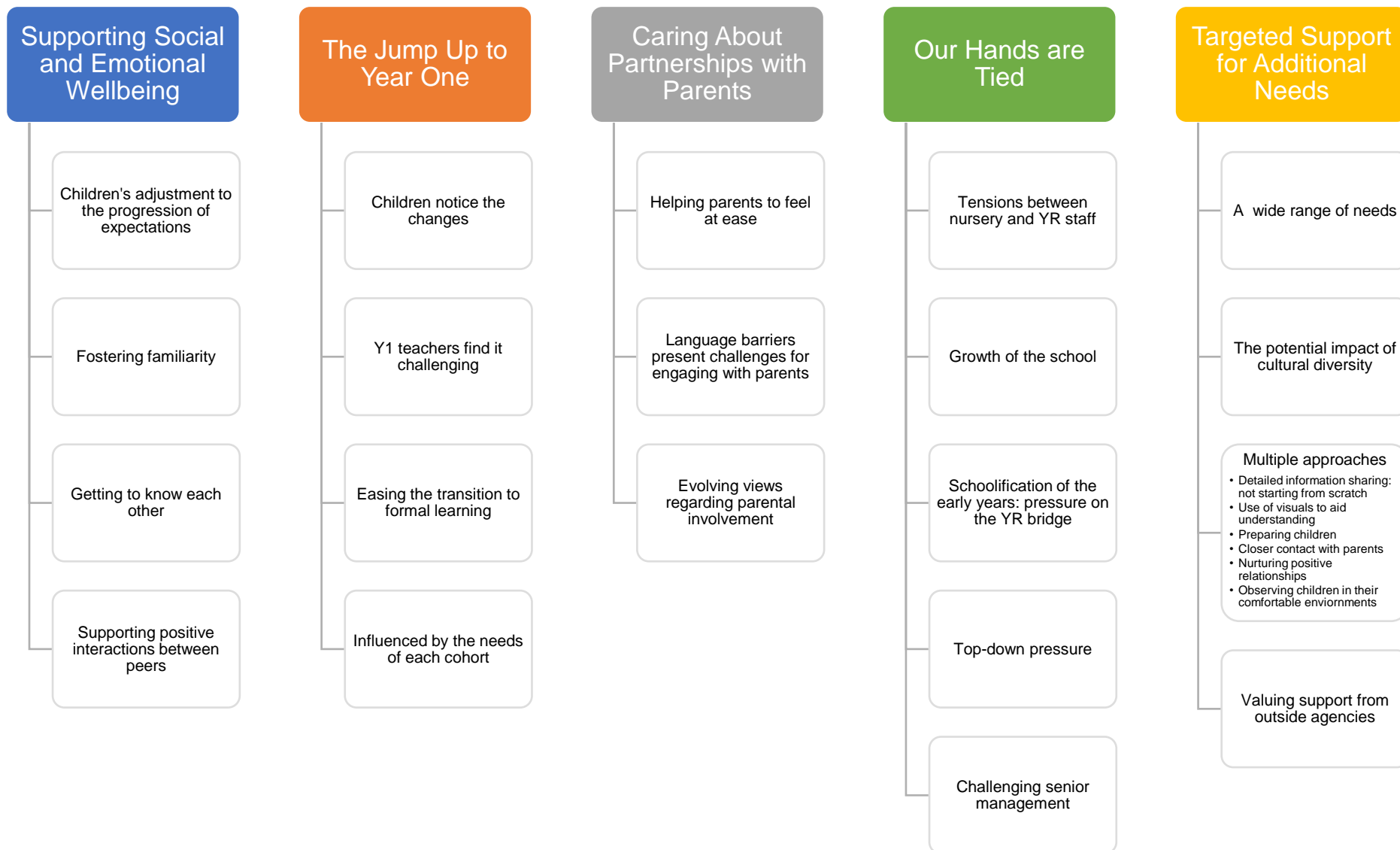
In total, five main themes and twenty sub-themes were created from the focus group data, as illustrated in the thematic map within figure 5. The five main themes were: ‘supporting social and emotional wellbeing’; ‘the jump up to Year One’; ‘caring about partnerships with parents’; ‘our hands are tied’; and ‘targeted support for additional needs’. These themes will now be discussed with reference to relevant research literature and the EDMT (sub-themes have been italicised). Appendix F provides a detailed list of example data extracts for each theme and sub-theme described.

#### **4.1.1 Supporting social and emotional wellbeing**

This theme encapsulates the sense from school staff that successful transitions in ECE are promoted through engaging in a range of practices that support aspects of children’s social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB); an important area of development which is widely regarded as “the building block to children’s healthy behaviours and educational attainment” (NICE, 2019, p. 4).

The views expressed by staff indicated the importance of *children’s adjustment to the progression of expectations* in each year group (i.e. from nursery to YR and from YR to Y1). This adjustment and adaptation was felt to be a key aspect of each child’s transition experience and one that requires time. Comments made by staff reflected the sense that children must develop an understanding of the gradual reduction in free-choice and increase in adult-led activities through each transition, for example:

**Figure 5: Thematic map of the themes and sub-themes constructed from data gathered in focus groups with school staff**



[...] the expectations that we have of [...] what they're expected to do when they come in are very different to nursery, because we want ours to come on to the carpet and do a morning activity, whereas in nursery they're often allowed to just free flow around [...] it's transitioning between those events as well. So, children have to suddenly realise that the expectations have changed and what they need to be doing is different. (YR CT1)

With regards to supporting children's adjustment, the significance of *fostering familiarity* in each new stage (e.g. with the environment; with staff) was clearly apparent within the views of staff in every year group:

Where the child feels they're in a safe environment, where they come in and feel that there's something familiar, that they feel safe with those people; we're not strangers to them, they've met us, that their parents trust us. (N CT1, talking about what a positive transition looks like)

[...] we'll go with them to meet their class teachers and to see their new classes, which I think is very helpful. We go around to each class and read a story with our children, just so they get a good idea of their surroundings. (YR LSA1)

[...] the week before the step up days, they bring them in every day into their new classroom, and the Reception teacher shares a story with them in their new classroom. So they get to know the classroom. (Y1 CT1)

Furthermore, staff talked of practices which foster individuals '*getting to know each other*', primarily through tuning into the needs of each child and connecting with his or her parents. YR LSA1 remarked:

[...] we go on home visits, which is really nice, because we get to see them in their own environment, get to meet their family, any pets. And it's quite nice. So, when they then come into Reception, we've got [...] a bit of a connection and we've been to their house and they remember us. (YR LSA1)

Children were also said to be supported to participate actively in this process, for example by expressing their views about themselves: "They make a book for their new class teachers as well, all about them. So, what they enjoy, what they might be worried about, things that might help them with learning as well" (YR CT1). Y1 CT4 commented on the positive effect of this sub-theme on children's feelings during the transition to Y1:

It's about making sure it's not daunting for them as well isn't it. So like fun activities, still educational, but getting to know them on another level. Taking that time to see their likes and dislikes and their triggers and things like that, it's quite helpful for you as a teacher and also for the children. They get excited about coming up instead of feeling a bit daunted. (Y1 CT4)

Specifically, several staff reflected on the impact of children's feelings about friendships during these transitions:

[...] he was struggling because they mixed all the Year Ones up, he was struggling with friendship groups and that's why he was quite reserved and not himself and not trying with work because he was worrying about his friendships constantly. (Y1 CT2)

Indeed, within the comments made by staff was the view that *supporting positive interactions between peers* is a key element of fostering successful transitions, especially as they felt that this is important to parents. Giving careful consideration to which children are placed in each class during the transition to Y1 was clear:

[...] the social side, the PSE stuff, is massive. (N CT1)

[...]they're quite careful with who they put in certain classes to adhere to friendship groups and things like that. So if they've got good friends in their class that also helps them. (Y1 CT4)

[...] we also looked at those who maybe don't work that well together in a class, who, kind of, need to be, obviously with their friends, but then when they're together, they don't work well. So, it's kind of splitting them apart. (YR CT3)

Altogether, this theme indicates that staff value the need to support the development of the whole child during the transition to YR and to Y1 and suggests that their practices are focused on fostering children's successful social and emotional development. This mirrors the findings within an earlier review of international literature by Fabian and Dunlop (2007), which highlighted the importance of teaching children emotional literacy skills that enable them to cope with change and adapt to unfamiliar situations, in order to make sense of school as a new context for learning.

### 4.1.2 The jump up to Year One

This theme incorporates a number of sub-themes that relate to the experience of transitioning to Y1; an experience which YR CT1 described as a “massive change”.

Importantly, school staff felt that *children notice the changes* that this transition brings with it. The increased structure and different physical environment (e.g. more tables; less outdoor space) were key features of this. In line with the findings of previous research (e.g. Orlandi, 2014; White & Sharp, 2007) staff also emphasised that children value, and therefore miss, the greater play element within the EYFS; YR CT2 gave the example of one pupil in her class who she felt had internalised negative feelings about the transition to Y1 as a result:

[...] she's a happy little girl in class and she went home and she was a bit upset about the transition to Year One. But she hadn't expressed that, she hadn't displayed anything you would actually be concerned about, you thought she was quite happy with the transition and it was only when dad said “Oh, she kind of misses playing” and she's expressed it at home. (Y1 CT2)

Y1 CT3 highlighted that children often get tired in the afternoons and will sometimes communicate not wanting to engage in adult-led tasks. The issue of the summer holiday between YR and Y1 making the change to formal learning more apparent to children was described by YR LSA3:

They finish Reception and then they have six weeks of doing whatever they want and then to almost have to go into Year One, where it's a lot more formal. And imagine, like, however long ago when it was even more formal, it's almost going from fun, free flow, loads of fun for six weeks and then boom, that's it, you're in formal education now. Sit down. Do some writing. (YR LSA3)

Related to this, having empathy for the experience that children are going through appeared to be important to Y1 CT4; particularly in terms of children's gradual reduction in free play opportunities during the transition to Y1:

I was actually quite surprised, because it was actually quite a big transition for me, because I'd never been in a Year One classroom before, so me transitioning from nursery, to Reception, to Year One, I was like “Oh, they have to sit and they have

to write! Oh! Ok! This is interesting...ok!" (laughs). So, I can imagine for a child, it's kind of, yea, a bigger scale, I guess. (Y1 CT4)

The discourses that school staff engaged in indicated that, within their school, practices to support the jump up to Y1 (e.g. by gradually preparing them for the change throughout YR) had developed over time; in the past children used to be very upset, as expressed by YR CT2:

[...] it's much, much better now, than it was a few years ago, because a few years ago when our lovely settled children went to Year One, they were just wailing. Spent most of term one crying, because they missed school as they understood it. (YR CT2)

Several of the *Y1 teachers find it challenging* to navigate the change to increasingly formal methods of pedagogy associated with the transition to Y1. Managing the increased number of focused learning tasks and responding to children's reluctance to engage in adult-directed tasks were described as key challenges:

We need to get through more learning, more focused group activities in Year One, don't we? And it's making sure we get through them but also giving them that free flow that's still purposeful outside and having the bodies to be outside making it purposeful. It's quite a challenge for us at the moment. (Y1 CT1)

I often get children, sort of, asking "Do I have to do this?" [...] So explaining, "well, yea, today, I'm sorry" (laughs), it's hard as a teacher isn't it? "But I don't want to!" (laughs) "Um, well...!" (laughing) (Y1 CT3)

Furthermore, *easing the transition to formal learning* was a clear sub-theme. YR and Y1 staff described a range of practices; for example, children are provided with opportunities to engage in active, outdoor learning experiences and staff build on children's interests to engage them in formal learning activities (e.g. writing). As Y1 CT2 explained:

[...] knowing their interests helps you with your planning; that creates a smoother transition, because they're interested in what you are planning. So the work's different, but if it's at their interests, it kind of locks them into their learning, which I've found, they don't mind so much writing as long as it's something about what they like and they're engaged in the activities. (Y1 CT2)

Staff also engage in careful planning to provide continuity in timetabling from YR into Y1. For example, YR CT1 spoke of preparing children for the transition to Y1 by gradually reducing the amount of time they have to access the outdoor space as the year goes on.

It was apparent within these discussions that the pace in which formal learning methods are gradually introduced by staff is *influenced by the needs of the cohort*, including children's level of maturity, ability and perceived degree of school readiness. Y1 CT3 emphasised the dynamic judgements that are made each year about what is appropriate in terms of planning for continuity: "I don't think I could say that year on year it's the same. But, judging it as you get to it and going from there" (Y1 CT3). This suggests that the characteristics of individual children impact upon the needs of the wider class group which, in turn, influence the decisions made by staff in dynamic ways across time. In line with the EDMT, this indicates, within the study sample, the presence of transactional processes; in which child characteristics interact with contexts (e.g. teachers' practices) in significant, combined ways over time to impact upon children's outcomes (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

#### **4.1.3 Caring about partnerships with parents**

The theme 'caring about partnerships with parents' was highly significant for all staff regardless of the year group they were working in and consists of several overarching ideas. School staff conveyed a strong sense of valuing their interactions with parents during transitions in ECE yet were aware of several challenges to the success of these interactions. Notably, subtle differences between staff perceptions were apparent depending on which age range they worked with; this was characterised by an apparent shift in their thinking about what parental involvement looks like as children progress from nursery through to Y1.

Staff spoke of the range of emotions that they perceive parents to express during their children's transitions to YR and then on to Y1. The emotions described by staff, on the whole, were those that were negative, perhaps as these have the most salient implications for staff's day-to-day practice. The emotions referred to encompassed

anxiety (including separation anxiety), worry and uncertainty. This finding supports international research which has suggested that the transition to school can be a challenging experience for parents (Griebel & Niesel, 2009).

N CT1 expressed the view that parents' main priority is for their child to be happy and settled; this view was shared by YR and Y1 staff who described a range of actions they engage in to *help parents to feel at ease*. YR staff detailed the importance of: having positive interactions with parents; sharing videos of children enjoying themselves; making phone calls to show that staff are holding parents in mind; checking in with parents at the end of the day; providing reassurance; and conducting open tours in which parents can ask questions. For example:

[...] sometimes it's just making a phone call as well. We've had kids who were struggling to come in and leave and so we say "we'll tell you if you need to come in. We'll be on the phone. We'll make a note, like, we've got our eyes on child and we'll just let you know should anything need to be done." [...] Sometimes with a child who can't let go of their parent, having the parent around is just keeping that trauma in front of them. (YR LSA3)

Y1 staff described a further set of practices that they engage in, such as arranging relaxed, informal opportunities for parents to visit the school setting and giving parents positive feedback about their child. Connected to this was the view that building positive relationships with parents (e.g. by asking them questions to invite them to share their knowledge of their child) and gaining their trust is a way to support them to feel at ease:

I think it's the trust of parents to you, that they've trusted their old teacher now that trust has to go to a new person. (Y1 CT3)

A specific sub-theme relating to the ethnically diverse community in which the sample of staff taught was the issue that *language barriers present challenges for engaging with parents*. One pertinent example of this was provided by NCT1:

I had a child a few years back who was autistic, and they were a Somali family. The parent had read the report and the dad said to me, "What about him peering?" I said, "What do you mean, peering?" He said, "In the report it keeps saying about peers," he said, "I looked it up in the dictionary and it says, 'When you look over a



wall.” He thought it was peer at something, like a peeping Tom type thing, and he just didn’t understand us talking about his peer group at all. It can be little words like that... He had quite good English, but he didn’t understand what that meant. (N CT1)

In addition to such misunderstandings, staff described issues such as: parents struggling to express themselves; parents not understanding the expectations of the school system; and the need for all written communication to be simplified.

A further sub-theme related to building partnerships with parents is that of ‘*evolving views regarding parental involvement*’. This latent theme encapsulates the subtle yet apparent differences in staff perceptions of what constitutes appropriate, or welcome, parental involvement depending on the year group they teach. Nursery staff expressed views that emphasised the centrality of family-centred practices, where parents are viewed as equal partners and trust is developed between home and school. For example, N CT2 commented:

It’s not just the child, it’s the whole family. It’s about establishing trust and parents feeling that this is a nice safe, secure place where their child will be really looked after and treated very kindly. And that we’ll pick up on every child’s individual needs, you know. (N CT2)

The perceptions of YR staff indicated a move towards more structured forms of home-school communication signalled by increasing boundaries between the two systems, although there remained a clear sense of seeking to work in partnership with parents via face to face communication:

[...] parents are at the forefront of everything that we do and we do have some tricky families here, but there are a lot of things in place to support those parents. (YR CT1)

The first week in terms of parents as well, it’s just almost remembering faces and checking in with them at the end of the day. If you get a word in your ear in the morning saying, “Oh, she mentioned that someone had hit me, and she had nobody to talk to.” You then explain that to the child in the day and then check in again with the parent, just to... it’s almost reassurance really. (YR LSA3)

Y1 staff described parents in ways which were suggestive of them being more on the periphery of school life following their child's transition to Y1. The idea of needing to 'get on' with the day suggested that teachers felt too busy to fully develop parental relationships, especially with needier parents, for example:

I don't get the register done until quarter past nine, because I can't get them out! (laughs) You know. [...] A lot of it is obviously to do with the children but you're so limited for time and they want to chat and chat and chat about their children. (Y1 CT1)

[...] there's a right time and a right place for certain conversations, I had it not too long ago, I think the other week, a parent was saying "she doesn't listen at home!". It was kind of like a parenting issue instead of a school issue. And that kind of conversation is quite difficult because you don't want to input too much, but you obviously want to help the parent as well, but it's about establishing roles of 'Ok, I'm the teacher, if it's a concern about school life or how they're learning, yes, but other concerns can wait until another time or maybe we can advise you to speak to a parenting group or something like that, you know. Its knowing which conversations can come now, and which ones can be diverted to someone else. (Y1 CT4)

However, Y1 CT1 expressed the desire to develop Y1 practice in this area, thus showing an awareness of the importance of parents as an intrinsic part of the transition process:

[...] you just say a quick "hi, how are you, yes he's getting on well, great, bye" and it would be nice to have that opportunity at the beginning of the year for them to get to know us a little bit better and then it might avoid some sticky situations. (Y1 CT1)

Arguably, this sub-theme is suggestive of a transition from 'parents as partners' in nursery, to 'teachers in charge' within school. This finding appears to be reflective of the change in parent-teacher relationships described by Shields (2009) and Cartmell (2017) and contrasts with Cartmell's emphasis on the importance of "democratic relationships" (p.366) with parents during their child's transition to school. However, it is only possible to speculate on the reasons behind this apparent change (e.g. is it due to the pressure that YR and Y1 teachers feel to focus on academic aspects of school life?) as further research would be needed to explore this issue further. This avenue of research would be especially key considering the emphasis within the

EDMT on the influence of interactional patterns between parents, teachers and schools on children's transition experiences (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

#### ***4.1.4 Our hands are tied***

This theme is characterised by the sense that engaging in a child-centred, joined-up approach to transitions in ECE can be challenging within the context of the sample school and that this can lead some members of staff to feel disempowered.

Firstly, *tensions between nursery and YR staff* were apparent in the discourses of some individuals. These views appeared to be related to differences in the philosophies held by the teachers relating to the nature of early years provision; nursery teachers emphasised their belief in focusing on the development of learning dispositions whereas, in contrast, one YR teacher described the need to focus on children's academic achievements:

I have an issue, as you two know, with all of it, because I think we should focus on where they're at now. Being ready, you can't always be ready for the next thing, let them just be who they are now. When they get to Reception, then they'll be ready. Lots of the things we do are about their learning dispositions and helping them have a good attitude to learning whereas, I think, maybe as they go through the school that's not important and it's more important that they have certain skills [...] It's not really in our control, so we just have to go along with it really. (N CT1)

I think we're better at doing the other end, with the coming in from home. We do a really good transition from home but the other way our hands are tied. (N CT2)

[...] our nursery isn't prepared to do their share of wanting to push the children up. So, we have a really big job in Reception. And, I think, that's possibly why the transitions aren't happening as well as they could, because actually they're worried that when they do come and see it, they know they're going to have to change their practice. And it's really difficult because I don't agree with what the government are asking, you know, for us to expect but- we're teaching the British education system... And so, therefore, we have to do it. We trained as a teacher, this is our government. This is what we need to do. And these are the achievements that we need to make. Whereas, certainly, they're still there, like, all about the pedagogy and development, which is absolutely great. But it makes our job really hard in Reception. (YR CT1)

Additionally, *growth of the school* in which the staff worked was identified as an aspect of change in the wider school system that had impacted upon transition practices. Nursery staff expressed the view that becoming a four-form entry school with a larger intake of children had negatively impacted on their ability to build and maintain relationships with YR staff in order to support children's successful transitions.

It was apparent that this systemic sub-theme was impacting negatively upon children's transition experiences within the school as it appeared to have led to ineffective joint working and/or collaboration between staff. Nursery staff, in particular, indicated feelings of being disempowered, whilst YR staff implied that nursery staff have a responsibility to support children's 'school readiness'. This tension is indicative of a reality that contrasts with one of the findings outlined by Skouteris et al. (2012); the need for mutual respect between teachers of different age groups in order to assist effective working relationships.

Linked to these tensions, the *schoolification of the early years* was a key issue that appeared to underlie the comments of many of the nursery and YR staff. For example, YR CT1 commented that "the benchmark at the end of the year has risen, when the Early Learning Goals came in" and YR CT2 explained that:

Before the pressure came on, in terms of what they have to achieve in Reception, before it was so high, we used to have much more integration with nursery, because we had international days, didn't we? A variety of things... (YR CT2)

Such comments denote that the rising expectations of YR over time might have reduced the quality of transition practices between the nursery and YR, arguably due to the pressure placed on YR which results in a rushing of the transition experience rather than taking it at the pace of children's needs. This *top-down pressure* to get on with formal methods of teaching in YR was felt by many staff to be due to the systemic focus in school on improving results and being able to track children's data:

I think sometimes it's seen as like a knee-jerk reaction from management, because results are not good enough, so, quickly, we need to do more formal things. You need to get them sat down at the desk and from five... (YR TA1)

This finding adds weight to those within the small scale study by Nicholson (2018) which also highlighted the pressure caused by pedagogical discontinuity between YR and Y1. A lack of understanding of the principles of early years education (on the part of senior leaders) was cited as a factor that perpetuates the pressure to accelerate the move towards formal pedagogical approaches. Previous research has suggested that this pressure stems from the wider political and national macrosystems in England, such as the school readiness agenda that is apparent within educational policies (Kennedy et al., 2012). However, YR staff *challenging senior management* within the school was highlighted as an important way in which this pressure has been opposed in recent times. YR CT1 argued as follows:

It's about having, as well, the understanding that it's going to take time to do it. It's not instant results. Like a lot of things are. Like they expect you to put something in place and then you get the results immediately. With the transition it needs to be slowly, slowly, bit by bit. It's not all going to happen at once. It's a long process for the teachers and staff as well as the children. (YR CT1)

#### **4.1.5 Targeted support for additional needs**

Across the group of staff, a *wide range of needs* were perceived to lead to certain children being vulnerable during transitions in ECE. This included: behavioural and emotional needs; SEN; English as an Additional Language (EAL); ASD; speech, language and communication needs (SLCN); and attachment needs. Staff also highlighted the vulnerability of children who: are younger (both chronologically and developmentally); do not have siblings; have not attended nursery before transitioning to YR; experience separation anxiety; and have difficult home lives. *The potential impact of cultural diversity* on children's vulnerability was also discussed within the Y1 focus group as a notable feature of the school community that can impact on children's transition. For example, staff explained that when children miss transition activities due to time away visiting family abroad this can have a negative effect on their adjustment, thus showing the importance of such activities on children's success:

We had two little ones, they went away to Pakistan and then they came back late from their summer holidays. So they came two weeks in to Year One and they just really struggled [...] the time difference in Pakistan, they're tired, and their routines

at home have been different so it's that kind of adjusting back to school life. (Y1 CT2)

Also accepting, saying goodbye to their old teacher, and their old LSA as well. If they didn't have that and they were suddenly, 'Ok, right, I'm on holiday', they probably didn't have much time to process that. So I think that can make it very difficult for them as well [...] They come back and they don't even know where their classroom is or who their teacher is. (Y1 LSA1)

*Multiple approaches* to supporting children with additional needs were described by staff (table 10 provides an overview of illustrative data extracts for each of these). Detailed information sharing was positioned as central; for example, through close liaison between class teachers (aided by live transition documents that are shared with support staff) and outside agencies (e.g. social services). Crucially, staff spoke of ensuring that the knowledge which has been built up about children's unique needs (e.g. behavioural triggers; calming strategies) is passed over to receiving staff to prevent them from needing to "start from scratch" (Y1 CT2). Effective communication was said to aid such continuity of knowledge between staff. The benefits of observing children in their comfortable environments (e.g. previous class) prior to transition were also highlighted by nursery and YR staff, as they felt that this supports staff to have a deeper understanding of handover information. YR staff commented that it would be helpful if Y1 staff were to do this.

Use of visual supports which aid children's developing understanding of transitions were also described by several staff members. Alongside this, staff highlighted the importance of adequate preparation; for example, getting provision in place and preparing children for upcoming changes (e.g. by repeating messages to the children about the impending transition of environment and staff). To support this, a few of the participants described having closer contact with the parents of more vulnerable children and several staff members highlighted the benefits of nurturing positive relationships between children and receiving staff members.

These findings suggest that staff have well-developed skills and knowledge regarding how to support more vulnerable pupils, as well as the confidence to do what they feel is necessary to support transitions appropriately. The elements within this sub-theme

are akin to the principles of the 'Ready Schools Framework' (Pianta et al., 1999; Kennedy et al., 2012) as there is a clear focus on the actions of staff and the centrality of quality interactions between key stakeholders.

**Table 10: Lists illustrative data extracts for the approaches described by school staff to support children with additional needs during transitions in ECE**

<b>Sub-theme: Multiple approaches to supporting children with additional needs</b>	
<b>Approach:</b>	<b>Illustrative data extract(s):</b>
<i>Detailed information sharing: not starting from scratch</i>	<p>[...] communication, passing it on just needs to be top notch really or it just- you've got no idea. You don't know why these kids are behaving the way they're behaving. (YR LSA3)</p> <p>Like, triggers or plans, because some of them have behaviour plans before they come up to you. So you know what kind of works well, with a, kind of a situation, you know what calmed them down before, which kind of helps. (Y1 CT4)</p> <p>[...] so that helps, because you know the strategies, so you're not starting from scratch trying to work out if that works or this works. It helps a lot. (Y1 CT2)</p>
<i>Use of visuals to aid understanding</i>	<p>It's very hard to know what the children are thinking at that particular time, especially as they're so young. It's very hard to express how they're feeling and how the transition may be affecting them [...] it's kind of working out whether or not you can break down that barrier of communication, and whether you're using symbols, or hand gestures or Makaton, or something like that, to allow them to communicate a little bit more and tell you how they feel in these transitions. Like, 'I don't like doing all this work!' (laughs) or 'I want to play more!'. (Y1 CT4)</p>
<i>Preparing children</i>	<p>They were really good at, like, kind of getting their heads around, ok, this was your old teacher, now this is your new one, you'll be in a different classroom. And just feeding that in quite a lot before the end of term so that they kind of understood, so it was a different transition experience. (Y1 CT4)</p>
<i>Closer contact with parents</i>	<p>With our children, I know it's a lot easier to talk to parents because we have, like, two children each, but some of our children also have home school books. So if you know that those conversations aren't going to happen [...] we do that, so there's that communication going on even if you can't quite get that. (Y1 LSA1)</p>

	[...] if a child's got a particular need you obviously engage with that parent a lot more than parents of a child who hasn't got any particular need. (Y1 CT1)
<i>Nurturing positive relationships</i>	[...] it's getting them more and more comfortable [...] and they see every interaction with the classroom as a positive thing, so it's a nice thing, and everything they do with their teachers. So it's kind of like, for us, it's about building that relationship, building the confidence of going from one place to the other. (Y1 LSA1)
<i>Observing children in their comfortable environments</i>	There is one particular lad who's in my keyworker group, and because I saw him at his other nursery, and I talked to them about the kinds of strategies that they used with him, because they'd had him there a year, at least, I can bear that in mind when I'm working with him now and I know these things work for him. So, that's helpful too, to go and see other settings. (N CT1)

Finally, several staff within each year group expressed the view that they *value support from outside agencies* when planning for children's transitions in ECE. This included input from the inclusion team, ASD team and EPS. Specifically, staff spoke about welcoming support from EPs (and other agencies) to discuss concerns, reflect on transition challenges, have their decisions "backed up" (YR CT1) and enhance the understanding of parents through, for example, conducting workshops focused upon transition. Y1 CT4 felt that outside professionals can help staff to consider "the bigger picture" of children's needs in order to support preparation for their transitions. One comment by Y1 CT2, regarding a desired role for EPs, was particularly vivid:

[...] giving actual strategies to help prevent certain behaviours or help to sort of prioritise what he needs... because I think as a teacher who's got to show that their children are making progress (laughs), for a child who is absolutely not willing to learn at the moment, being told by other agencies and your SENCo that actually that isn't what is important for him right now, getting him to feel comfortable in your classroom is what is important not making him do some maths work, that was really reassuring for me as a teacher to be like, actually, what is important to him right now is that he feels comfortable in my classroom and that we get him to a place where maybe at Christmas he will want to come in and learn. [...] So, yea, a lot of reassurance they provided. (Y1 CT2)



## 4.2 Part two: EP themes

In total, five themes and nineteen sub-themes were identified within the data, as represented in the thematic map within figure 6. The main themes constructed for the EP's views were: 'starting school is key'; 'Year One: a highly significant transition'; 'anxiety'; 'collaborative approaches to support'; and 'an evolving role for EPs over time'. These themes, as well as the sub-themes within them, will now be discussed with reference to relevant research literature and the EDMT. Appendix G provides a complete list of example data extracts for each theme and sub-theme described.

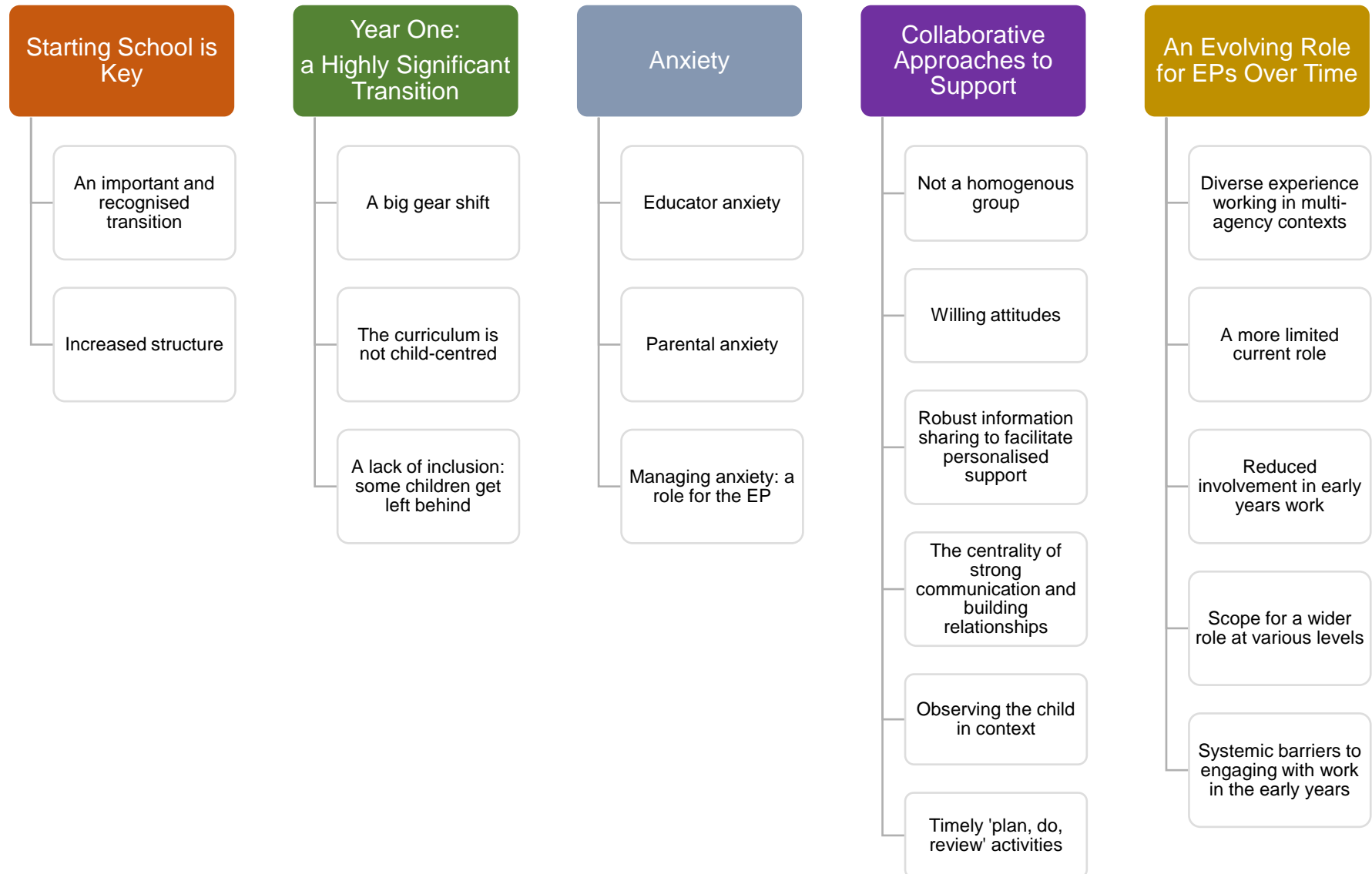
### 4.2.1 Starting school is key

All of the EPs perceived the transition to YR to be *an important and recognised transition*; a transition that is given a lot of attention and prepared for by schools, parents and other relevant adults. A sense of this transition being "quite a step change" (EP6) was clear, and the importance of it was emphasised by several of the EPs:

I think it's huge. I mean, really. [...] if you can get things right when they're little, and when they're coming in new, I think you can really make a huge difference [...] plasticity of the brain we know is key and wellbeing and happiness, the child feeling a sense of belonging, staff feeling that they've got a good handle on and understanding of need, and so the transition is crucial. If the child starts and it's a tricky start then it can be a long time before you've managed to reign it back. So, absolutely key. (EP2)

[...] at that age, children are really, really like sponges, so, and they're obviously starting to develop their emotional literacy and it's something where they've kind of got into a routine, maybe at pre-school or with a child-minder, or something where they're kind of getting into a routine and then suddenly that changes. And I think it makes it important to get it right because they're transitioning into school and they have to be there up until sixteen, eighteen years old so it needs to work and they need to have a good experience, I think for their motivation and their engagement with education. (EP3)

**Figure 6: Thematic map of the themes and sub-themes constructed from data gathered during semi-structured interviews with educational psychologists**



Due to the widely recognised nature of the transition to YR several EPs felt that, on the whole, schools do not require EP support with it. For example, EP6 felt strongly that school staff have well-developed, embedded skills in terms of supporting children's transition to school and, therefore, that her involvement was not required unless support was needed for a child with complex needs:

[...] I think schools and primaries and nurseries are quite good at it at this stage, so they recognise - and also maybe because the parents are very aware [...] I find that most of the primaries and nurseries that I go into are already aware of what they need to be doing [...] That's all really quite out there and embedded in terms of practice. (EP6)

EP1 expressed a similar view, detailing that this is particularly the case for schools situated in more affluent areas; "They were quite able to hold it themselves and I tended to see the young people later down the line". However, although EPs felt that the transition to YR is a well-recognised transition, it was also described by EP1 as being less understood or attended to compared to transitions at other educational stages.

The main change during the transition from nursery to YR was felt to be the *increased structure*:

[...] it's very much sort of moving into that more structured but not completely structured (because there's not too much of a difference) environment. (EP1)

The transition challenges for children, parents and teachers were felt by EPs to be more around changes in routine, relationships and setting, rather than curriculum. This is reflective of the fact that, in England, starting school involves moving into the 'bridge year' (Dubiel & Kilner, 2017) of YR, in which teachers are required to continue to educate according to the EYFS. The methods of pedagogy therefore remain primarily play-based (DfE) whilst changes are introduced in aspects such as the physical environment and ratios of staff to children (e.g. fewer staff).

#### 4.2.2 Year One: a highly significant transition

All of the EPs perceived the transition to Y1 to be highly significant for children, and perhaps more so than the transition to YR, as described by EP2:

I don't see the jump from nursery to Reception as being as big as from Reception to Year One, interestingly. Well that's my experience, that's all, just my experience of what schools tell me and children that I've seen [...] I think that's the tough one. (EP2)

The conceptualisation of this transition as a *"big gear shift"* (EP1) was clear and yet, despite this, there was also a sense from several EPs that the transition to Y1 is a more covert transition compared to the move to school (YR). For example:

I think the transition that people don't pay enough attention to is actually the transition from Reception into Year One. (EP6)

There's a big gear shift which I don't think is very, I don't know, spoken about or overt [...] that's what is not really spoken about in terms of transition. (EP1)

In line with previous research on the experience of transitioning to Y1 (e.g. Sanders et al., 2005), the key reason for the significance of the transition to Y1 was felt to be the change in curriculum; this change was positioned by EPs as a macro-systemic problem as it was perceived to move too quickly for children's development, reflecting *a curriculum that is not child-centred*:

The curriculum, it's not child-centred. I think it's less to do with schools...it moves too quickly for child development and everybody seems to understand that it's too fast. Research shows it, yet we still plough on doing it. (EP1)

EPs spoke about the expectations of children changing during the move to Y1 (e.g. they spend more time sitting in a circle), the increased number of academic tasks and reduced free-play opportunities. EP5 talked of "the drive into the curriculum", perceiving this to impact negatively upon staff's ability to engage in a "measured" approach to supporting children with additional needs at this stage. Indeed, EP's views regarding the negative impact of the discontinuities between pedagogical approaches in YR and Y1 is encapsulated in the next sub-theme; *'a lack of inclusion*:

*some children get left behind*'. This suggests that one result of the curriculum change during the transition to Y1 can be a lack of inclusion; that is, children are "suffering" (EP2) if they are not ready for the expectations of Y1:

That's the point where you see children who have been quite successful, you could argue have been held, but I would say they haven't, the curriculum has been right in Reception. Then they go into Year One and within four or five weeks, you're called in and you start looking for a specialist provision which is just heart-breaking at that age because you know if they had a couple more years at play based curriculum, they could remain within their community school. (EP1)

[...] the difficulty is when as a teacher you're obliged to go straight into the structured teaching of the Year One curriculum, and it doesn't make the necessary accommodations for those children who may have needs such that they haven't been able to sit in the circle for action rhymes and songs at nursery, so once they get to school they can't do that. So moving from Reception into Year One when there is far more 'sit on the carpet, go and do the task, come back' you know, reflective thing [...] the whole language of the curriculum at that stage becomes sophisticated so quickly that I think that's got a huge impact for those kiddies who aren't up to speed in all developmental levels or areas. (EP5)

Children were felt to be at a disadvantage if they have not reached a particular developmental level by the start of Y1, for example due to the sophisticated language of the curriculum, the pre-occupation with phonics and handwriting and the decreased value given to play experiences. The risk of missing opportunities to learn key skills was emphasised, for example if teaching is provided too soon and then not repeated at a later stage. There was a sense that the responsibility for being 'ready' for Y1 is attributed by the school system to children, with the related issue of retention in YR being one that EPs described experience with:

I did have one boy who, English was an additional language for him, and the school were starting to be concerned and didn't know whether to recommend to parents to hold him back and keep him in Reception. That was quite interesting because I had almost a completely different view to the school, I was like I'm not sure where that would come from because he's actually doing really well, you know, and maybe his needs lie in different areas but it would be fine, I would say, to just transition as normal. (EP3)

We're going to struggle to meet this child's needs in Year 1, so we're going to ask them to repeat Reception"... Actually, what would be more helpful is if you put

them into Year 1 and you offer a play-based time or intervention, potentially in a group, that supports other children. (EP1)

This theme has important implications at a systemic level since it implies that, in contrast to the principles of early intervention (Allen, 2011), children are at risk of being left behind at the very beginning of their education due to the pressures inherent within the structure of the education system. The risk of ‘the gap widening’ as a result of children not being ‘ready’ to cope with the demands of the curriculum during this transition was clear.

Critically, EPs appeared to feel a sense of dissonance around the disconnect between their training in children’s developmental trajectories and their practical experience of the expectations of the English education system:

[...] It’s really difficult, being a psychologist and having a children’s development perspective, that actually we ask children to do things that they’re not ready to do [...] in a totally political way, I would really welcome a completely different approach to early years education. So I would be much, much happier with a sort of more Scandinavian system and having more of a kindergarten or early years education without as much formal teaching up to seven, and I think, developmentally, I kind of think that, you know to me, that makes much more sense. I don’t understand why we are preoccupied by teaching phonics really early, and handwriting. (EP4)

EP1 highlighted that this disconnect stems in part from her view that EPs are “not having an impact at that national level, at the DfE level” in order to challenge the lack of child-centred pedagogy in the National Curriculum. Several EPs reflected upon the systemic change they feel is needed at a national level to enable the education system to better value children’s early years experiences and to reduce the pressure on schools to engage in formal teaching methods:

I mean, in a utopian world you would change the whole system so that they’re allowed to follow what has interested them and weave the skills that they need to around something that’s caught their interest, or something that’s been on the news or something someone’s brought in but that’s not how, that’s about a radical overhaul of how we teach our children. (EP6)

One implication of this overall theme for the role of EPs is the importance of raising awareness of the significance of the move to increasingly formal methods of learning

in Y1 and advocating for the challenges that children may face during this experience. EPs need to be mindful of this possibility and need to promote the best interests of children through the transition to Y1 from a holistic systemic perspective of their development within ecological contexts. It is possible that, at times, EPs could support school staff to make decisions around curriculum adaptations that are based upon the child's needs, whilst enabling them to recognise systemic discontinuity as one of the reasons that a child might be having difficulties. As described by EP1:

I find often, now, that my role around transition from Reception into Year 1 is ticking the box that, "Yes, you as the teacher can decide what is right for this young person which you know is to allow a play based curriculum and a child led curriculum". But they need an outside professional to rubber-stamp that, as opposed to feeling like they can, as a teacher, as a school, make a decision about what is right for that young person. It's like there needs to be evidence or somebody else to say, "It's okay that we do this. (EP1)

This links with the view of Kennedy et al. (2012), who argued that the in-depth knowledge that EPs have concerning children's development in context enables them to engage effectively with the issues arising during transition processes in ECE from an informed and inclusive position.

#### **4.2.3 Anxiety**

The key emotion that many EPs spoke of regarding transitions in ECE was anxiety, though 'panic' was also described. In terms of *educator anxiety*, this was sometimes felt to be due to the pressure on "overworked teachers" (EP3) to improve results. This anxiety was perceived to lead to teachers rushing into adult-led forms of learning:

Another thing I have noticed in Reception is how quickly schools start pushing the curriculum. My most deprived school that I work in pushes the curriculum from day one, so they do very little settling. So we're straight into learning our sounds and getting into reading, because – to quote the SENCO – we *have to* with regards to results, whereas actually we know, as educational psychologists, we need to spend time building that community, that sense of belonging, working together, some of the play skills, properly assessing where young people are. (EP1)

A key feature of teacher's anxiety or "panic" was described as being centred upon those children with additional needs, who are viewed as being "behind" and in need of "catching up" (both at the transition to YR and to Y1). For example:

You know it might be that there's a sudden panic: "oh my goodness, they're at the end of Reception and they can't do du, du, du, and we need them to get to there". (EP2)

[...] but I think it's probably a reflection of the curriculum going too quickly, and that anxiety of: "If I don't meet the expectations, if the children I'm teaching don't meet these expectations", that is also a school that does performance-related pay for the teachers, so there's that in the background, which is a huge anxiety for the teachers. It comes across. It feels like a very stressful environment. (EP1)

A further sub-theme was that of *parental anxiety*, which, again, was described as being especially apparent amongst parents of children with additional needs:

[...] that transition of cuddly, cuddly early years into the more formal school setting is a big kick in the teeth to some parents, you know, they feel they're being deprived, 'what about my little person?'. (EP5)

[...] kids on the autistic spectrum [...] there's lots of parental anxiety in that group: "oh, they've got so used to Mrs so and so being there and the routine and the rigor and the structure. How are they going to manage in a different building or a different room and a different person?". (EP6)

*Managing this anxiety* was perceived to be one of the *key roles of EPs*, for example:

The challenge is handling that anxiety and allowing everybody to feel uncertain about what might happen, but actually planning for it anyway and just seeing how things go. (EP1)

Handling the anxiety and uncertainty around transitions is a skill that EPs are arguably well-placed to be able to exhibit, since they have a detailed understanding of the macro-system pressures (e.g. curriculum demands; school results pressure) that might feed into such anxiety and the complexity of emotions that might be involved. The benefits of bringing a positive psychology perspective to these issues was highlighted by EP4:



I think often the starting point is about people being anxious and having things they think will be barriers and therefore it's really important that those don't get minimised, because they need to be acknowledged, but it's also really important alongside that to have a narrative about new opportunities, things that will suit people, to have a kind of positive and developmental approach to transition. You know, who wants to be in nursery forever? Or pre-school? (EP4)

The idea that transitions are fundamental to human experience was also highlighted, as well as the value of teaching children to notice, consider, explore and celebrate change. Reducing anxiety by bringing a positive perspective towards transitions in ECE is arguably a key way in which EPs can make a unique contribution to work in this area. This sense of reframing transitions as presenting not only challenges but also opportunities for growth and development is reflected in previous research (e.g. Seidman & French, 2004; Hugo et al., 2018). Furthermore, as highlighted by past research (e.g. Shields, 2009; Connolly & Gersch, 2016; Byrnes, 2012; Potter et al., 2013), supporting parents during the transition journey is vitally important. For example, EPs could help to support the amelioration of parental anxiety by running parental workshops (e.g. see Giallo et al., 2010, for an Australian example) that could be designed to foster “a strengths-based, family-transitions approach” (Webb et al., 2017).

#### ***4.2.4 Collaborative approaches to support***

This theme captures the views of EPs regarding how best to support children with additional needs during transitions in ECE. Although a range of support options were identified, the common thread amongst them all was the idea of collaboration; working together and/or developing shared understandings was central to all of the approaches identified within the sub-themes that follow.

Firstly, EPs identified an array of factors which can lead to some groups of children presenting as vulnerable during transitions in ECE (see table 11).

**Table 11: Outlines the additional needs that can lead to children being vulnerable during transitions in ECE, as identified by EPs**

Additional needs that can lead to vulnerability during transitions in ECE:
• social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
• children with attachment or trauma needs
• children who have “missed life opportunities” (EP1)
• children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)
• developmental delay
• Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)
• Children who are in care (CIC)
• SEN
• children born prematurely
• children who do not have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), despite having a high level of need

What appears to be clear from the views of EPs is that this is *not a homogenous group of children* but instead that there are a range of presenting needs that can lead to the need for additional support during the transition to YR and to Y1. Importantly, EP1 felt that there is no clear pattern regarding which children are vulnerable, and commented that it would therefore be beneficial to conduct research to track the long-term outcomes of these children:

I think a potential role would be to look at the... Would be to crunch the data [...] I'd love to do a piece of research to asking nursery staff: "Do you think this child is going to have an issue at primary? What do you think those issues might be?" Then at the end of reception, getting the teacher, going, "Does this child have any issues? What are they?" and seeing if the two match up, because that would allow you to realise: "Actually, are nursery staff highlighting things that become an issue? Or are they just generally a little bit anxious and actually nothing happens?" (EP1)

A range of supportive strategies and practices were identified as important regardless of the type of need a child or family has. Although the transition to Y1 was viewed by EPs as highly significant and, in some cases more challenging for pupils to adapt to compared to the transition to YR, the strategies for supporting all pupils and those

deemed to be more vulnerable were described similarly regardless of whether the child is transitioning out of nursery or YR.

A number of EPs discussed the influence of the school ethos, for example, the importance of *willing attitudes* to learn, change and make adjustments, on the success of children's transitions:

I would say it does vary across schools about how willing they are to adjust the curriculum to meet that young person's need. Some schools are absolutely brilliant and take children and they learn; they just learn, they put things in place, they train people up and I've got some schools that are absolutely brilliant at doing that. And some schools that are quite resistant, still, unfortunately. (EP2)

I've seen some schools that really appear to not have a huge amount but they're just creative with the way that they put it in place. Then other schools who are quite like, "We're going to struggle to meet this child's needs in Year 1, so we're going to ask them to repeat Reception". (EP1)

EP5 highlighted the need for "understanding, acceptance and willingness on the part of the receiving school", particularly for children with complex needs.

The importance of *robust information sharing to facilitate personalised support* was also apparent within EP's perceptions, including the need to transfer and build upon everyone's knowledge of each child's unique needs to aid the success of their transition (e.g. giving very specific handover of successful strategies), a sub-theme that was exemplified by EP4:

There was an example with this piece of work that I did that was actually in Foundation, where the nursery, in terms of their paperwork, they had written quite bland things like, 'calming strategies when she has a meltdown' and when we were talking there were some really specific things. Like they did this blowing, (makes blowing sound), and actually nobody would ever have invented that from the school's point of view, you know you'd never come up with it, or at least it would take ages, or you'd wonder what she was doing if she was huffing about, without that information. (EP4)

As part of the information-sharing process, *the centrality of strong communication and building relationships* between all key stakeholders was highlighted. Several EPs

described the importance of face to face meetings, in addition to sharing paperwork, attended by everyone who is directly involved in meeting a child's needs:

[...] good practice is when people communicate. So when the nursery, or early years setting, communicates well with the primary school and I would say that, to me, would look like more than just paperwork. So, ok, there needs to be a sharing of paperwork if there is important paperwork but there needs to be face to face meetings between key adults in both settings and for parents to be a part of that. And for the child to be a part of that where possible. (EP3)

[...] it often comes down to communication, which I think is building relationships and funding having a coffee together. It sounds... from the outside it looks like you're just funding people to sit down and chat, but actually, if you put educational professionals together, they very rarely sit and chat about their holidays. They often talk about what they do, because they only work in their setting. (EP1)

Involving parents and supporting their understanding through this process was highlighted as a key supportive role that EPs can engage in:

I think working with the parents so that there are no surprises for them as far as possible [...] It's fundamental; because often in the course of the journey with special needs parents can misunderstand things or, you know, it's all jargon [...] so it gives them a chance to sit down and we can really help spell it out and really try to persuade them, just ask, and if we don't know we'll find out. (EP5)

EP5 also described the need for school staff to engage in a personable approach with parents (e.g. by writing a letter to introduce themselves), to foster a sense of getting to know each other.

*Observing the child in context* (e.g. at home; in their previous setting) was raised by EP1 and EP6 as a common practice which helps to develop school staff's understanding of a child's previous experiences. However, EP1 noted that these visits are not always conducted by the most relevant member of staff (e.g. the class teacher) and that information gained from the home visit in YR is not always passed on to Y1 staff.

Finally, EPs emphasised the importance of engaging in *timely 'plan, do, review' activities* when supporting the transitions of children with additional needs. EP3

summarised the need for a clear transition plan to be devised in good time prior to the transition to YR:

[...] if it's a child who has SEN, then some kind of plan that outlines strengths, needs and what works in the nursery, is going to be really helpful [...] but to have that information early on so that the primary school has got a chance to set it up ready for September, in Reception – EP3

Furthermore, EP1 communicated the belief that identification of needs should take place early on in YR to enable children to have a positive experience within “the best year of primary school to make friends and to get into routine ready for Year One” (EP1). The importance of well-timed preparation and regular reviews of progress was described by EP5:

I think if people don't prepare for transitions, it's a missed opportunity and often I think it's a really important summative point, you know, it's kind of, quite often people don't realise how much a child has developed and how much has changed [...] if a setting or a group of people who are moving a child into their next phase, if they don't have the opportunity to think about it and review what has and hasn't been effective then that's lost learning and that's a lost opportunity. (EP4)

Overall, this complex theme suggests that EPs hold views that are reflective of the principles of the EDMT, in which the quality of relationships over time are positioned as central to transition success (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). It has been argued that an awareness of the dynamic interaction between what the school setting is offering and the needs of the individual child is essential (Laverick, 2008) and the results indicate that the EPs had such an awareness. However, challenges to building relationships were highlighted by several EPs, mainly due to features of the ecological environments, for example: the constraints related to key staff in the next year group not being identified far enough in advance, thus reducing the time with which they can be fully involved in transition practices; and there not being enough time for full dialogue between sending staff and receiving staff.

#### **4.2.5 An evolving role for EPs over time**

This main theme is comprised of several sub-themes which together demonstrate the EPs' view that their role within transitions in ECE has changed and developed over time, towards a reduction in their involvement. The potential for a wider role and the perception of systemic barriers to this also feature within this theme.

EPs described a range of work at the individual, group and systems levels which indicated that in the past they developed *diverse experience working in multi-agency contexts* for issues relating to transitions in ECE (table 12 provides a summary of the aspects of work discussed). Common themes across the examples provided included the view that EPs previously had closer links with other professionals (e.g. LA teams) working outside of the school system and that the key role of the EP in the past was essentially one of facilitating, supporting and bringing together key people (e.g. parents; school staff; medical professionals). Importantly (from an ecological perspective), EP5 expressed the view that in the past her role was more embedded within school settings and she was therefore able to engage in work over time, which helped to build a richer picture of children's' needs:

[...] before there was an opportunity to build a proper, rich and full picture about a child's development from the entrance to, say, a Children's Centre or the nursery, so that you would have opportunities to build up, sort of a photo almost, a little album in your head, of how they're developing and their needs. (EP5)

In contrast, EP views were indicative of *a more limited current role* in ECE transitions (table 13 provides a summary of the work described). This was explained as involving: engagement in short discussions with school staff; informal 'check ins' with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) during core planning visits; the provision of transition planning support for children with complex SEN (including statutory work); and the giving of advice pertaining to curriculum planning in Y1 (for children in need of continued access to play-based learning opportunities). On the whole, such work appears to be at the individual level and this contrasts with previous research that detailed wider programs and interventions that EPs have been involved in (e.g. Kennedy et al., 2012; Byrnes, 2012). Of course, the perceptions of EPs in this study

**Table 12: A summary of past work that EPs described their involvement with in relation to transitions in ECE**

Aspects of past work that EPs reported their involvement with	Examples
⇒ Strategic work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of one-page profiles to aid the sharing of key information during children’s transitions</li> <li>• Devising SEN toolkits (specialist EP)</li> <li>• Carrying out joint work with the LA autism team: supporting children with ASC during transitions; supporting schools to think about meeting their needs proactively; providing information that schools could use at a group and strategic level</li> <li>• Sitting on the LA early years panel: contributing to decision making regarding funding applications for EP and portage input</li> <li>• Working with the early years team in the LA to create information packs for parents of children with SEN that supported parents to think about their child’s transition to school</li> </ul>
⇒ Systemic work in schools and early years settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting staff to plan an appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of a cohort of children in YR, the majority of whom had SLCN</li> </ul>
⇒ Consultation work focused children’s transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting individuals to develop their thinking and prepare for the transition</li> <li>• Helping key people to explore what they want to happen and how the transition might work</li> <li>• Involving the SENCo, class teachers, support staff and parents</li> <li>• Carrying out drop-in consultations for staff working in Children’s Centres in which joint-problem-solving would take place</li> </ul>
⇒ Offering a holistic perspective in a multi-agency context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating in, and facilitating, multi-agency meetings to support planning for transition</li> <li>• Ensuring that key individuals (e.g. those working directly with the child) attend meetings</li> <li>• Establishing what’s worked well, what needs to be transferred, the concerns of parents, next steps</li> <li>• Working with key adults involved</li> <li>• Facilitating and enabling discussion</li> <li>• Developing understanding of a child’s needs to support the bridging to the primary setting</li> <li>• Gathering together the perspectives of a variety of professionals (e.g. Speech and Language Therapists; Occupational Therapists; and Physiotherapists)</li> </ul>
⇒ Working with parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting parents of children with SEN to understand the transition to school (e.g. by creating information packs)</li> <li>• Offering reassurance and support</li> <li>• Helping parents to recognise the progress their child had made in YR</li> </ul>

provide only one example of practices taking place in an English LA and a comparative investigation into EP work elsewhere would therefore be a useful avenue for future research. It is also possible that other EPs within the EPS were engaging in a greater degree of work with transitions in ECE.

**Table 13: A summary of the current work that EPs described their involvement with in relation to transitions in ECE**

Features of EPs' work	Examples
⇒ Discussing children's transition during general planning meetings (as part of a school's core visit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short discussions with school staff about children's transition into the setting</li> <li>• Informal 'check-ins' with SENCos to find out how children are progressing</li> </ul>
⇒ Supporting the transitions of children with complex needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting decisions around whether or not a child would benefit from a move to specialist provision</li> <li>• Contributing to assessments for a child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCPs)</li> </ul>
⇒ Supporting staff with issues related to the transition from YR to Y1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving staff the confidence to continue to provide a pupil with a play-based curriculum into Y1</li> <li>• Supporting decisions around whether a child should repeat YR instead of transition to Y1, through an advisory role</li> </ul>

Importantly, two of the EPs (EP2 and EP4) within this study reflected upon their past experiences working in other LAs and it is possible that such work was ongoing in those contexts. However, all of the EPs were clear that, in the context of the LA where they were working at present, they had experienced significantly *reduced involvement in early years work* in recent years. This indicated a lack of EP involvement in early intervention and preventative work. For example:

There's far less systemic stuff than I would like and supporting staff with meeting children's needs and that sort of thing. So it's sort of dwindled. I used to do a lot more and it seems to have dwindled over the time that I've been practicing. (EP1)

I'm going to have to go back a bit because I haven't done any early years work for a while, so at least a year. (EP2)

I haven't had a lot of Reception work, which is interesting, given that we should all be doing, you know, early intervention and everything. They don't tend to come up. (EP3)



[...] like I was saying, I haven't done an awful lot of early years work recently. (EP4)

We don't do nearly enough systemic work in the early years settings. We don't do any (systemic work) anywhere – because it's quick consultations and then we bog off! (laughs). Go away! (EP5)

I used to do loads more early years, just consultation work [...] that's just not happening with the frequency that it used to. (EP6)

Nevertheless, the EPs in this study felt that there was *scope for a wider role at various levels* in terms of EP involvement in ECE transitions. They described a range of potential future roles (as outlined in table 14), from direct work supporting parents, to involvement with group work in schools, to carrying out research.

Finally, a range of *systemic barriers to engaging with work in the early years* were raised and several of the EPs felt very strongly that these were responsible for the reduction in their involvement with ECE transitions. These barriers included:

- systemic changes in the allocation of EPs to early years work within the EPS, resulting in a lack of autonomy;
- the move to a traded model of service delivery, resulting in schools prioritising other issues for EP input;
- lack of funding (e.g. a limited budget for commissioning early years work within the EPS);
- a resultant reduction in EP involvement working with whole school settings over time, leading to insufficient time to develop knowledge of children's needs and build relationships with staff;
- a greater focus on transitions into post-16 settings; and
- the voice of EPs is not being heard at a national level (e.g. to challenge educational policies and practices).

**Table 14: A summary of EP views regarding the potential future roles for EPs within transitions in ECE**

Potential role for EPs	Examples
⇒ Working with parents more directly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To support transition</li> <li>• To develop parenting skills and attachment</li> </ul>
⇒ Designing and carrying out interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group interventions to support vulnerable children at times of transition (e.g. those who are emotionally vulnerable)</li> </ul>
⇒ A research role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To investigate the effectiveness of induction timetables</li> <li>• To track the long-term trajectories of children who present as vulnerable during the transition to school</li> <li>• To establish the range of work that EPs are doing within the early years in other LAs</li> </ul>
⇒ Following up on casework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisiting and reviewing cases involving vulnerable children to establish the effectiveness of transition input over the long-term (e.g. in five years time)</li> <li>• Gaining feedback from children, parents and staff about their experiences</li> </ul>
⇒ Supporting Y1 staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting the confidence and skills of CTs in terms of how to support children who are deemed not to be ready for Y1</li> <li>• Improving communication between key adults</li> </ul>
⇒ Providing support for non-maintained settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting less experienced staff to develop an understanding of how to meet the needs of children with additional needs</li> </ul>
⇒ EPs based in an early years setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working closely with the SENCo at a multi-agency level</li> </ul>

The EP's comments suggest that, within the context in which these EPs were working, systemic challenges were impacting upon their ability to become involved with transitions in ECE. It was noticeable that each EP's level of experience appeared to have an effect on their perceptions within this sub-theme. EPs with more experience in the EP role were more negative about the systemic changes they described; presumably as they were more able to reflect on changes over time within the context of the LA. EP1 (eleven years of experience), EP5 (twenty-nine years of experience) and EP6 (fourteen years of experience) were particularly dissatisfied with the issues that they perceived to be barriers in this area. As EP5 summarised:

I wouldn't say I have a chance to talk to anybody else about what could be helpful systemically, so lack of opportunity and lack of... Is it 'autonomy', the right word – to do what I think is right as a professional? That's completely taken away from me. I'm directed to do pieces of work. (EP1)

[...] in the past it's been very much – there was more autonomy, so there comes a point where if an EP isn't allowed a certain degree of autonomy then I think we are being really hard pushed to do a good job. (EP5)

I suppose in truth it's a bit about the sense of loss of control as well, because, again, with different systems, going back, there were obligations on following through on kiddies. So, the transition wasn't a huge deal because in any case you'd started with the child so you'd be carrying on a bit before you finished. Whereas now it's the piece of work, get top-up funding, bang, gone. Hear about the child three years later. What actually happened that now you're shouting? (laughs). (EP5)

### **4.3 Similarities and differences between the views of school staff and EPs**

One of the strengths of this study was the inclusion of the perspectives of two different groups of participants. The inclusion of the views of school staff is helpful in providing EPs with important insights into how and where they can support schools and early years settings with transitions in ECE.

A number of similarities were apparent across the themes constructed for school staff and for EPs, such as:

- the belief that the transition to Y1 can be significantly challenging for many children and that careful support is required to navigate the transition successfully;
- the view that a diverse range of needs leads some children to be vulnerable during transitions in ECE;
- comparable perceptions around the types of support that are effective for children with additional needs during these transitions, including robust information sharing based on effective relationships;
- the issue of top-down pressure leading to anxiety for school staff;
- the sense that transitions in ECE can lead parents to feel a range of difficult emotions (e.g. anxiety); and
- the view that, within the LA, EPs have a limited role pertaining to these transitions at present.

Such similarities are positive as they indicate shared constructions across these two professional groups which, presumably, facilitates effective joint working.

Alternatively, differences in perspective were also apparent in several key ways. For example:

- Whilst EPs and school staff both emphasised the importance of collaborative working (e.g. robust information sharing), school staff highlighted the challenges to engaging in this successfully in practice (e.g. due to tensions between staff; increasing top-down pressure; and the schoolification of the early years);
- School staff described a range of practices that they use to ease children's' transitions to formal learning whilst EPs highlighted the negative experiences that some children experience regardless of this; and
- School staff provided important insights into specific features of the school neighbourhood and community which impact upon children's transitions (e.g. language barriers and cultural practices)

One reason for some of the differences in perceptions could be the fact that school staff are carrying out the school practices they described (i.e. they are actively engaged in children's transitions in their day to day work) whereas EPs were often reporting on what they have seen others doing.

## **5. Implications for EP practice**

EPs, with their knowledge and insight into child development and ECE, can play a key role in supporting early years settings and schools to provide the highest quality of education to young children during transitions in ECE. In the early years, children are developing a broad range of social and personal skills, as well as their identity and sense of self as an individual in the world (Evangelou et al., 2008). If the effects of transition experiences in ECE have long-term effects on children's future developmental trajectories, then the work of professionals such as EPs is well invested in promoting good practice in early years transitions.

The findings of the present study have a range of implications for the work of EPs at individual, systemic and strategic levels with schools, parents and other agencies. These implications are outlined in table fifteen. It is important to highlight that these implications have been drawn from the comments made by school staff and EPs rather than the first-hand views of parents and agencies; it would therefore be helpful for future research to seek the opinions of parents (and other agencies involved with ECE transitions), to explore whether they share these views.

**Table 15 outlines the key implications of the findings of the present study for the work of EPs (note that several implications cross over, these have been indicated with a \*)**

Implications for practice with schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support staff to plan for effective continuity between year groups to help children to navigate the transition successfully and develop independence in the context of increasing expectations</li> <li>• Develop staff practices for supporting pupils who have been identified as vulnerable through the transitions (e.g. those who are not yet ready for formal methods of teaching)</li> <li>• Foster a positive view of transition focused on possibilities rather than challenges</li> <li>• Reframe narrow child readiness perspectives towards a systemic focus on inclusive 'Ready Schools' *</li> <li>• Support staff to create effective transition plans for pupils with complex needs (e.g. plans that provide support over time and are grounded in fostering positive relationships between all involved)</li> <li>• Support the development of staff confidence to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of all children</li> <li>• Advocate for the importance of play-based learning opportunities and the development of children's social and emotional wellbeing</li> <li>• Promote the importance of, and develop understanding of, developmentally appropriate YR and Y1 curriculums (to help to reduce 'schoolification' of the early years)</li> <li>• Facilitate staff understanding of cultural diversity and support staff to develop shared understandings with parents for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL)</li> <li>• Support effective professional relationships and collaborative working between school staff (helping to break down barriers between year groups)</li> <li>• Develop shared understandings of the importance of transitions in ECE across different levels within school systems (e.g. support staff, teaching staff, senior leadership teams)</li> <li>• Apply theory and research on anxiety and emotional wellbeing to support teachers with the challenges related to ECE transitions (including the pressure to achieve results)</li> <li>• Conduct research to track the progress of vulnerable groups (e.g. long-term outcomes)</li> <li>• Provide training to promote the EDMT</li> <li>• Support school staff to recognise the continued importance of involving parents through the transition to Y1 and develop practice in this area; for example, by exploring the</li> </ul>

meaning of democratic relationships with parents and helping staff to consider ways in which such relationships can be developed more effectively
<b>Implications for practice with parents</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster a positive view of transition focused on possibilities rather than challenges *</li> <li>• Support parents to engage in democratic relationships with school staff</li> <li>• Create transition projects which seek to promote positive relationships over time and foster person-centred partnerships between parents and school staff</li> <li>• Reframe narrow child readiness perspectives towards a systemic focus on inclusive 'Ready Schools' *</li> <li>• Conduct workshops for parents to support their understanding of the transition process</li> <li>• Apply theory and research on anxiety and emotional wellbeing to support parents through the challenges of transition (particularly parents of children with additional needs) *</li> <li>• Offer support and advice to parents of children with complex needs during transition planning (e.g. help to explain terminology and processes)</li> <li>• Promote the values of inclusion and support parents to challenge practices which do not make reasonable adjustments for the needs of children</li> </ul>
<b>Implications for working with other agencies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead programmes at the level of the LA that target transitions in ECE in order to support early intervention</li> <li>• Reframe narrow child readiness perspectives towards a systemic focus on inclusive 'Ready Schools' *</li> <li>• Engage in joint work with other professionals to create and evaluate projects which seek to involve parents in transitions and foster democratic partnerships between schools and parents</li> <li>• Advocate for a developmentally appropriate curriculum that is informed by relevant research conducted within ECE</li> <li>• Advocate for children's rights with the aim of preventing failure in those who are not yet ready to engage with the demands of formal learning</li> <li>• Support inclusive transition practices *</li> <li>• Promote the importance of working with schools in systemic ways across time</li> <li>• Challenge restricted ways of working within LAs</li> </ul>

## **6. Strengths, limitations and future research**

The holistic exploration of two transitions taking place within English ECE is considered to be a key strength of the current study since it allowed a concurrent consideration of the issues surrounding both transitions (which can arguably be viewed as parts of the same continuum). Furthermore, gathering the perspectives of not only teachers but also TAs and LSAs regarding these two transitions is a unique contribution of the study as, to the researcher's knowledge, no other study has done so previously. The inclusion of a diverse group of school staff allowed wide-ranging

discussions to develop within focus groups. Indeed, the use of focus groups with school staff is a method that has not been used in previous research in this area to date; this is a strength of the study as it provided staff with an opportunity for professional development through participation in the research (e.g. by co-constructing and reflecting together on their experiences). Finally, the exploration of the EP role within transitions in ECE is a key strength as this is a highly under-researched area despite the international recognition of the importance of the transition to school.

The present study also has a number of limitations. Critically, a key limitation is the omission of the views of parents and children. This would be a priority for future research in order to balance and triangulate the views gathered thus far and to establish the extent to which the perspectives presented in the current study are similar or different to those of children and parents.

The current research may also be criticised for only representing the perspectives of school staff and EPs in one LA, since practice varies widely across geographical regions; an alternative approach might have been to conduct a larger scale survey of views across multiple LAs. However, the study did not seek to identify generalisable findings (e.g. for the EP profession as a whole); instead, the intention was to produce a qualitative account of the views of a sample of school staff and EPs in England. Therefore, the strength of the study is in its depth, not breadth.

The inclusion of staff views from only one school is a further limitation as it is possible that the addition of staff from other schools could have supported richer conversations to develop during the focus groups. An alternative approach that future research might wish to consider would be the use of a case study approach; such an approach could prove beneficial in order to explore, from various perspectives, the extent to which staff carry out the practices they described in the present study.

Furthermore, the self-report nature of EP's views on their role within ECE transitions presents only one perspective of EP practice in this area; it would have been useful to have gathered the views of individuals that work directly with EPs, such as SENCOs,

in order to present a more balanced account of the role of EPs from different perspectives.

It was also apparent that there was insufficient time within both the interviews and focus groups to explore the issues related to neighbourhood and community factors in detail. Thus, future research to investigate the various neighbourhood and community issues that were raised in the study would be beneficial; for example, what can school staff do to support children who, for cultural reasons, miss transition activities pre- and post- transition? How can they, and their families, be supported?

Finally, although staff identified a range of needs that can lead to vulnerability during transitions, the detail around additional support was general in nature. Further research could look in more detail at the kinds of support that can be provided to target specific needs (e.g. children with ASC).

## **7. Final conclusion**

From the theoretical perspective of the EDMT, this study explored the perceptions of school staff and EPs regarding two key transitions taking place within the context of ECE in England (nursery to YR; and YR to Y1). Overall, a number of similarities were apparent across the views of school staff and EPs, although several differences were also clear. The central tenet of the EDMT is that the transition to school is a dynamic process which takes place gradually over time and is impacted upon by interactional processes within and between significant relationships. Several of the findings indicated a high degree of cohesion between participant's perceptions and the principles of the EDMT, which provides evidence for the validity and usefulness of the theoretical model in practice. However, the results also suggested that there are a range of challenges to working in this way in practice.

This piece of research provides important qualitative insights into the perceptions and current practices of school staff and EPs working in one English LA regarding their involvement with transitions in ECE, thus addressing a number of gaps in previous literature. Such insight enables the identification of a range of implications for the work



of EPs, who have a vital contribution to make in advocating for inclusive educational practices which ensure that no child gets left behind during transitions in ECE.

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## **Part C: Critical Appraisal**

## 1. Introduction

I engaged in an ongoing reflective and reflexive process throughout the experience of conducting this thesis research. Key aspects of this process are represented in the following critical appraisal, which consists of two distinctive sections:

- i. Firstly, there is a critical account of the research process that I engaged in. This includes a summary of the initial rationale for the study, a clarification of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that were inherent within the decisions that I made, and a transparent explanation of the various elements of research design that I worked through. The ongoing development of my research skills and knowledge throughout this process are also referenced.
- ii. Secondly, the contribution of the study to the existing knowledge base in this area is outlined, including how the research adds to the literature through addressing key gaps. The strengths and limitations of the current study are also reflected upon, alongside suggestions for future research. Furthermore, the application of the results to the practice of educational psychologists (EPs) is discussed.

This part of the thesis will be written in the first person to reflect the inherently personal (Creswell, 2012), as well as professional, nature of the research process; this project was a powerful learning experience which I feel can only be described from a personal perspective.



## **2. Critical account of the research and research practitioner**

### **2.1 Rationale for the research**

#### ***2.1.1 Inception of the research focus***

The decision to conduct my thesis on the topic of transitions in early education stemmed in part from my own direct experiences as an early years, Reception (YR) and Year Two (Y2) class teacher prior to becoming a trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). These experiences contributed to my strong belief in the incredible value of early years education and my awareness of the possibilities and challenges that can present during times of transition. I was keen to invest my time in an area which had the scope not only to develop my research skills but also to generate compelling and useful insights to the work of educational psychologists (EPs) in the early years. In particular, I was curious to explore the topic of the transition from the YR class to Year One (Y1) in England; since my subsequent experiences as a TEP had indicated, on an anecdotal level, that this can be a particularly complex experience for children with additional needs.

Through discussion with my research supervisor and an initial search of literature, my initial focus widened to include the transition that children make in England and Wales from nursery into YR, since this is a more formally recognised transition which also had the potential to warrant interesting and valuable research. I began to view both of these transitions as part of one continuum situated within the wider context of early childhood education (ECE), catering for children up to the age of eight.

I also began the research process with a broad interest in exploring the role of the EP working within the early years due to my belief in the power of early intervention for children's long-term outcomes. An initial search of literature indicated that this area had received little research attention in recent years and, specifically, research around the role of the EP in early years transitions was altogether limited. Therefore, a scoping exercise was carried out on an online discussion forum for EPs in the UK, 'EPNET', in order to gain some initial ideas around the extent of EP's work in early

years transitions. The results of this indicated that there were a range of potential issues to explore in a piece of research in this area.

The decision was thus made to conduct my thesis on the topic of two key early years transitions in the English school system (the move from nursery to YR, and YR to Y1). Conducting a systematic literature review (see section 2.1.2) led to the decision to explore how these transitions are perceived by key adults (EPs, class teachers and parents) from the theoretical perspective of Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta's (2000) Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (EDMT). Further to this, the study set out to engage in an examination of EP involvement in supporting these transitions. (Section 2.4 below provides further detail around the decisions made regarding participants).

It is acknowledged that the interest and passion that I had for this topic, stemming from my own experiences, will have no doubt influenced the direction of the study and the way in which I interpreted the results. My belief is that my interests and prior experiences, whilst bringing with them an inevitable degree of researcher bias, meant that I had a deep understanding of the research topic at the outset and that this in turn enhanced the effectiveness of the study design as well as the interactions that I was able to have with participants who kindly gave their time to the research. As a result, I believe that I generated rich and complex data which allowed me to make a significant contribution to knowledge in this area. Furthermore, as I will go on to explain, my research is situated within a qualitative research paradigm which does not argue that the researcher is "absent or removed" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.33) from the process of creating knowledge; instead, from a reflexive position I have recognised that it is impossible to separate myself as a researcher from impacting upon and influencing the results of my research (Willig, 2013).

### ***2.1.2 The process of conducting the literature review***

An initial search of key electronic databases indicated that my focus for the research would generate a large and complex body of literature to review. I therefore gave careful consideration to my synthesis of existing literature to ensure that I conducted

it in a systematic, structured way. I decided to adopt the 'Weight of Evidence' framework outlined by Gough (2007) to organise my approach to the review and to support my justifications for the decisions I made around the quality and relevance of included literature (see appendix A for a visual representation of this).

I constructed three key questions to guide the overall review:

1. How are these transitions viewed and in what ways are children supported through them?
2. What role have educational psychologists had in supporting these two transitions?
3. Which theoretical perspectives and/or models are evident within literature pertaining to the two identified transitions?

Seeking to explore the ways in which these questions have been answered led me to conduct three separate literature searches using a range of databases as well as hand searches of relevant journals. Use of Gough's (2007) framework as well as clear inclusion and exclusion criteria supported my process of narrowing the larger body of research down. However, I found this to be a significantly challenging process, not only due to the time-consuming nature of it but also because of the vast array of terminology used across the literature. I spent considerable time making sense of this in addition to the process of critiquing the quality of literature based on, for example, the methods used. One further challenge I encountered was the need to supplement my initial literature review with the most up to date research in the area following my interruption of study throughout 2018. I felt it was important to do this to ensure that my research retained integrity and to limit the impact of the substantial time gap between the 'groundwork', 'measurement', 'design' and 'analysis, interpretation and dissemination' phases (see Barker, Pistrang & Elliot, 2016) of the project.

Searching for literature related to question one above, in relation to the move to compulsory schooling, was significantly challenging due to the vast quantity of literature available for evaluation. It was clear that I would need to make systematic quality and relevance judgements in order to present a synthesis that was

underpinned by a clear rationale. Firstly, I decided that I would not include research published before 2009 as I felt that older studies would represent knowledge pertaining to social, political and historical contexts of education differing greatly from the present day, thus reducing their relevance. I also made the decision to focus primarily on empirical studies conducted in the UK as these were clearly of greatest relevance to the work of EPs in England, which was the context for my study.

Although the UK studies provided important insights into parental involvement in ECE transitions, there was a clear lack of literature focused on other aspects of children's transitions to YR, which limited the scope of my review. I therefore decided to select five reviews of international literature (Boyle et al.; Dockett & Perry, 2013; Skouteris, Watson & Lum, 2012; Hirst et al., 2011; and Peters, 2010) for inclusion in order to present a broad and succinct overview of international research findings in this area. The reviews I selected had to have been conducted in the last ten years (2009-2019) and needed to consider a range of international literature. I decided to focus on findings that related to markers of successful transitions and how to support positive transitions. Although I felt that research conducted in international settings lacked direct relevance to practice in the UK (e.g. due to the wide range of school starting ages), I also felt that to omit all of the findings of such a large body of research would result in my literature review lacking sufficient depth or context.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that there are limitations to presenting the findings from existing review papers for several reasons. Firstly, the reviews that I included only present findings from literature conducted during or prior to 2015, which is arguably less applicable to the present day. A further caveat is that these reviews will have been influenced by the interpretative lens, biases and/or synthesis skills of the researchers who conducted them and it is therefore arguable that the findings presented may not accurately reflect the original research being cited. However, I felt that presenting the findings from several different reviews would help to minimise the effect of such issues on my review by providing a balance of perspectives.

### **2.1.3 Construction of the research questions**

At the outset of the study, I constructed five exploratory research questions (RQs) (Barker et al., 2016) in order to address gaps in the literature that I had identified. In line with the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the methodology of the study (see section 2.2 below), the RQs were concerned with gathering data to capture subjective perceptions of the two transitions. I later decided to add an additional RQ so that, for the first two questions, each transition was considered in isolation. This enabled a more explicit exploration of participants' views of the two transitions before focusing in on specific aspects of the processes relevant to both.

I spent a lot of time throughout the latter stages of the research process considering whether the RQs needed to be refined or changed in any way. My reasoning for this can be outlined as follows:

The process of focusing questions is an iterative, reflective process that leads, not just to data, but to specific data that can add knowledge to a larger field of study. (Agee, 2009, p.442)

Indeed, I wanted to ensure that the wording within my questions was specific and focused enough to identify clearly the areas that I aimed to explore through the study, particularly as I planned to conduct a deductive thematic analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, it was also important that the questions were sufficiently reflective of the constructionist epistemology underlying the research paradigm; I needed to avoid constraining the way that the questions were framed.

## **2.2 Research paradigm**

A methodological framework (Barker et al., 2016) guided the decisions that I made around how to conduct the research. This stemmed from the beliefs, values and assumptions that I brought to the process as a researcher.

With regards to the consideration of 'what there is to know' about the world (Willig, 2013), I assumed the position of a *relativist* ontology, which posits that what we know of as 'reality' is influenced by our interpretation of the world (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thus, from this position, there are numerous 'realities' that are constructed by individuals in different ways (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This contrasts with the ontology known as *realism*, which holds that there is one truth or 'reality' that exists out in the world; a truth that is accessible, and knowable, through research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Another alternative ontological perspective is that of *critical realism*, which posits that "subjective interpretations" effect people's perceptions and experiences of an "objective world" (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014, p.2).

Stemming from this, when considering the question of "how, and what, can we know?" (Willig, 2013, p.4), I adopted a *constructionist* epistemological view. This perspective posits that societal discourses are at the core of how individuals interpret their experiences and create meaning from them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). From a social constructionist position, Burr (2003) argued for a questioning of knowledge that is taken for granted and instead contended that "knowledge is sustained by social processes" (Burr, 2003). Willig (2013) provided a succinct overview of the aims of research conducted from this philosophical approach:

Research from a social constructionist perspective is concerned with identifying the various ways of constructing social reality that are available in a culture, to explore the conditions of their use and to trace their implications for human experience and social practice. (p.7)

A constructionist epistemology stands in contrast to alternative perspectives such as *positivism*, which argues that it is possible to produce objective, unbiased knowledge that directly represents what exists in the world (Willig, 2013).

In light of my ontology and epistemology, a qualitative research paradigm was deemed to be the most appropriate for the study. This approach encapsulates the position that conducting research using small samples allows us to examine meanings within the world and, thus, to produce contextual, partial forms of knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013) that are intrinsically valuable and useful.

### **2.3 Research design**

In line with the theoretical position of the EDMT, I decided that gaining the perceptions of school staff, parents and EPs would enable a thorough ecological examination of the two transitions that were the focus of the study. The initial research design therefore consisted of three parts, with the aim of each part being to gather the perceptions of a different participant group. At the data collection stage, it was not possible to complete part three of the study (aimed at gathering parental perceptions), which resulted in it being removed from the current study, although for the purposes of this critical appraisal, all three parts of the study design will be detailed (see appendix L for copies of the documentation sent to parents).

### **2.4 Participants**

Peters (2010) highlighted the view that “very few research designs address multiple perspectives” (p. 4) and so I felt that recruiting not only EPs but also school staff and parents would be a significant strength of my research design. I also considered involving young children as participants in the research, using, for example, a specific method such as the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) which can be used to empower children to participate meaningfully in research and contribute their perspectives as a result. However, it was felt that this approach would require additional time and resources that were beyond the scope of my thesis. Gaining children’s views could be one important way to extend the findings of this research in future (see section 3.4).

#### **2.4.1 Part one: school staff**

At the beginning of the recruitment process, qualified nursery, YR and Y1 class teachers (CTs) working in three different school settings were sought in order to gather data pertaining to a wider range of contextually valid yet alternative ‘realities’ or ‘truths’ (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008). All eligible schools across the city were contacted, first via email and, where no response had been received, through follow-

up phone calls. Of these, one school gave consent to participate, five explicitly declined due to time constraints and the remaining schools did not give a response. It was therefore the case that staff working in only one school took part in the study. The data collected therefore reflects the constructions of individuals within one school context only which limits the range of views captured.

Additionally, the intention at the outset of the study was for the sample to consist only of class teachers. However, insufficient numbers of teachers in each year group gave consent to take part and therefore support staff (Teaching Assistants and Learning Support Assistants) were also invited to participate. Upon reflection, this presented a valuable opportunity to gain the perspectives of other important school staff who are closely involved with these transitions and the diverse participant group is now considered to be a strength of the research.

#### **2.4.2 Part two: EPs**

The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) situated within the local authority (LA) where I was working on practice placement was identified as an appropriate sample from which to recruit EPs. Six EPs were selected at random from the wider sample within the EPS and contacted to request their participation; all of these EPs gave consent to do so.

The link EP for the participating school was not invited to participate in the study for various reasons. Firstly, due to the potential for ethical difficulties to arise as a result of the EP knowing that I would also be speaking with school staff, and vice versa. This could have led to a conflict of interest whereby the EP was less objective in their discussion of their views due to concerns about what school staff would report (e.g. in case the findings were contradictory), thus reducing the reliability of the findings. It was also felt that inclusion of this EP could have led to teachers feeling that they needed to make comments that would not contradict the views of the EP; such demand characteristics might have biased the findings. I decided that interviewing EPs who had no link to the participating school would allow for more honest and frank



discussions to take place with EPs and staff which, ultimately, would provide a more accurate representation of their perceptions and experiences and would ensure that the relationships between school staff and the link EP were not negatively affected. With this in mind, it was important to make it clear to school staff that the link EP would not be interviewed and that the content of FG discussions would not be directly passed on to the link EP, so that, again, this did not impact upon the way that school staff shared their views. This also ensured that staff wellbeing and relationships were maintained.

### **2.4.3 Part three: parents**

At the design stage of the research I decided to seek the views of parents of pupils attending YR within the schools that gave consent to take part, since parents are central to children's transitions in ECE and the literature review had indicated that their perspectives are underrepresented. I also felt that the inclusion of their views would help to triangulate the perspectives gathered from staff and EPs to present a more balanced set of results. However, during the recruitment stage, I was unsuccessful in engaging sufficient numbers of parents; only four parents out of a possible ninety returned consent forms. This was likely to have been in part due to the issues associated with how to engage 'harder to reach' groups of parents, such as those with English as an Additional Language (EAL), who comprised a large majority of the sample school. Notably, within a qualitative research paradigm it would have been interesting to nevertheless gather data from the four parents who did give consent, however I decided against this due to the inability to analyse the findings of such a small sample using thematic analysis.

Upon reflection, part three was a very ambitious proposal which arguably had the scope to constitute another research project in its own right. Increasing the engagement of parents required additional time and resources that were not possible to devote within the limitations of the thesis timeframe and I therefore decided not to pursue this part of the study. This is perhaps reflective of the fact that applied research does not always turn out as planned. In future I would give closer consideration to

increasing the accessibility of language used within parent information letters (which I had not adapted based on the needs of the school community) and I would plan in sufficient time to conduct approachable parent information sessions in school as an alternative method through which to engage parents in the research process.

## **2.5 Methods and measures**

Several methods of data collection were considered for each part of the study.

### **2.5.1 Part one: focus groups with school staff**

A focus group (FG) method (see Liamputtong, 2011) was chosen for use with school staff as it allowed group interaction to naturally develop with active guidance from the researcher (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010), “to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (Morgan, 1996, p.2). This opportunity for interaction is considered to be a unique feature of FGs in comparison to alternative methods, such as interviews (Kitzinger, 1994). I decided that FGs were the most appropriate method for use with school staff as I felt that the opportunity to reflect as a group on perceptions of transition would stimulate richer insights into the topic, as well as encourage more reluctant staff to participate (Kitzinger, 1995). I also hoped that FGs would give staff the opportunity to reflect on their current practices and create shared meanings in a confidential, supportive environment; thus providing them with an intrinsic benefit in taking part. Indeed, at the end of the Y1 FG in particular, staff commented on how enjoyable and insightful the experience had been, not only in developing their awareness of practice but also in boosting their confidence (see table sixteen).

Three FGs were conducted as research has shown that this number is sufficient in order to identify all of the most frequent themes within a data set (Guest, Namey & McKenna, 2016). As an inexperienced researcher, my decision to carry out smaller FGs, consisting of three to eight participants, was informed by Braun and Clarke (2013) who argued that these “work best in terms of generating a rich discussion, and are easier to manage” (p.115). This was my experience during each of the FGs

although I did notice that a less diverse interaction took place during the nursery focus group, in which there were only three participants, presumably as there were fewer views available to stimulate discussion. This may have restricted the representation of nursery staff during data analysis, which is a limitation of the study.

**Table 16: Extract from the focus group conducted with Y1 teachers detailing a discussion of how it felt to participate in the research**

Interviewer:	Yes, yea. I mean how have you found it this evening? It's often only when you get together, and you talk about a very specific issue like this, you realise how much knowledge you've got.
Y1 CT1:	Do you know what it just makes me think actually we do a really good job!
Y1 CT4:	We do a lot! (all laughing)
Y1 CT1:	You know, it makes me think gosh, actually, we know so much about our children that have transitioned, that we just take it for granted that we do it.
Y1 CT4:	Yea! I'm surprised by how much we actually know which sounds very silly because we're all educated, able people but, especially doing my NQT year sometimes you do kind of doubt yourself a little bit and you're kind of like 'oh...' especially doing my training and stuff in... I have to leave every Wednesday to go and do training and they give you questions and then sometimes you're like "oh no! oh no!" (laughs). But when you're in a kind of comfort zone where it's your school and it's just a nice social group like this it is actually quite nice to be like, "yea, I know that, I get this. I know that." Yea, I know my children and I know what to do with them and...
Y1 CT1:	It's relaxing isn't it? You don't feel pressured. [...]

I initially considered conducting mixed focus groups of nursery, YR and Y1 teachers in each school, however I decided that this would raise significant ethical issues around the potential for conflicting views to be expressed which could negatively impact upon relationships among the staff following the focus group.

One key drawback to the use of FGs is the logistical challenges they present in terms of recruitment and organisation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For example, it is possible that the requirement for staff to travel to a setting other than their own school was a significant contributing factor to the failure to recruit participants from three different schools, due to the commitment it necessitated. Staff were more willing to participate when the FG took place within their own school setting.

### **2.5.2 Part two: semi-structured interviews with EPs**

Semi-structured interviews were chosen in order to explore the views of EPs as this method allows participants to discuss their experiences and perspectives in a confidential setting, which often results in the production of rich, in-depth data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I felt that having the option to probe and explore topics of interest within the semi-structured format would be useful, for example so that I could clarify meanings around what were likely to be complex issues. A further benefit to the use of interviews with EPs was that it allowed for ease of access to the participants; an alternative approach such as FGs would have proved logistically difficult to organise given the agile nature of EP work (e.g. EPs work in lots of different settings).

### **2.5.3 Part three: a qualitative survey of parental views**

My intention was to use pre- and post-transition qualitative surveys of parent's views, with the option of these being sent in three possible forms (chosen by the parent):

- using online software on the 'Survey Monkey' website;
- via a paper survey sent to parents in the post; or
- via a telephone survey (to increase accessibility for those parents who were less able to write their answers down).

The survey contained eighteen open-ended questions (see appendix L) that I constructed in order to gain parents' perspectives on the RQs. Questions were structured into six areas:

- Parent's ecology of schooling
- Parent's perceived contribution to transition
- Relationships over time
- Emotions involved in transition
- Neighbourhood and community influences on transition
- Additional needs

The survey would have been sent to parents at two time points:

1. In the summer term of YR, prior to their child's transition into Y1
2. In the autumn term after their child's transition into Y1

This would have allowed for an insightful comparison of parents' views (in anticipation of the transition and upon reflection of it), thus extending the design of previous research (e.g. Shields, 2009). I also felt that providing parents with two opportunities to reflect on their perspectives and experiences would have allowed the principle of dynamic change in relationships over time (within the EDMT) to have been explored more sufficiently.

## **2.6 Ethical considerations**

In addition to the ethical considerations detailed in the methodology of Part B, the following points arose during the research process:

- As stated previously, during the planning stages of the research I decided that it would be beneficial to seek the participation of three different schools (with differing demographics) in order to gather a richer range of data; I felt that a mixture of participants from different schools would stimulate more diverse interactions to take place within the FGs. However, relatively few schools met the inclusion criteria, thus reducing the available sample, and during the recruitment process only one school agreed to participate. I was initially concerned about this, however, upon reflection, there were several advantages to recruiting participants from one school, including the fact that the report findings are highly relevant to the school and that

it was possible to make direct comparisons of staff perceptions across different year groups where staff were working in the same school context. However, additional ethical considerations arose as a result of this, including the potential for challenging discussions arising within the FGs to continue afterwards.

- At the outset of interviews and FGs I made sure to provide reassuring messages to participants by spending time outlining details of the study and how the data would be used. I also provided a thorough verbal and written debrief at the end, which detailed what I would do with the information shared and what I would not.
- I conducted the majority of interviews with EPs prior to the FGs and made a conscious effort not to make comments or ask questions that could have indicated to participants what the views of other participants were, so as to ensure confidentiality. I also sought to minimise bias by engaging in the same approach to each interview and FG and ensuring that the key points within the question schedules were covered each time. It was important to ensure that I was not unduly influenced by the discussions that arose, and also to manage my emotions and responses to participants to ensure that I did not impact upon, for example, the group processes within the FGs.

## **2.7 Data analysis**

The process of Thematic analysis (TA) that I engaged in is outlined in appendix E. Appendix M provides an example of a coded focus group transcript and appendix N an example of a coded interview transcript.

### **2.7.1 Why thematic analysis?**

TA can be defined as “a method for recognising and organising patterns in content and meaning in qualitative data” (Willig, 2013, p.58). TA was chosen as the method of data analysis over a number of other alternatives for several reasons. Firstly, the topic of focus was an area that had already received significant research attention and therefore the use of Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1992) would not have been appropriate, since this method is better suited to research which seeks to generate

theory from data (Robson, 2011). The use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was also deemed inappropriate due to its focus on exploring, in detail, the lived experiences of individuals; instead, I was interested in gathering the perceptions of groups of participants and therefore TA was deemed to be most suitable.

### **2.7.2 Inductive or deductive?**

A deductive, or theoretical, approach to TA was chosen. Braun and Clarke (2006) explained that this approach is “driven by the researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest in the area” and that it “tends to provide less a rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data” (p.84). The theoretical background of my study was the EDMT and, in light of the extensive research already conducted on the research topic, I was interested primarily on the six RQs I constructed following my review of literature. Therefore, a theoretical TA was most appropriate. However, although I coded all data for the six RQs I also remained open to coding other pertinent features of the data which did not fit within the RQs. Additionally, when reviewing themes I was highly aware of the need to minimise the risk of being unduly influenced by the findings of existing research to ensure that I did not ignore other important aspects of data.

My construction of themes and sub-themes took place through an active process of constructing meaning from patterns across the data. Feedback from my research supervisor was sought regarding the degree of correspondence between the constructed themes and sub-themes and the data extracts that underpinned each one. This checking of evidence proved useful, however, it would also have been useful to have asked a second researcher or colleague to elicit themes from the original dataset in order to minimise the inevitable bias resulting from my interpretation (Smith, 2015). Due to the limited time scales available for the research this was not possible. In future research activities I would seek to do this and I would also conduct a process of “member checking” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 282) following the construction of my themes; this process involves asking the participants to consider whether the

constructed themes are representative of the meanings they felt that they had communicated.

### **2.7.3 Latent or semantic?**

As Willig (2013) stated:

...thematic analysis can focus on different kinds of meaning; these can be manifest meanings (reflecting the explicit content of what a research participant has said, for example), or latent meanings (e.g. reflecting the interpretation the researcher has made of what has been said by a research participant) (p.60)

A combination of semantic and latent analyses were conducted. As the EDMT underpinned the study, I felt that seeking to identify the underlying meanings of participants' comments would allow for a deeper level of analysis in relation to the model (e.g. when considering staff perceptions of the quality of their relationships with parents). However, there were also instances when I felt that capturing the semantic content of data was most appropriate and insightful (e.g. when participants outlined the needs of children they consider to be more vulnerable during transition).

### **2.7.4 Challenges**

I found the process of TA to be lengthy and challenging but also very rewarding as I was keen to do justice to my data and to present my findings with integrity. One issue that I grappled with was whether or not to analyse my data and present my findings in relation to each RQ. I was aware that to do so could run the risk of missing important themes within the data set (e.g. due to discarding data that did not directly relate to a RQ) and I did not want to constrain my writing within the final report by presenting my findings in an overly structured format (e.g. by working through each RQ in sequence). I decided to use my RQs to guide my initial coding, as these were reflective of the primary areas of interest in the study, whilst, at the same time, noticing and creating themes in a fluid way which allowed for the incorporation of additional miscellaneous points of interest that did not directly relate to the RQs. One example of this is the staff theme 'our hands are tied'.



A further dilemma I encountered was the consideration of how many themes and sub-themes to create. As Braun and Clarke (2013) noted, “there is no magic formula” (p.232) for this. The number of themes that I eventually produced necessarily led to the creation of a lengthy results and discussion section, however I felt that to reduce the number of themes any further would have resulted in the omission of essential parts of the ‘story’ of my data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### ***2.8 Personal reflections on the research process***

My experience of conducting this thesis is akin to the summary written by Barker et al. (2016):

Research is demanding: it does require clear and rigorous thought, as well as perseverance and stamina, but it is also fascinating and exciting, and, we hope, beneficial to the public that psychologists ultimately profess to serve. (p. 3)

At many points, I found the process to be stimulating and rewarding. For example, I enjoyed developing my interviewing skills and my ability to facilitate effective dialogue within groups; these skills will be invaluable in my future work as an applied psychologist. Throughout, I found it important to reflect on the similarities and differences between the roles of researcher and TEP, and to be mindful of the separate yet interlinked identities that I was developing in these areas over time. I have learnt to value the unique skills that doctoral level research fosters and in future I will seek to utilise these specific research skills, for example, when seeking to evaluate the work that I carry out in schools.

At other stages of the research process the demands stretched me to my limits of endurance and, in light of this, I feel that I demonstrated persistence and flexible thinking. One notable example of this is my continuation of the research despite taking a year-long interruption of study half way through the process. This brought a unique set of challenges to the process; for example, I needed to recall stages of the research that had been carried out within the last two years in order to reflect on decisions that I had made along the way, showing my progression in understanding.

Crucially, I learnt to recognise that managing feelings of doubt and uncertainty is part of the research journey which can be helpful when channelled into the process in productive ways. One example of this was the process of conducting my literature review, and subsequently updating it following my interruption of study. I found this process uncomfortable and very challenging but, ultimately, it was a valuable learning experience which will be very helpful in my future work as an evidence-informed EP.

A further point to note is that during the data analysis, I was personally affected by the EP theme which suggested that some children are being left behind due to the constraints of an inflexible curriculum placing high expectations on children's academic achievements at a young age. As a firm believer in the importance of inclusive education it saddened me to consider the EP's perspective that children with additional needs, who are potentially vulnerable during these transitions, are being let down by culturally derived policies pertaining to the start of compulsory schooling and the introduction of formal education. This was especially stark when considering my literature review which emphasised the differences in such policies in countries across the world. The results of my study have therefore buoyed my interest in challenging the possible 'schoolification' of early years provision in England due to the negative impact that this can have on some groups of children.

Undoubtedly, my personal interests in this area will have influenced my interpretations of the data and the meanings that I brought to the study. However, my hope is that the measures I put in place to conduct a rigorous and systematic piece of qualitative research allowed me to maximise the effectiveness of the study and, thus, resulted in the production of unique, useful knowledge. I feel passionate about advocating for developmentally appropriate curriculums and this is something that I will take forward with me into my work as an EP as a result of conducting this research.

### **3. Contribution to knowledge**

The present study was designed to address a number of gaps in existing literature, and in doing so it has made a unique contribution to the research in this area.

The study extends previous research on the transition to Y1 by providing evidence that the curricular pressures associated with the transition can negatively impact upon children with additional needs. Perhaps one of the most significant findings was the view that some children are suffering if they are unable to manage the increased expectations associated with the transition to Y1 (the pressures of which can lead educators and parents to feel significant anxiety). This is at odds with the principles of inclusive education and therefore has strong implications for EPs, who arguably have a primary role in advocating for, and supporting organisations to become, 'Ready Schools' (Pianta et al., 1999). One way of doing this might be to support mainstream school systems to manage the pressures related to the curriculum in ways which allow for necessary adaptations, such that all children are supported to access an appropriate education.

Furthermore, the study provides detailed insight into the wide range of needs that school staff and EPs consider to lead to vulnerabilities during transitions in ECE and it addresses a gap in the literature by describing the kinds of additional support that are considered to be important as a result. However, the findings also suggest that more could be done to support vulnerable children, as EPs expressed the view that children who lack 'readiness' run the risk of being left behind at this stage in their education despite staff putting in place a range of additional supports. This is indicative of the need for greater systemic change, at the national and political level, in order to develop a child-centred curriculum which is adaptable to the needs of all children. A clear implication for EPs is the role they could have in advocating for such change and also in conducting research to further explore the risk factors which can lead to children being vulnerable through this time in education (see part B for a full discussion and overview of implications for EPs).

The inclusion within this study of the views of both school staff and EPs provides a unique set of findings that give insight into the experience of transitioning to YR and to Y1 from two different perspectives. This research focuses on the perceptions of school staff and EPs working within the context of one LA in England and thus makes a significant contribution to the scant research conducted previously in this context

and with these participants. The research was not designed to be representative at any larger level; instead my aim was to capture one example of constructions of knowledge regarding early years transitions in this particular context.

A particularly unique feature of the study is the direct exploration of EP's own views on the topic of ECE transitions, which, to my knowledge, have not been studied previously. The EPs expressed the view that greater systemic change is needed regarding the curriculum which takes appropriate account of current research on children's development. The findings also indicated a move away from EP's previously diverse involvement in ECE transitions, towards greatly reduced input, despite EPs expressing a desire for a greater role. Reasons for these changes over time appeared to centre around systemic changes at the levels of the EPS and LA (e.g. traded services; limited funding; and time issues).

Lastly, this research provides a timely update to previous research and indicates that the challenges described in past research remain salient in today's educational climate. This suggests that there is an ongoing need to support all children, and those with additional needs, during their transitions in ECE.

### ***3.1 Strengths and limitations***

Strengths of the study have been detailed in Part B and expanded upon throughout Part C. In summary, the fundamental value of the research design that my thesis embodies has been highlighted by Docket and Perry (2013):

Smaller-scale, qualitative studies do not generate the explanatory power or generalisability of large-scale studies. However, they do contribute a great deal to our understanding of the experiences and expectations of those involved in transition and serve to remind us all that individuals, communities and contexts make a difference in all human endeavours. They also serve to remind us that there are multiple transitions, as no two children experience transition to school in exactly the same way: for each child, the transition to school is unique. (p.9)

The qualitative contribution that the study makes to the diverse field of early years transitions research is considered to be a key strength. Furthermore, the use of the

EDMT as a framework to guide the design of the study and the analysis of data is considered to be a significant strength of the research. However, the research also has a number of key limitations (which stand in addition to those outlined in Part B):

- The views of parents were not captured; in future I would plan in additional time to engage in activities that promote the engagement of parents with the information and consent process.
- The sample is representative of school staff working in one school; this school is situated in a diverse community with high numbers of EAL and SEN. In future I would aim to gather the views of staff from a range of schools to gather more varied perceptions regarding school practices.
- The views of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) were not sought; thus, it was not possible to explore the wealth of knowledge and experience that they have around supporting children with additional needs. In future it would be very valuable to gain their views to build on the findings of the present study, especially as (to my awareness) no previous research has been undertaken to explore the perceptions of SENCOs in this area.

### ***3.2 Future research possibilities***

As outlined in Part B, there are a range of possibilities for future research:

- a priority would be to gather parental perceptions regarding these transitions, perhaps using FGs, semi-structured interviews or a qualitative survey;
- the findings of this study could be supplemented with further research that captures the views of school staff (e.g. SENCO's) who have more detailed knowledge of transition processes for pupils with additional needs and the role of the EP;
- gaining the views of EPs with an early years specialism, now or in the past, could generate interesting comparative data; and
- the present study sought to explore all of the key features of the EDMT (e.g. the influence of the child, parents, teacher, peer group and neighbourhood), however

in future it would be useful to have the opportunity for a deeper exploration of the neighbourhood and community factors that were raised by school staff.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The experience of carrying out a piece of doctoral research, from inception through to completion, has been challenging and thought-provoking. I have developed a range of practical research skills, deepened my awareness of ethical issues and developed my critical writing skills. The study I conducted provides detailed, qualitative insight into the perspectives of school staff and EPs in relation to transitions in ECE, and makes a unique and valuable contribution to the existing body of literature.

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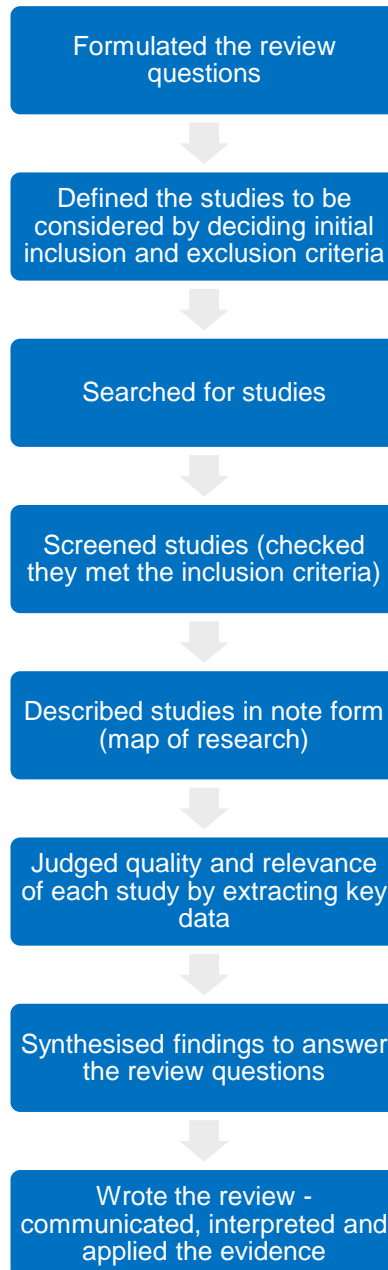


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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Visual map of the literature review process

A flowchart to show the stages of systematic research activity I engaged in whilst reviewing the literature, including searching for and synthesising the evidence (using the framework outlined by Gough, 2007).



**Appendix B: Table of search terms and results (updated in April 2019)**

Search terms	Source and results		
	British Education Index	ERIC	PyscINFO
Transition AND to AND school	2432	15,779	2,333
Starting AND school	687	5, 026	2,726
Early AND childhood AND education AND transition	156	1,730	412
Starting AND school AND transition	28	272	198
Early years AND transition AND to AND school	72	268	18
Transition AND to AND school AND UK	345	371	22
Transition AND to AND school AND England	156	433	18
Early AND educational AND transitions	184	1918	261
Nursery AND to AND reception AND transition	1	3	1
Transition AND to AND compulsory AND schooling	11	7	9
Transition AND formal AND schooling	39	115	108
Transition AND reception	11	36	69
Transition AND kindergarten	76	911	699
Early AND education AND transition AND parents	84	1180	289
Early AND education AND transition AND professionals	100	522	91
Early AND education AND transition AND psychologist	5	36	15
Transition AND to AND school AND vulnerable	26	126	37
Transition AND to AND school AND special AND educational AND needs	99	958	53
Transition AND to AND Year AND One	220	3, 878	199
Transition AND to AND key AND stage AND one	8	119	15
Educational AND psychologist AND early AND years	220	121	60
Educational AND psychologist AND early AND years AND transition	8	12	3

## Appendix C: Focus group schedule

### Introduction:

- Introduce self and give brief overview of study
- Highlight likely length of focus group (30-45 minutes)
- Show participants the dictaphone and outline how it will be used for transcription
- Give confidentiality clause and remind teachers of anonymity
- Remind teachers of right to stop at any point/not answer uncomfortable questions
- Establish focus group principles including speaking in turns, speaking to each other, building on each other's ideas, respecting confidentiality (e.g. not sharing what others say outside of the room)
- At start of recording ask teachers to say their name to help with transcription

Nb. Some questions will be adapted to reflect the year group the teachers are in.

- Nursery teachers will be asked to reflect on the nursery → Reception transition
- Year One teachers will be asked to reflect on the reception → Year One transition
- Reception teachers will be asked to reflect upon experiences with both transitions

### Questions: (with possible areas of exploration in bullet points)

**Support given to all children over time** – including relationships and neighbourhood and community influences

1. What does the word 'transition' mean to you?
2. How do you prepare for upcoming transitions? (to make them go well)
  - preparing pupils
  - curriculum continuity/pedagogical approaches
  - working with other teachers
  - what are the challenges to doing these things?
3. How do you define a 'good' transition and how is this recorded/assessed?
4. How do you develop relationships with parents and families to support transition?
  - class teacher practices
  - school policies/practices – giving information, open-door etc.)
  - how important is this? (is it an outcome of a successful transition?)
  - what are the challenges to doing these things?
5. Which aspects of the school community or wider neighbourhood do you think have an influence on the process of transition?
6. Has the support you give with transition changed over time?
  - What has influenced this? (research, interventions, agencies, policy?)
7. *Reception teachers*: How are decisions made around which class to place children in? (e.g. is it based on relationships with older siblings, parents, child's

peers, pre-school experiences?)

### **Additional support for vulnerable children/those with additional needs**

8. Are there any groups of children who are vulnerable/who have additional needs during the transition?
  - How do you identify/monitor these children?
9. What 'additional support' are these children given?
  - Proactively - in anticipation of needs
  - Reactively - after a transition that has not gone smoothly
  - What are the challenges involved in supporting these children? (pedagogy? Relationships?)
10. Which agencies have been involved with these children?
  - Would you like additional support from any agencies? In what way?

### **Emotional factors involved**

11. What emotional factors do you think impact upon the transition process?
12. How do you feel when planning for and supporting children with this transition?
13. How would you describe a child who 'copes well' with transition?
  - What does positive adjustment look like? – attitudes/behaviours, family, class level?
  - What are the main factors that affect how well they cope?

### **The role of other agencies, including the EPS**

14. If it were possible, what support would you like from other agencies, including the Educational Psychology Service, with transition issues?

### **Ending:**

15. Would you like to add any additional comments about the transition process?
  - Thank everyone for giving their time
  - Give verbal and written debrief

## **Appendix D: Semi-structured interview schedule**

### ***Introduction***

- Introduce self and give brief overview of study
- Highlight likely length of interview (30-45 minutes)
- Remind EP that early education refers to 0-7 age range, with particular focus on two transitions (nursery to reception, and reception to year one)
- Show EP the dictaphone and outline how it will be used for transcription
- Give confidentiality clause and reminder of anonymity
- Remind EP of right to stop at any point/not answer uncomfortable questions
- At start of recording ask EP to say their name to help with transcription

### ***General transition views***

1. What does the term 'transition' mean to you in your work as an EP?
2. As an EP, what role have you had with transitions across the age ranges in general? Has this changed over time?
3. How do you view the nursery to reception transition? (e.g. the importance of it, what happens etc.)
4. How do you view the reception to year one transition? (e.g. the importance of it, what happens etc.)

### ***Transitions in early education – current role***

5. How much of your work is concerned with early years and transitions, working at individual, group or systemic levels? (changing the child or context?)
6. With reference to early transitions, how do you view your role?
7. Who do you work with or support? (e.g. SENCo, leadership team, teachers, parents, children, agencies, others?)
  - How has this way of working changed over time?
8. Are there any interventions or programs you have been involved with?
  - What psychological theories underlie these? E.g. problem-solving frameworks, ecological models
9. What are the benefits to transition work in early education?
10. What are the challenges to transition work in early education?
11. In your experience, which groups of children are particularly vulnerable during transitions?
12. How do you support these groups?

### ***Transitions in early education - potential role***

13. Can you see a different role for yourself in early years transitions? (at individual, group or systemic levels)
14. Who might you work with, if you were to be more involved in early years transition work? (e.g. school, parents, children, peers, neighbourhood, others?)

15. What would be the benefits of working in this way?
16. What would be the challenges?
17. How might you support vulnerable children through these transitions?
18. What role do you feel you could have or will have in the future?

### **Ending**

19. Would you like to add any additional comments about transitions in early education?

- Thank EP for giving their time
- Give verbal and written debrief

## **Appendix E: Process of Thematic Analysis (TA)**

I conducted two separate thematic analyses: one for focus group data (school staff views) and another for interview data (EP views). I followed the six stages as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process I engaged in was as follows:

### **Stage 1: Familiarisation with the data**

- all data were transcribed
- transcripts were read several times
- notes were made around initial points of interest within the data

### **Stage 2: Generation of initial codes**

- interesting features of the entire data set were coded systematically (coded data extracts were highlighted according to the RQ they pertained to)
- initial codes that I identified were collated on a sequential list of 'coding notes' that were grouped according to RQ (codes were colour-coded to allow me to trace which participant the code originated from)

### **Stage 3: Search for themes**

- started searching for patterns by grouping codes together
- groups of codes were collated into a table of potential themes and sub-themes that captured the essence of each group
- referred back to transcripts to gather illustrative data extracts for each theme and sub-theme



#### **Stage 4: Review of themes**

- checked that themes worked in relation to coded data extracts and all of the data set
- created a thematic map of the analysis

#### **Stage 5: Definition and naming of themes**

- refined the details of each theme and constructed the overall 'story' of the analysis
- named and generated definitions for each theme

#### **Stage 6: Production of report**

- selected key example data extracts to include within the report
- analysed selected extracts (embedded them within the report)
- related the analysis back to the RQs and previous literature

**Appendix F: Complete list of supportive quotes for each theme and sub-theme (school staff)**

<b>Theme: Supporting good transitions for all</b>
<b><i>Subtheme: Children’s adjustment to the progression of expectations</i></b>
<p>Yea, and to adjust as well, because if you’re allowing them time to adjust, rather than saying ‘right we’ve got to get this done, you’ve got to get through this quicker’, you’re giving them time to adjust, to find out, so they’re not feeling the pressure of getting everything ticked off that you have to get ticked off that year, but giving them time to kind of adjust into the year group. That’s a good transition - Y1 CT2</p> <p>I often get children, sort of, asking “Do I have to do this?” (all laugh) “Do I have to do this activity?” because they’re obviously used to choosing more. And if they don’t want to do that then, in nursery, they don’t necessarily have to do that. So explaining, “well, yea, today, I’m sorry” (laughs), its hard as a teacher isn’t it! “But I don’t want to!” (laughs) “Um, well...!” (laughing) - Y1 CT3</p> <p>‘Kind of got to now!’ (laughs) – Y1 CT4</p> <p>[...] children that used to have a nap during the day and then when they’d come to school and they can’t have that nap, I think that can be quite unsettling - YR CT4</p> <p>In terms of some of the kids from our nursery as well, at least in our class, it feels like they’re almost not too big for their boots, but they know, at least, the school. So, they’re like, “Oh, yes, this is just an extension of nursery.” And that, in nursery, it’s just like, “Oh, yes, you play and you do whatever you want.” [...] you obviously want a child to be comfortable, but you don’t want them to be so comfortable that they’re then not bothered about learning and they’re not willing to adapt to a new situation. – YR LSA3</p> <p>Sometimes we just have to say to children, “This is the way it is and it’s fun at school.” - YR CT1</p> <p>They do sit on the carpet, in there, they have their circle time. They have their one little small group time and that’s it. Whereas we have lots of little bits during the day. It’s not just once. It’s sort of, “No, you have to come and sit down again.” “I don’t want to.” So, I think that is a big jump for those children. – YR TA1</p> <p>Some children are not ready for change and therefore they find the transition difficult. And quite often that came as a shock didn’t it? When we started to talk about the next year, I had a room with quite a few, “Ah! We’re going to change.”</p> <p>They had no idea. They thought they’d come to school and that’s where they would stay and it would always be like this. They were not prepared that it would change. And others with older siblings were going, “Oh, no, this is what you do.” So, they’re quite used to the idea that you would move on, but others were not. – YR CT1</p> <p>[...] the expectations that we have of the parents and the transitions and what they’re expected to do when they come in are very different to nursery, because we want ours to come on to the carpet and do a morning activity, whereas in nursery they’re often allowed to just free flow around [...] it’s transitioning between those events as well. So, children have to suddenly realise that the expectations have changed and what they need to be doing is different – YR CT1</p>
<b><i>Subtheme: Fostering familiarity</i></b>
<p>(What does transition mean to you?) There being a familiarity about reception that they can relate to, and the staff. They’re familiar with the staff too, and some of the routines. – N CT2</p> <p>[...] we take them in, usually when the class is on a trip and the class is empty we will take them in to visit reception, when it’s just us and them. That’s just getting used to the environment rather than anything else, and that’s, usually, quite a positive time -N CT1</p> <p>(What is a positive transition?) Where the child feels they’re in a safe environment, where they come in and feel that there’s something familiar, that they feel safe with those people; we’re not strangers to them, they’ve met us, that their parents trust us. All those things that would help them feel more secure in that setting. – N CT1</p>

It can take a whole term for children to begin gradually coming round to the idea of going next door and helping them to get used to that idea, even when they go into reception, with lots of things being similar, so that crossover is easier and it's not such a shock. – N CT1

I would say continuity and familiarity are two really important aspects of it. – N TA1

We used their garden quite a bit last year and played out there – N CT2

Yes, we did, didn't we, so they get familiar with that physical environment. – N TA1

Within reception, at the end of the year, we do a big two, three-week project on transition. So, preparing the children, thinking about the changes. We'll take photos. They go on a little tour - YR CT1

[...] into Year 1, we'll go with them to meet their class teachers and to see their new classes, which I think is very helpful. We go around to each class and read a story with our children, just so they get a good idea of their surroundings. YR LSA1

I guess that the child feels comfortable, I think. So they're happy and settled in their new environment. That's a big thing. Well in (the resource base) it's a big thing! (laughs) - Y1 LSA1

[...] the week before the step up days, they bring them in every day into their new classroom, and the Reception teacher shares a story with them in their new classroom. So they get to know the classroom - Y1 CT1

[...] just getting them used to our corridor, walking down to the toilet, walking back from the toilet- [...] Y1 CT2

### ***Subtheme: Getting to know each other***

It's about making sure it's not daunting for them as well isn't it. So like fun activities, still educational, but getting to know them on another level. Taking that time to see their likes and dislikes and their triggers and things like that (laughs), it's quite helpful for you as a teacher and also for the children. They get excited about coming up instead of feeling a bit daunted. – Y1 CT4

[...] we know our families quite well because we've got quite a lot of siblings, haven't we, so we do get to know the whole family, which helps a lot with transition - Y1 CT2

I think I know this year so much more than I did last year; my children who are inquisitive children, children who ask questions that are relevant, and just things like that - Y1 CT3

[...] on the second day we dismiss them from our classrooms so the parents feel at ease because they've met us and they come in, and have a chat as well – Y1 CT2

I guess it's having a good connection with the child. I mean, some of the classes are so big, it's hard to connect to every single child, but kind of knowing the things that they like and the things that they don't like, those little things can take it a long way with them, and if they can connect with you and they can feel comfortable talking to you and asking you for help and things like that then I think that's a great transition because it's showing that they feel comfortable with you and they're not scared or things like that - Y1 CT4

They got to know them really quickly didn't they? Y1 CT4

[...] in Reception they do writing activities about what they like, what's their favourite thing, and then they bring a little book up with them to give to us. And so they're kind of making something for their teacher which is quite nice, I think they quite enjoy that - Y1 CT3

[...] in the school, every year group has two step-up days where the children go and spend two days at the end of an academic year with their new teachers and get to know them - YR CT1

They make a book for their new class teachers as well, all about them. So, what they enjoy, what they might be worried about, things that might help them with learning as well - YR CT1

[...] the children come up and they have two full days with their new teacher and their new LSA. Just getting to know us and their classrooms – YR CT2

[...] we go on home visits, which is really nice, because we get to see them in their own environment, get to meet their family, any pets. And it's quite nice. So, when they then come into Reception, we've got that, kind of, already- a bit of a connection and we've been to your house and they remember us - YR LSA1

I go and meet all the children coming from outside nurseries, so that kind of helps. So, they've seen my face before and parents get to know me. YR CT1

Like one of mine found it really tricky coming in talking with all the new adults and faces, but I, kind of, just gave her a bit of space... Because every time an adult went up to her, she'd get a bit like, "Oh, I want mummy." ... I think it's just that first nudge of giving her the space, letting her go off and explore, without having someone on her back all the time. But, obviously, making sure she was okay. But I think that really helped her as well to settle in - YR CT3

[...] we had a girl in our class and she very much needed- or used to need a nap. But you just know that if you comfort her, verbally, first and you're sort of saying the right things, then she's okay. And she starts to come out of her shell more- YR CT4

[...] it's, sort of, like you were saying, managing those children and building a relationship with them so that you can see what they need - YR CT4

[...] we quite often take the children from nursery and we go and collect the reception children, from next door, on the way, and that sort of thing. So, they do get to know some of the children - N CT2

In July they have a day when they can come along and play with their parents, and just have fun. Then, we visit them at home before they start - N CT2

We visit all of them at home, and then we try to make it that it's the keyworker that's going to work with them that visits them at home - N CT1

[...] we send out a letter addressed to the child, "We're coming to visit you." - N CT2

Because every day you go through it they soon get to know each other's names and recognise who's there and not there. - N CT1

[...] it's about helping them get to know each other, learn each other's names, and the routine in a very gentle way. So, we just gradually introduce one more element to the routine - N CT2

It's much easier to get to know a small group like that than thirty children. This is just their little key group. - N CT2

We get to know them quite well on that home visit. Sometimes you see them in a way where they're very relaxed, and you, perhaps, don't see them again quite so relaxed until January. - N CT1

[...] for the children, they're coming in and they want one person to relate to. They've just been at home with their mum, you know, you become a second mother, don't you, really, and so that keyworker system is essential. - N CT1

### ***Subtheme: Supporting positive interactions between peers***

[...] knowing that inside knowledge, you can say well let's build on friendships now, to kind of make you feel more comfortable in your year group -Y1 CT2

[...] he was struggling because they mixed all the Year Ones up, he was struggling with friendship groups and that's why he was quite reserved and not himself and not trying with work because he was worrying about his friendships constantly - Y1 CT2

[...] if they've got a good friendship group, so they're quite careful with who they put in certain classes to adhere to friendship groups and things like that. So if they've got good friends in their class that also helps them - Y1 CT4

Some of it can be more reactive, like we've noticed they're a bit anxious [...] the LSA might take the child off and just make them, maybe build a friendship within the class - Y1 CT1

We've had some children in Year One actually that are new to the school and the three of them don't speak any English and we've just done some story times with them and just tried to build friendships within the class - Y1 CT1

[...] we also looked at those who maybe don't work that well together in a class, who, kind of, need to be, obviously with their friends, but then when they're together, they don't work well. So, it's kind of splitting them apart – YR CT3

The biggest thing for parents, when their children go into Reception, is they want to know that they're with their friend, because then they'll be okay – N CT2

[...] that's very important for parents, even if we say, "These are their friends, they play together all the time and they know that they're going with them...". I mean, the social side, the PSE stuff, is massive. N CT1

### **Theme: The jump up to Y1**

#### **Subtheme: Children notice the changes**

[...] she's a happy little girl in class and she went home and she was a bit upset about the transition to Year One. But she hadn't expressed that, she hadn't displayed anything you would actually be concerned about, you thought she was quite happy with the transition and it was only when dad said "Oh, she kind of misses playing" and she's expressed it at home - Y1 CT2

I think they miss the play aspect [...] it was exactly the same in my class last year, the Reception children going up to Year One, they said exactly the same thing, like, "We miss playing!". They didn't necessarily understand that what they were doing in Reception was play-based but it was still a lot of learning and a lot of work and the transition to Year One, the learning was just different. And it was that transition that was a bit "ah!" for them at first but they settled down really quickly - Y1 CT4

[...] they're quite tired as well, I've found that our, the children they are, I think I forget how young they are sometimes but they're just quite tired in the afternoons so not, like, dragging them through a lesson - Y1 CT3

I often get children, sort of, asking "Do I have to do this?" (all laugh) "Do I have to do this activity?" because they're obviously used to choosing more - Y1 CT3

I was actually quite surprised, because it was actually quite a big transition for me, because I'd never been in a Year One classroom before, so me transitioning from nursery, to Reception, to Year One, I was like "Oh, they have to sit and they have to write! Oh! Ok! This is interesting...ok!" (laughs). So, I can imagine for a child, it's kind of, yea, a bigger scale, I guess - Y1 CT4

They finish reception and then they have six weeks of doing whatever they want and then to almost have to go into Year 1, where it's a lot more formal. And imagine, like, however long ago when it was even more formal, it's almost going from fun, free flow, loads of fun for six weeks and then boom, that's it, you're in formal education now. Sit down. Do some writing. – YR LSA3

The Year 1 is quite structured compared to what we are and even though they do do some elements of early years' curriculum it looks very different. And, I think, when they first go up on their step days, all they see is tables in their classroom. – YR CT1

[...] the biggest change for reception up to Year 1 is they lose that garden. And that's a massive change. - YR CT1

[...] it's much, much better now, than it was a few years ago, because a few years ago when our lovely settled children went to Year 1, they were just wailing. Spent most of term 1 crying, because they missed school as they understood it. – YR CT2

You're like, "Sorry, you've had your time. You've got to go and play with the concrete." – YR CT4

#### **Subtheme: Y1 teachers find it challenging**

It's a big challenge for us, isn't it? - Y1 CT1

Yes, for us and for the children, because they're suddenly in a classroom. Yes, more - Y1 CT3

We need to get through more learning, more focused group activities in Year One, don't we? And it's making sure we get through them but also giving them that free flow that's still purposeful outside and having the bodies to be outside making it purposeful. It's quite a challenge for us at the moment - Y1 CT1

I often get children, sort of, asking "Do I have to do this?" [...] So explaining, "well, yea, today, I'm sorry" (laughs). It's hard as a teacher isn't it? "But I don't want to!" (laughs) "Um, well...!" (laughing) - Y1 CT3

It helps as teachers as well, sometimes if you're having a really stressful day, (laughing), it's quite nice just having a bit of a chilled, less intense afternoon - Y1 CT4

### ***Subtheme: Easing the transition to formal learning***

Yes, we've made a lot of our, well we've really tried this year in Year One to make our enquiry sessions creative and I think that's made a big difference for our children because even though the outdoor stuff might be a bit trickier during our Maths and English times, designing our lessons so that actually it's very outside based or very arty and things like that almost compensates for that a little bit and I think that really helps our afternoon sessions just in general. Y1 CT3

[...] we do quite active afternoons and actually it really helps if they're producing a little product from it but creativity wise rather than sitting and writing. [...] That kind of, taking that away and saying "let's do it a different way" but making sure we've got the evidence to say they've learnt the objectives has really helped - Y1 CT2

[...] that's what they're brought up with in the early years isn't it? So it's good that we're modelling it in Year One because we're developing from what they've done in the early years haven't we? - Y1 CT1

I think ours find it tricky as well [...] they have such a huge outdoor space with so many resources in Reception and we're slightly more limited in our areas. So we try, as much as we can, to put, like, to get them out there doing different things, even if it's just an extension of what they've been doing in class. Or actually just doing the same work in class, outside - Y1 CT3

We always try to ensure that the Year One start of year timetable mirrors the end of Reception timetable. So that aids a smoother transition for the children and limits the number of changes for the children as they move to Year One - Y1 CT1

[...] knowing their interests helps you with your planning; that creates a smoother transition, because they're interested in what you are planning. So the work's different, but if it's at their interests, it kind of locks them into their learning, which I've found like they don't mind so much writing as long as it's something about what they like and they're engaged in the activities, I think they've found that easier and it's not too challenging - Y1 CT2

Yea, and to adjust as well, because if you're allowing them time to adjust, rather than saying 'right we've got to get this done, you've got to get through this quicker', you're giving them time to adjust, to find out, so they're not feeling the pressure of getting everything ticked off that you have to get ticked off that year, but giving them time to kind of adjust into the year group. That's a good transition - Y1 CT2

We very much change our timetable in reception, as each term goes along and we do reduce the time and how that garden is used, but they do lose it. And that's massive - YR CT1

### ***Subtheme: Influenced by the needs of the cohort***

I don't think I could say that year on year it's the same. But, judging it as you get to it and going from there - Y1 CT3

[...] we try to mirror our timetable as much, we're still doing quite a lot of free flow activities in this side, but in comparison to last year, our children seem more able this year, and so the activities we're doing with them are more challenging so I suppose we are judging it. I don't think I could say that year on year it's the same. But, judging it as you get to it and going from there - Y1 CT3

We've also had the discussion, haven't we, in Year One, about how long we'd keep the free flow learning going for. I think last year we kept it going until Christmas, whereas this year we're only thinking of going to October half-term, because the children are quite able, and they're ready to get on. So this transition period will be a bit shorter, with the free flow play. We'll obviously keep it as part of our planning as much as possible, to keep it engaging for the children, but we don't feel they need all that free flow time now, because they're more mature- Y1 CT1

I'm the mixed Year One/Two class. So they made sure when they were selecting the children for my class that it was children that were more school-ready, shall we say, from Reception, so more of the quite focused learners, when selecting them. And we do quite practical, so they're more now not carousel-ing, or free flow, they're more, kind of, not old-fashioned classroom as such but they're doing quite practical activities [...] they seem to be coping quite well but I think it's because we've got the more mature side of Reception - Y1 CT2

[...] in terms of mixing last year, we first had to look at which children would be ready for a mixed Year 1, 2, not based on academic achievement, but based on their characteristics of effective learning. So, really understanding the child and whether they would cope and manage being in a Year 1, 2, because they're in the Year 2 corridor. YR CT1

## Theme: Caring about partnerships with parents

### *Sub-theme: Helping parents to feel at ease*

N CT1: I think, for the parents, there's a lot of uncertainty.  
N TA 1: Yes and worry and anxiety.

I think all that transition, it's important for parents too, because they need to feel comfortable and feel that their child is safe, and that feeling will be transmitted over to the child. – N CT1

The parents want, more than anything, to know that their child will be happy, and everything's being done to help them be happy and settled. Anything else, to do with the educational side, I don't think it matters to them. – N CT1

For some of our families, if it's their first child it could be their first experience of education in this country or they may have had a very different, you know, very negative experience of education themselves. So, we're building up that trust. – N CT2

That trust is starting there in that home visit. We do have some parents who trust is very important for, because they've had, perhaps, bad educational experiences and they just see... They have a, they are slightly anti-establishment, aren't they, just a little bit, and you can feel they're very prickly. In the first few weeks you can have a little bit of complaining, or suggesting or just feeling... Trying to, not exactly, cause trouble... - N CT1 - Just trying to trip you up a little bit. – N CT2 - Yes, and you aim for that to go because they start to accept and trust. – N CT1

Sometimes it's the parent that needs the support, leaving their child because their child's fine but they're struggling with it. – N CT2

I've also taken videos of children, like, during the day and then showed them to the parent at the end of the day, but with the child there. Because, often, you get children that go home and go, "Mummy I didn't like school today or I had a really bad time." And then you're like, "Oh, but can you remember when you did this." And kind of just having that positive interaction and, yes, children are like, "Oh, yes, I did enjoy it." – YR CT1

[...] sometimes it's just making a phone call as well. We've had kids who were struggling to come in and leave and we'll tell you if you need to come in. We'll be on the phone. We'll make a note, like "We've got our eyes on child and we'll just let you know should anything need to be done." [...] Sometimes with a child who can't let go of their parent, having the parent around is just keeping that trauma in front of them. If they leave, then it almost falls from that sometimes. And you can... make that call to say, "Yes, they're fine now. It's been 15 minutes, so all good." - YR LSA3

Yes, we physically have to tell a mum to leave the classroom every day. Her child's somewhere completely different to her. But she needs that, kind of... So, I think in the area that we're in, the needs come from the parents, just as much as the children and it's about transitioning them as well as the four and five year olds... - YR CT1

The first week in terms of parents as well, it's just almost remembering faces and checking in with them at the end of the day. If you get a word in your ear in the morning saying, "Oh, she mentioned that someone had hit me, and she had nobody to talk to." You then explain that to the child in the day and then check in again with the parent, just to... it's almost reassurance really. – YR LSA3

It's a big change for their parents, as well, I think when you've seen that garden and you know your kids are going there and then you go and see what's out there, which is nothing. It's kind of- it doesn't feel good. You want reassurance from the teachers that there is stuff to do, isn't there? This is going to be okay, isn't it? [...] So, parents going up to Year 1 as well, when they see what's happening, it can be a bit worrying. – YR CT4

[...] we do welcome tours, sort of, open days for new parents. We'll talk to parents. Anxious parents, especially, will come and ask a lot of questions. So, we can, kind of, address some of that stuff. YR CT1

[...] only last year, I felt like a counsellor for half the year. – YR CT1

[...] our parents would be allowed to come in to look at their work, which is quite a relaxed thing, we kind of moved away from parents evening to do more of a relaxed afternoon where parents can come in. I think that helps. [...] it's more of a casual greet and talking about, and I think that makes our parents more at ease. Y1 CT2

It always helps when the parents are on board as well - Y1 CT4

It's letting the parents feel that they're comfortable to talk to you about their children. Like, not unprofessional but kind of if they have any concerns that they could approach you and if it's not the right time then they could book to come and see you at another time feeling like they have someone to talk to in terms of their child's learning and things like that. And just like a little comment at the end of the day like 'oh so and so's had a really good day, he did amazing writing today!', it kind of is like 'oh that's a nice little bit of information that they're going home with', which I find really helps. Y1 CT4

[...] we know our families quite well because we've got quite a lot of siblings, haven't we, so we do get to know the whole family, which helps a lot with transition - Y1 CT2

I do try as much as I can, like, and that's not every day by any means, just to give a few parents that I don't speak to on a day to day basis so much, 'aw she did really lovely writing today' or 'she was playing really nicely at playtime today', just so they've got, they know that you care a little bit. Because I think that can be really tricky - Y1 CT3

It's also talking to the parent, if you have problems, and you're always out talking to the same parent, to say something positive, as well, to build up that relationship - Y1 CT2

I've also let my parents come in, some of my Reception, the kind of needy parents, at the beginning, just to let them feel more at ease with the classroom. Y1 CT3

I think parents do tend to respond quite well to that as well, like if you're going at it as more of like a 'I'm trying to help, I want your child to be as happy as they can be, do you know anything that you can tell me to help make that better?' I think they like that, they respond quite well to that. Y1 CT3

I think it's the trust of parents to you, that they've trusted their old teacher now that trust has to go to a new person Y1 CT3

[...] that's a big barrier for us actually. I've had that one crop up very recently actually, that, because they'd built up such a close relationship with their Reception teacher that I'm almost not going to be good enough in any way! Y1 CT1

### ***Sub-theme: Language barriers present challenges for engaging with parents***

We've got a lot of, well, a majority of ethnic minorities and some of those will be families who've been here for a couple of generations, but there are some who are new, asylum seekers and refugees, and so the whole education system may be something completely alien to them. And they are a little bit afraid of bringing their child here and not knowing what the expectations are. They find it hard to express themselves... I mean, that's another factor we will take... If, when we go on the home visit a translator is needed we will try our best to take one. – N CT1

There was a time when we had, I think it was L, do you remember that? When we had one of the Somali mums. She's well respected in the community and she used to be here, sometimes, early on in the morning... Am I right in thinking this, N CT2? She used to be out there and talk to parents? So, if they had any little particular problem they could go straight to her and ask her. – N CT1

Particularly when we had a lot of new arrivals. The Somali community is much more established now, but a lot of our families didn't have very much English when they arrived. – N CT2



You know, they must wonder about our practice and think, "What's going on? What does this mean?" and all sorts of things. They must have so many questions that they, perhaps, don't feel able to ask, and it would be nice if there was somebody for them and able to support them. You can get confusions over starting, dates and times, how long they're staying here, all those sort of things, and they might not always want to ask because they're not going to understand what you're going to say anyway. So, it's very helpful to have that bilingual support. – N CT1

The problem is, we have so many different languages. What have we got, something like 16 or 18 languages just in nursery? So, you can't have the support for all of them. - NCT2

I had a child a few years back who was autistic, and they were a Somali family. The parent had read the report and the dad said to me, "What about him peering?" I said, "What do you mean, peering?" He said, "In the report it keeps saying about peers," he said, "I looked it up in the dictionary and it says, 'When you look over a wall.'" He thought it was peer at something, like a peeping Tom type thing, and he just didn't understand us talking about his peer group at all. It can be little words like that... He had quite good English, but he didn't understand what that meant. – N CT1

Sometimes parents, you think they've understood because they're saying, "Yes, yes, yes," and they've actually not understood a word you've said. - N CT2

I think that's another factor as well, for transition it's very important that any literature that goes out to the parents, that everything is simplified, usually. So, it's not lots of writing, just a few simple points, because there are always problems at the beginning of the year where parents don't know which class their children are going in, they don't know what time they're starting... - N CT1

I don't have particularly needy parents, I have, like, one or two but I also this year don't have as much of an English Additional Language barrier as I did in my previous year. - YR CT3

### ***Subtheme: Evolving views regarding parental involvement***

#### ***Nursery staff: family-centred practice***

It's not just the child, it's the whole family. It's about establishing trust and parents feeling that this is a nice safe, secure place where their child will be really looked after and treated very kindly. And that we'll pick up on every child's individual needs, you know, "So-and-so is afraid of going to the toilet, he doesn't like the flush," or for somebody else it might be some other little thing that we'll take in mind. N CT2

I think that home visit makes them feel special, doesn't it, and the parent feel special, that their child is special to you, we'll listen, we'll play, and we'll spend time. We don't rush it, the home visit, we don't have so many in a day that we have to dash away. Because some parents... Well, we've had a couple of two- or three-course meals – N CT1

For some of our families, if it's their first child it could be their first experience of education in this country or they may have had a very different, you know, very negative experience of education themselves. So, we're building up that trust. – N CT2

But, yes, if the parents feel happy and trust you then that's going to make a big difference for the child, so it's important to involve the family. – N CT1

We're not expecting them to rush off if they don't want to. – N CT1

N TA 1: No, we've still got a parent with us, haven't we?

N CT1: Yes, and that's okay, we don't mind.

N TA 1: Yes, absolutely.

We've had some lovely, amazing experiences on our home visits, haven't we, that have developed really lovely relationships with our families [...]. It is about the whole family feeling that, you know, their child's going to nursery, but you've come to see the whole family, you're going to look after their child as well as they would and understand them. It's about giving that impression.– N CT1

The parents are able to stay with them for as long as they need to when they're settling in. – N CT2 - Yes, there's no limit on it. Every child's individual needs are taken into consideration at that point, for some child it might be that their mum can go straight away, with another one you know that a different strategy is needed. – N CT1

Sometimes it's the parent that needs the support, leaving their child because their child's fine but they're struggling with it. – N CT2

We try our best to make them feel comfortable, we'll give them magazines, so they can sit and read a magazine whilst their child's playing, because otherwise it can get a little bit too intense. What they need is to step back from their child a little bit and let them get on, so they can have some reading material, they can go and read and let the child go off and do something, rather than following them round trying to look after them. [...] It's very much based on the needs of each individual child. We think, "What about so-and-so? What are we going to do with them? How are we going to help them through?" because it varies quite enormously, really. – N CT1

Some of the information about that we gain on the home visit. You know, parents quite often, when we're in their home, they feel like they can talk about the little things that are worrying them, like, I don't know, "He's got a thing about, is it alright to bring his little cuddly thing because he'll be able to cope if he's got that?" or something they wouldn't ask in a school visit, that they feel is trivial but it's bothering them. You know, "Will you be able to help him go to the toilet because he can't manage?" – N CT2

I mean, parents can talk to us every day, that's fine. At the end of the day we're in our three keyworker groups, so that means there's more opportunity to talk to us than if there was a great big group. So, you can spend a few minutes with each one as they're going home, you can say, "You've had a nice time today". Because I think all that transition, it's important for parents too, because they need to feel comfortable and feel that their child is safe, and that feeling will be transmitted over to the child. – N CT1

***YR: move towards structured forms of support***

I've had a few parents come to me, kind of, as their children have gone into Year 1 and that's something that they really miss is that face-to-face contact, because we can address a problem straight away. "Yes, your child is having this issue. Right, what do you want us to do? What can we do as a school?" By the end of the week, it's all sorted and it's moved on whereas I know, as you move up the school those transitions get lost. And so, I think, parents' anxiety goes up a little bit more with certain children. – YR CT1

[...] parents are at the forefront of everything that we do and we do have some tricky families here, but there are a lot of things in place to support those parents. - YR CT1

I had one parent who has got an older daughter who would cry every day into Year 3, I think it was. And the younger one has started to show those signs. She's like, "Is there anything that you could do to help?" So, I've done like a little star chart for her and if she gets the star, I said she gets five minutes on the iPad as a reward for coming in and saying bye to mum, go in. And then I'm going to reduce that, if she gets five stars in the week on a Friday, she'll get that. And slowly take it away. But that seemed to be working. But, yes, that was Mum coming in saying, "I can't deal with this for another three years. Is there something that we can do?" – YR CT2

Transitions for parents as well, actually, because it's the parents sometimes that drag out the process as well. – YR CT1

***Y1: parents are more peripheral***

I don't get the register done until quarter past nine, because I can't get them out! (laughs) You know. [...] A lot of it is obviously to do with the children but you're so limited for time and they want to chat and chat and chat about their children - Y1 CT1

[...] there's a right time and a right place for certain conversations, I had it not too long ago, I think the other week, a parent was saying "she doesn't listen at home!". It was kind of like a parenting issue instead of a school issue. And that kind of conversation is quite difficult because you don't want to input too much, but you obviously want to help the parent as well, but it's about establishing roles of 'Ok, I'm the teacher, if it's a concern about school life or how they're learning, yes, but other concerns can wait until another time or maybe we can advise you to speak to a parenting group or something like that, you know. Its knowing which conversations can come now, and which ones can be diverted to someone else - Y1 CT4

I think if I'm honest I think we could improve our transition from the parents a lot more from Reception to Year One. I think particularly in my class I've got a lot of needy parents this year in Year One, and I think if I'd had the opportunity, I mean I did have the opportunity to speak to one or two of them on the step up days, but actually maybe to have an open floor where they can come and meet me, maybe in July or beginning of September I could have maybe spent an hour after school just chatting and saying 'hello, this is me', and we were talking about that today in PPA weren't we, we were saying the parents don't really know us – Y1 CT1

[...] you just say a quick “hi, how are you, yes he’s getting on well, great, bye” and it would be nice to have that opportunity at the beginning of the year for them to get to know us a little bit better and then it might avoid some sticky situations - Y1 CT1

I think it would have been great to have met them both together prior to the start of the year to get to know that child a bit better because actually her wetting is a cause of emotional stress at home and I haven’t got to know about that until after it’s become a problem and it’s more of a reactive thing than a preventative ‘oh what I could have done to support this child’. [...] I didn’t have the opportunity to talk to the parent to say ‘oh, there might be, this might happen to the little girl, or this might trigger it’ - Y1 CT1

If you’re in Reception you go and do home visits don’t you, so I suppose it’s no different from that, so it would be good to meet them. - Y1 CT2

## Theme: Our hands are tied

### *Subtheme: Tensions between nursery and YR staff*

I have an issue, as you two know, with all of it, because I think we should focus on where they’re at now. Being ready, you can’t always be ready for the next thing, let them just be who they are now. When they get to reception, then they’ll be ready. Lots of the things we do are about their learning dispositions and helping them have a good attitude to learning whereas, I think, maybe as they go through the school that’s not important and it’s more important that they have certain skills. But, I see that it’s much more important to have a good attitude to learning, in a much broader sense, and be independent... - N CT1

[...] we, sort of, encourage them to have all these positive attitudes, but it’s a shame that it’s just lost, and it doesn’t get taken further, because it would benefit them so much in the future. [...] That’s transition in the broadest sense, that those attitudes to learning can continue all the way through school and be supported. – NCT1

I think, as a team, we’re all very passionate about early years, and I think if we didn’t have such strong views ourselves then we’d have bowed to more pressure to become schoolified. – N CT2

Certainly, staffroom conversation, you overhear people say, “Oh, so-and-so can’t do that anymore.” And you think, “Well, actually, yes they could.” - YR CT1

I think we’re better at doing the other end, with the coming in from home, we do a really good transition from home, but the other way our hands are tied. – N CT2

It’s not really in our control, so we just have to go along with it really. And at one time we did used to organise which of our children were going into which class so that we could put friendship groups together, but that doesn’t really happen now either, that’s not done by us now. So I think, maybe sometimes they take a little bit of consideration into what we suggest, and maybe children who really need to go with somebody they know, but not as much of that takes place anymore [...] It sounds awful, but there’s not an awful lot of transition activities. – N CT1

I don’t think that’s valued as much when they go on. I think if it didn’t happen they might notice, but I don’t know. And it has changed, in that it’s coming down from up top isn’t it, that more and more is wanted in terms of targets and skills, and that is challenging. – N CT1

I think having that vision about the whole purpose of education is absolutely massive and in recent years that’s become much more narrow than it was in the past, which is a loss. – N CT1

But our nursery isn’t prepared to do their share of wanting to push the children up. So, we have a really big job in Reception. And, I think, that’s possibly why the transitions aren’t happening as well as they could, because actually they’re worried that when they do come and see it, they know they’re going to have to change their practice. And it’s really difficult because I don’t agree with what the government are asking, you know, for us to expect but- we’re teaching the British education system... And so, therefore, we have to do it. We trained as a teacher, this is our government. This is what we need to do. And these are the achievements that we need to make. Whereas, certainly, they’re still there, like, all about the pedagogy and development, which is absolutely great. But it makes our job really hard in Reception. And it does feel like other nurseries in the area have stepped up this year, especially, like a lot are teaching phonic programmes now, a lot are teaching pencil control, things like that. Whereas we’re not getting that from ours. - YR CT1

### ***Subtheme: Schoolification of the early years***

That was one of the things, wasn't it? We have to prepare for Year 1. That was like two terms into reception. Why? – YR TA1

[...] it's really difficult because I don't agree with what the government are asking, you know, for us to expect but we're teaching the British education system... And so, therefore, we have to do it – YR CT1

Before the pressure came on, in terms of what they have to achieve in Reception, before it was so high, we used to have much more integration with nursery, because we had international days, didn't we? A variety of things... - YR CT2

[...] that went out the window, years ago, before YR CT1 came, well before YR CT1 came, because of the pressure of, "Right, you have to achieve this." – YR CT2

it does feel like other nurseries in the area have stepped up this year, especially, like a lot are teaching phonic programmes now, a lot are teaching pencil control, things like that. Whereas we're not getting that from ours. - YR CT1

[...] obviously, the benchmark at the end of the year has risen, when the Early Learning Goals came in. – YR CT1

I think the expectation is the same at the beginning to what it is in the end in nursery. Whereas our expectation at the beginning of reception is very different to our expectation at the end of reception. I think our phonics lesson is, you know, ten minutes in the beginning, "Oh, my God, we've got them all on the carpet and they've all had a go at a sound". By the end, you're in phonic set groups. – YR CT1

[...] their induction period is much shorter now, isn't it, in Reception? They used to do more stay and play with parents and not be in for lunch right away whereas now... When I started in the Reception here it seemed like it was a much slower process than what it is now. - N TA1

I've been here a long time too, twenty years, we've seen a lot of change, haven't we? A lot of change. – N CT1

I think one thing that I always keep in mind is that when I was first teaching the children who were in Reception were actually the nursery children then, and the year I first started teaching they became the reception class children because it started with the rising fives going into school. We treated them like they were nursery children, then suddenly they went into Reception and the children who were coming in to be nursery, suddenly they were no longer nursery, they were coming into big school straight away. That changed expectations an awful lot, and they've never really disappeared. Those expectations are still there. So, I always keep that in mind, really, that those children in Reception were nursery children. – N CT1

They were given all those experiences that we do now, they had that in nursery, and they even had the sleep and all those kinds of things. Now the expectation of reception has changed so much. - N CT1

In the past when there was more time, you know, the Reception teachers used to come in and tell stories, and take them in there. – NCT2

I think, also, they used to run it in the beginning very much like, in a similar way to nursery, they used to have a very similar routine, but I don't think that happens anymore either. So, I think time constraints, I think they feel under pressure to get children in and not miss any learning... - N CT1

I think priorities have changed in school because it's very much about data tracking and a much narrower approach to the curriculum. – N CT1

It doesn't fit into their timetable any more. – N CT2

[...] if you asked up about the children in year six now, I bet we could have a pretty good guess now at how they were doing, from here. Generally, that's about PSE, it's not so much about whether they could come in and they were very articulate, they could count well, or they knew their alphabet when they came in here. It's not about those things, it's about their confidence, how independent they are and their general attitude, that tells you an awful lot about how they're going to achieve later. – N CT1

***Sub-theme: Top-down pressure***

I think sometimes it's seen as like a knee-jerk reaction from management, because results are not good enough, so, quickly, we need to do more formal things. You need to get them sat down at the desk and from five... - YR TA1

And they can see it has a negative effect, actually, once you've done a few years of that. – YR CT2

[...] it has changed, in that it's coming down from up top isn't it, that more and more is wanted in terms of targets and skills, and that is challenging. – N CT1

Yes, and there is so much focus on assessing and data that it would be easier if there's just one person, the class teacher, doing all of that. – N TA1 (referring to keyworker system in YR)

I think they feel under pressure to get children in and not miss any learning... - N CT1

[...] when I first came to this school a few years ago in Year One it was very much productivity and evidencing, but evidencing through what the children could do independently in their enquiry sessions and a lot of that ended up being worksheets. And so it was just sucking the life out of Year One and what the early years is about and I think we've gradually moved towards that as a school. – Y1 CT1

In the past there was a quite a lot of material on transition, there was a lovely poster I remember we had once that said all the things that you were looking for to support children when they went onto reception, well, for each year, and people aren't aware of them anymore. I think it's a time factor and there is less a focus on personal, social and emotional, and more on, "We've got to achieve certain targets, let's get on with it," which is so sad. – N CT1

I think it's to do with money and I think priorities have changed in school because it's very much about data tracking and a much narrower approach to the curriculum. So, I think people are just tight for time and any money there is will go on that kind of thing, go on things further up the school. You can see why, but it's a shame sometimes. – N CT1

I think that sometimes the people who are in that don't really understand about early years education, and that it's worth putting in the time, in the early years - N CT2

To develop those positive attitudes that will then stand them in good stead in the future. I think it just sounds airy-fairy to other people – N CT1

***Sub-theme: Challenging senior management***

Whereas reception at the moment is, very much on an upward trend with data and we're able to show what we're doing is working. So, certainly, last year there was more emphasis on the Year 1 teachers coming and seeing what we were doing and talking. Because they knew our levels are going up, so what we're doing is working. It wasn't all talk. You've got evidence to base that on. And, I think, because we change our timetable every term, as well, we're showing how we're developing that and how that's changing for children. And if they're not ready, they're still going to stay here. And if they are ready, we're going to move them on. It wasn't, "Oh, we're just going to do reception like this all year round." I think, because we can show how we're transitioning them through each stage of reception, it was like, "Actually, yes, maybe Year 1 need to look at what we're doing at the end of Reception." How can they, then, move it on further to go? – YR CT1

You just know that's right for the children but she can argue and run rings around them and they just think, "Okay, she really knows what she's talking about. Maybe we ought to change..." – YR CT3

It's changing management and attitude for a start. And management and attitude, listening to the staff that have to deal with the children, knowing that what they have in place and what they insist is in place, actually, is not suitable. And it is moving over and having someone our senior leadership will listen to. And, actually, take on board what is being said. So, I mean we were saying it for years and it was going nowhere. – YR CT4

It's about having, as well, the understanding that it's going to take time to do it. It's not instant results. Like a lot of things are. Like they expect you to put something in place and then you get the results immediately. With the transition it needs to be slowly, slowly, bit by bit. It's not all going to happen at once. It's a long process for the teachers and staff as well as the children. – YR CT1

**Subtheme: Growth of school**

Then we used to have those events when we had sharing with other classes. It's so big now, there are four reception classes, but there was a time when there were only two reception classes, and then we used to have an open event in that last term where they came into our classes and we'd go into there, and there would be a carousel of experiences. The teachers would come in and read stories... We thought of it more as a long-term thing, but that doesn't really happen now. – N CT1 - It doesn't fit into their timetable any more. – N CT2

In the past I have been involved in reception admissions, so some of those decisions were mine, but I don't do that now. Obviously, when I was doing that I could influence a lot because I wanted those children to feel happy going in there. But, since it's become much bigger, somebody else does that. – N CT1

We've had shared events, like we used to do a sponsored bike ride in the summer, but reception used to do a scooter ride at the same time, so we'd have shared events a little bit more as well. – N CT1 - Yes, it's too big. – N CT2 - because reception is so enormous, because there are four classes, that can't really happen. – N CT1

I'm not exactly sure, but that was my impression, N TA 1, that they didn't have it anymore, because it was hard to manage, I think, and particularly with the record keeping they found it hard to manage. So, I think that was why. It's such a big unit, because it's four classes. – N CT1 (referring to keyworker system)

**Theme: Additional needs require targeted support**

**Subtheme: A wide range of needs**

I would say our children with behaviour problems. Yea, and like different home lives, because as a teacher you'd have it all put in place for the year and you'd begin to get them to a place probably where you want them and then they have to transition [...] it's change, and those children don't usually deal very well with change. - Y1 CT2

I was gonna say the ones I struggle with the most are those with attachment issues, that are so close with their mums and dads and they've been so reliant on their parents in Reception coming in and hanging their bags and coats up for them and doing everything for them that in Year One we're trying to get them to 'just put your own bag on your peg and just do this' and their parents won't leave the classroom [...] the challenge is, sometimes the parents saying bye, so it's not even just the children, it's the parents that have got the attachment issue, you know of saying bye to their children. Y1 CT1

Some that on the step up days that I had quite a lot of concerns about actually came back in September and were perfectly fine, and others have not been so fine. I'm not really too sure with a lot of them, to be fair, and it's taken a few weeks to get them a bit more settled. But I don't think that those children would fit into a group particularly. Y1 CT2

I had a particular child, that struggled with mornings with leaving his mum, and there were a lot of attachment issues – Y1 CT1

[...] something that's happened over, like you said with the emotional needs over the summer, that, what happens at home then is brought into transition. But I don't know if you can group it, as such. Y1 CT2

The children with autism. - Y1 LSA1

[...] any child with special educational needs or English as an Additional Language. The language barrier for the children and also for us with the parents can be quite tricky. -Y1 CT4

Communication and language- like speech and language... when their level of understanding isn't there as well, so not being able to communicate, but also understand what you're saying to them. Yes, I think that's really tricky. And, I guess, the same with, kind of, emotional needs. We have quite a high level of safeguarding issues within here and we're trying to make it as safe and secure as possible, but you've got- their home lives can be very, very chaotic and you don't know how they're going to come in, on a day-to-day basis. So, you might have managed a transition for four weeks and then all of a sudden something at home over the weekend has really changed. So, I think they, always, are very much a vulnerable group. - YR CT1

[...] the children with English as an additional language as well. They were finding it quite tricky as well, because maybe they're not paying attention. So, they're not listening to the keywords of, like, we're sitting on the carpet and things like that. – YR CT4

When they can't verbalise what's wrong or whatever – YR CT2

[...] if you're an only child and you've not been to a nursery, some of them don't even know how to play or get involved with what's the social etiquette of going up to someone and saying, "Can I play with you?" Without just snatching something off them. - YR LSA3

I think those who have never been to nursery before – YR CT3

Autistic children for me is top of the list, if I'm honest, - YR LSA3

[...] it's children with additional needs, they're vulnerable, and there are some of the really young ones who are not toilet trained yet. They're such tots, aren't they, and they are very vulnerable. – N CT1

N CT1: Obviously, children with additional needs.

N CT2: And some of the children with behavioural problems.

N TA 1: Yes, who really need that reliability and that security of where they are.

N CT2: Children that haven't had much structure at home and they rely on that routine.

Sometimes these things have not been picked up at all, and we're the first people to pick it up, really, when they come in. [...] sometimes it's been missed, hasn't it, by health visitors and things.  
– N CT2

Developmentally, lots of them are very young. – N CT2

### ***Subtheme: The impact of cultural diversity***

I think the sort of community that our school is in, a lot of the children do go back and forth, because a lot of them have parents in other countries, or family in other countries, so they do go back and forth from countries a lot and I don't think that necessarily happens in a different school that you might find two miles down the road [...] the community that we serve as a school has a big impact on transition. - Y1 CT3

[...] that doesn't help with the transition because it's change as well. So getting used to something that's different, a classroom that's slightly different, different teacher. -YR CT2

[...] they quite often miss the transition at the end of the year as well, because they go before the summer holidays, like two, three weeks before. So all the vital transition that we put in place in school in the last two weeks, quite often they miss.

They come back and they don't even know where their classroom is or who their teacher is. – Y1 LSA1

And it's not the class they were with last year. So he might have friends in his class but he's with, like, another eighteen children who weren't in his class last year, erm, they know you (the teacher) better than he knows you, because they've already had two weeks with you. - YR CT3

[...] the time difference in Pakistan, they're tired, and their routines at home have been different so it's that kind of adjusting back to school life. - Y1 CT2

We had two little ones, they went away to Pakistan and then they came back late from their summer holidays. So they came two weeks in to Year One and they just really struggled [...] that's, something that's happened over, like you said with the emotional needs over the summer, that, what happens at home then is brought into transition.. Y1 CT2

It's hard to get the parents to understand that those- they find it 'Oh, it's just two weeks, it's just fourteen days'. But those fourteen days, a lot can happen in that time. Y1 CT4

Also accepting, saying goodbye to their old teacher, and their old LSA as well. If they didn't have that and they were suddenly, 'Ok, right, I'm on holiday', they probably didn't have much time to process that. So I think that can make it very difficult for them as well. - Y1 LSA1

The ones that were struggling, when they came back, we took them down to their Reception teacher and kept on taking them to show off their work and kind of show off what they were doing [...] and a lot of communication with the parents, seeing what happened and getting the full story, because sometimes you're not in the loop. That kind of helped with them because mum said "Oh well they did have school in Pakistan" and she said they said 'Oh no, I don't want to go'. And they didn't have to go. And then she was like 'and now we're forcing, saying oh you have to go now' and they're like 'but why?' and that's where the tears were coming from and stuff. Y1 CT2

### ***Subtheme: Multiple approaches***

#### **Detailed information sharing: not starting from scratch**

Sharing information about children moving from one class to another, making sure that the transition is as smooth as possible – Y1 CT1

We closely liaise with the Reception teachers. The Year One teachers and Reception teachers meet prior to handover meetings where we talk about the children in our class, and share safeguarding notes, share the children's abilities and their progress and their home life - Y1 CT1

We also had a document in Year One this year, and Reception, where we shared all the data for each child [...] whilst we had the transition meeting with the Reception teacher we were able to go onto this online document and tap in all the notes as we were discussing them with the Reception teacher. And we were then able to share that with our new LSA's as well who weren't part of the meeting [...] I know my LSA has been using that document quite a lot, helping to get to know the children and their needs. Because it's easy to forget little triggers sometimes when you've got a whole new class. So that document was really helpful because we can go "Oh, that's why they're behaving like that because in Reception they did this". So even though it's only week four we feel like we know the children really well - Y1 CT1

[...] it actually got to a point where we spoke to social services who were involved, and they were like 'oh actually at this particular time this was happening at home'. So, you can kind of put pieces together and I guess understand and they have a nice partnership with us now where we can speak freely and we can understand what's going on at home, where parents can't actually, they're not able to express it as well, due to language barriers and other different aspects. - Y1 CT4

[...] the transition for her has been fantastic because I know what's been working well in Reception I've brought it into this classroom and I know pretty much everything there is to know about that child and her upbringing and what's going on at the minute and I share that with my LSA as well so it's really exceptional. - Y1 CT1

[...] the information shared by her previous teacher was fantastic and then I was able to have a meeting with the safeguarding officer beginning of September so I knew all her previous records of incidents that had happened - Y1 CT1

[...] so that helps, because you know the strategies, so you're not starting from scratch trying to work out if that works or this works. It helps a lot. Y1 CT2

You really get a whole picture of each child. It's not just where they're working at, it's all of their needs. You know, a lot of the behaviour, emotional, family, everything. - Y1 CT1

Like, triggers or plans, because some of them have behaviour plans before they come up to you. So you know what kind of works well, with a, kind of a situation, you know what calmed them down before, which kind of helps. Y1 CT4

A lot of it can be proactive. So, if we look at their notes and say 'oh we know when they come back they might have this problem or this problem so we'll make sure we do this'. Y1 CT1

[...] having spoken to his Reception teacher, he did that back in September, but they then knew that he had to keep his P.E. kit in all the time. - Y1 LSA1

There's a little boy in my class in Year One and he was completely different from Reception. So obviously spotting that as well from the notes because I was told something different and then I've got a different child in my class. Y1 CT2



Like, the child last year that I had 1:1, I came up with her. So she already knew me in Reception, she felt comfortable with me in Reception and then I came up with her to Year One. Y1 CT4

[...] communication, passing it on just needs to be top notch really or it just- you've got no idea. You don't know why these kids are behaving the way they're behaving. YR LSA3

It's usually more if there is a child who is finding it difficult, then a member of staff will come back to us in September and say, "What were they like in nursery?" – N CT2

#### **Use of visuals to aid understanding**

It's very hard to know what the children are thinking at that particular time, especially as they're so young. It's very hard to express how they're feeling and how the transition may be affecting them [...] it's kind of working out whether or not you can break down that barrier of communication, and whether you're using symbols, or hand gestures or Makaton, or something like that, to allow them to communicate a little bit more and tell you how they feel in these transitions. Like, 'I don't like doing all this work!' (laughs) or 'I want to play more!'. - Y1 CT4

We do different transitions for children with special educational needs as well so, for example, they have more visual things to bring up with them. So, they get given a picture of their new teacher and LSA and symbols to represent the sentence. - Y1 CT4

Yes, so 'my new teacher is', 'my LSA is', 'my classroom is called', and we had the pictures in the middle, and then they would pick out theirs, so they recognise – Y1 LSA1

[...] any children that need actual transition documents, they'll have a transition book made, with you know, they've got a picture of the garden, picture of the lunch hall, all of those things that they might find difficult. YR CT1

We use a lot of symbols as well. I guess it will depend on the class, if you've got certain children with SEN or EAL, it helps. We've got it in our class, I know quite a lot of our classes have them up the years but just so that they can see what they're doing in the day, it makes them feel a little more at ease because they're like 'ah ok, I can take that one off because we've done that now and there's only one, two, three, four more tasks until we go home'. It gives them a little bit more of, yea, time management as well. It's great. I know it really helps. Y1 CT4  
In (resource base) it does! Just two things at a time though...! - Y1 LSA1

For our children, some of them start with no English whatsoever, so that's quite scary for them. In the past we've had bilingual support in the classroom, but we haven't at the moment, so we have to make everything as visual as possible. – N CT2

#### **Preparing children**

They were really good at, like, kind of getting their heads around, ok, this was your old teacher, now this is your new one, you'll be in a different classroom. And just feeding that in quite a lot before the end of term so that they kind of understood, so it was a different transition experience. - Y1 CT4

[...] we took them on walks, so from their new classroom, to (name of resource base), and (resource base) back, so they're kind of used to that routine, as well, because a lot of them will walk on their own. Y1 LSA1

In terms of the girl I worked with, it was almost like in the last term I was trying to prepare her in some way [...] I then took a step back from working with her almost. So, she'd respond and respect other people, giving her orders. - YR LSA3

[...] it's about preparation, kind of like, 'ok, this is where we're going today, and it's going to change'- Y1 LSA1

Understanding them as well, and knowing, like, as we were saying before, triggers and things like that, and knowing that, ok, this child may not deal very well with this, what things can we put in place before we do this? And we can't do it for every single child, some things may be out of our control, but we try and think as much as we possibly can of what could possibly go wrong and the things that we could put in place so that those things don't go wrong! A lot of preparation, I guess, and practice. - Y1 CT4

I think a lot of it is just dependent on the child and we just quickly plan for their needs, nice little snippets and pockets just to reassure them really. Y1 CT1

Explaining how their day is going to look like as well, like I was saying before about the symbols, using those and being able to kind of remove those, 'oh, we got through that now! And there's like an hour of lunch coming up and

I'm really hungry! [...] splitting down the day so it doesn't seem too daunting. Because a whole day at school – it is quite a long time - Y1 CT4

### ***Observing children in their comfortable environments***

[...] there have been a couple of children who N CT2 and I have been to visit at other nurseries, because we knew they were coming with a particular problem of some kind, or a need. I think that's helped because we were able to talk to the staff there about them. There is one particular lad who's in my keyworker group, and because I saw him at his other nursery, and I talked to them about the kinds of strategies that they used with him, because they'd had him there a year, at least, I can bear that in mind when I'm working with him now and I know these things work for him. So, that's helpful too, to go and see other settings. – N CT1

One thing, I think, is missing is the teachers coming to see them in their comfortable environment. So, actually, coming and observing how we manage behaviours and our, kind of, little quirks of teaching. And I'm not saying that everyone should do the same thing, but certain children really respond to a way that you've worked all year with – YR CT1

[...] you do go and speak to the teacher, so they get it all verbally, but it's just a piece of paper with that child and that's harder to remember, isn't it? [...] than if they, actually, came in and met the children and saw what you were talking about really - YR TA1

### ***Closer contact with parents***

I think parents do tend to respond quite well to that as well, like if you're going at it as more of like a 'I'm trying to help, I want your child to be as happy as they can be, do you know anything that you can tell me to help make that better?' I think they like that, they respond quite well to that. - Y1 CT3

With our children, I know it's a lot easier to talk to parents because we have, like, two children each, but some of our children also have home school books. So if you know that those conversations aren't going to happen, I know that one of the children in your class does, doesn't she? So we do that, so there's that communication going on even if you can't quite get that. - Y1 LSA1

[...] if a child's got a particular need you obviously engage with that parent a lot more than parents of a child who hasn't got any particular need -Y1 CT1

I called a meeting with their parents as well, which I tend to do if something is not quite right at the beginning. I call them in, the parents, and sit down and chat about it because I think they might kind of tell you something. [...] so kind of calling the parents and saying 'he's acting kind of differently to what I've been told in Reception'. - Y1 CT2

### ***Nurturing positive relationships***

[...] for someone like her I think having a relationship, it's important probably for her to have a good relationship, like it is with the boy in my class as well actually, to have a relationship and for the whole year group to sort of know what's going on with particular children is really important. Y1 CT2

She's built a good relationship with all the Year One teachers now actually, she's got really positive relationships. So, yea, that's been really nice for her. Y1 CT1

[...] what we also try and do as well is, like, any interaction they have with their teacher is very positive because they only really spend registration in their classes, a couple of them do spend longer in the afternoons. So we do cooking on a Thursday, and the whole point is they make something to bring their teacher and their LSA. - Y1 LSA1

[...] it's getting them more and more comfortable, and every, and they see every interaction with the classroom as a positive thing, so it's a nice thing, and everything they do with their teachers. So it's kind of like, for us, it's about building that relationship, building the confidence of going from one place to the other – Y1 LSA1

## ***Sub-theme: Valuing support from outside agencies***

I had a little autistic boy last year who I had some support from the inclusion team. She came in at the end of the year and had a meeting with myself and the reception teacher that he was going to, and she's also booked in... Round about now she's coming in again, before she signs him over to the next team, to make sure that the

transition's gone well. She gave us all sorts of advice about using PECS pictures and things, and how to do stuff with mum over the holidays to prepare him for starting school. – N CT2

It's usually only with really quite severe needs, isn't it? Like an autistic child. A little boy we've got this year has got a syndrome with a very long name, so he has all sorts of physical needs to be met. – N CT2 (referring to

A few meetings were set up with the educational psychologist with me and the child, parents and things like that. But that was only about twice that it happened, just to see how she was settling in. Nothing long term. – YR LSA2

I think the family needed support too, and to know that something was taking place for him.

It's almost like talking it through with someone and you realise that you actually have the answers in your team but talking with someone outside it helps you think about those strategies yourself as well. So just something like that is always helpful. Y1 LSA1

I think being able to provide some more support for- I don't know whether it would be educational psychologists, but for parents to understand as well. Because we were talking earlier about sometimes it's as hard to get the parents to leave as what it is separating the children. And that kind of anxiety, like the damage that they're doing on their child by staying longer. And we can say it, but, certainly, myself, I'm not a parent. So, I can say, "I know this, because I've been a professional for this many years", but you can see some parents looking at you going, "Well, you've never been through it. So, you don't know." And you kind of need another professional to come in and just back you up, because I feel secure in what I'm saying and very much had successes with children over the years. So, I'm confident to say it, but I just think if there was someone saying the same message, I think that would be quite useful. – YR CT1

[...] talking it through and giving a bit of time to sort of sit and talk to someone who's a bit more clued up on something very specific than I was, like I found that just talking through with her, everything she said made complete sense to me and wasn't new to me necessarily but was, like, because you're just sort of twirling it over in your own head you haven't - and when you actually talk about it it made a lot more sense why he's doing certain things or why he might have felt like that. - Y1 CT2

[...] giving actual strategies to help prevent certain behaviours or help to sort of prioritise what he needs... because I think as a teacher who's got to show that their children are making progress (laughs) for a child who actually, he is absolutely not willing to learn at the moment being told by other agencies and your SENCo that actually that isn't what is important for him right now, getting him to feel comfortable in your classroom is what is important not making him do some maths work, that was really reassuring for me as a teacher to be like, actually, what is important to him right now is that he feels comfortable in my classroom and that we get him to a place where maybe at Christmas he will want to come in and learn. [...] So, yea, a lot of reassurance they provided - Y1 CT2

[...] those outside agencies can help get the bigger picture of that child and what's going on so that we can prepare a little bit more here. - Y1 CT4

New strategies to press the refresh button would be definitely welcomed! - Y1 CT1

It would be good to have people who could translate for us and bilingual support, because in those situations, again, you've got a family who, maybe, hasn't got very much English and you're trying to explain to them that their child has an extra need, and it can come out completely wrong. You don't know that they really understand. – N CT1 - You've got to be really careful and so sensitive – N TA1

[...] you don't need support weekly or monthly or anything, but maybe you just need another professional to be able to come in and run a workshop for parents and talk about the attachment theory and different things like that and just give these parents a bit of an awareness. - YR CT1

## Appendix G: Complete list of supportive quotes for each theme and sub-theme (EPs)

<b>Theme: Starting school is key</b>
<i>Subtheme: An important and recognised transition</i>
<p>I think it's huge. I mean, really. It's, you know, if you can get things right when they're little, and when they're coming in new, I think you can really make a huge difference, obviously, plasticity of the brain we know is key and, wellbeing and happiness, the child feeling a sense of belonging, staff feeling that they've got a good handle on and understanding of need, and the transitions are crucial. If the child starts and it's a tricky start then it can be a long time before you've managed to reign it back. So, absolutely key.- EP2</p> <p>There's a transition, quite a step change, from nursery into Reception – EP6</p> <p>[...] at that age, children are like, really, really like sponges, so, and they're obviously starting to develop their emotional literacy and it's something where they've kind of got into a routine, maybe at pre-school or with a child-minder, or something where they're kind of getting into a routine and then suddenly that changes. And I think it makes it important to get it right because they're transitioning into school and they have to be there up until sixteen, eighteen years old so it needs to work and they need to have a good experience, I think for their motivation and their engagement with education. – EP3</p> <p>But I think transition generally is much better understood now, and the importance of it. It's a bit of a buzzword. People, kind of, know what they're doing. Less so, I think, probably, from transition from nursery to primary [...]. I think from primary to secondary is so much better than it used to be. Schools do transition days, visits over the summer. They really go to town on it and know the importance of preparing young people so it's not all strange in September. I don't think that level of settling is done in the majority of nursery to primary. - EP1</p> <p>In the more affluent schools, I wasn't really involved at nursery at all and limited at Reception. They were quite able to hold it themselves and I tended to see the young people later down the line with more complicated needs - EP1</p> <p>I think nursery to primary is a lot more robust of a transition and it's also perhaps more recognised as a kind of a key transition. – EP6</p> <p>[...] I think schools and primaries and nurseries are quite good at it at this stage, so they recognise - and also maybe because the parents are very aware [...] There's a definitely a focus from parents that for them it's a big transition, starting school, and so there's an awareness that they bring to the, having to liaise with the nursery and the primary – EP6</p> <p>I find that most of the primaries and nurseries that I go into are already aware of what they need to be doing in terms of like, having a photo book over the summer; taking photographs and bringing them to the new setting; you know, all of those lovely ideas, about creating visuals for the child. That's all really quite out there and embedded in terms of practice. – EP6</p> <p>In terms of standard transition I see a lot of good practice and awareness [...] I find that most of the primaries and nurseries that I go into are already aware of what they need to be doing [...] That's all really quite out there and embedded in terms of practice. – EP6</p>
<i>Subtheme: Increased structure</i>
<p>So from nursery to primary, it's very much sort of moving into that more structured but not completely structured, because there's not too much of a difference, environment. There's a change in physical setting between nursery and going to primary school. - EP1</p> <p>I suppose at a very basic level things get slightly more structured. There's more structure brought in. – EP2</p> <p>[...] so to my mind it's not just about leaving one setting and going into another. There's a transition, quite a step change, from nursery into Reception - EP6</p>

The difficulty, dealing with various special needs of course mainly, the difficulty is always about the increased structure. – EP5

I think reception is very well planned [...] it's a continuation of nursery essentially. It's very child led, play-based, there's very little adult-imposed structure, there's no kind of didactic or learning and things like that. So, in terms of that kind of, I don't think that's a difficult transition. It's more about the logistics of being in a bigger setting and where do I go and how do I feel about being around year 6 kids and things like that. – EP6

The difficulty, dealing with various special needs of course mainly, the difficulty is always about the increased structure. - EP5

## **Theme: Y1: A highly significant transition**

### ***Subtheme: A big gear shift***

There's a big gear shift which I don't think is very, I don't know, spoken about or overt [...] it's only because I've seen it as a parent that I've picked up on it more and also as class teachers have raised that concern as well. Yes, so that's what is not really spoken about in terms of transition. - EP1

I think the transition that people don't pay enough attention to is actually the transition from reception into year 1 – EP6

I don't see the jump from nursery to Reception as being as big as from Reception to Year One, interestingly. Well that's my experience, that's all, just my experience of what schools tell me and children that I've seen. – EP2

(Y1) I think that's the tough one. I think for lots of children that's the one where schools are in touch and are panicking about- we're not sure that they are ready yet to do the Year One bit - EP2

[...] actually it's the transition to a more formal curriculum, that's a difficult transition for children and having less control over what they choose to do in the day. – EP6

[...] my conversations with schools is, it's kind of as you get further up in year 1 and into year 2 there's a - year 1 is very Reception based until Christmas and then there's more "Ok now you're going to do the activities that I have set for you," and that's often in work where we have, in my EP role, conversations with teachers around how they are really now struggling to manage this increased amount of instruction and are struggling to manage the increased amount of academic rigour that's expected of them, especially with the recent adaptations with the curriculum. – EP6

[...] that's where I'm noticing more trickiness [...] as an EP. – EP6

And then there's that massive curriculum change from expectations and curriculum presentation in Reception versus Year 1, right the way through all of primary. EP1

I guess before I was an EP I never really thought of it as being any different, if that makes sense? So I kind of thought the nursery to Reception is the hardest because you're getting used to being in school and then Reception, Year One, Year One to Year Two just kind of works and you get used to it. But having worked in schools and with children with needs, then I actually think that jump between Reception to Year One is much harder than I thought. And I don't know whether that is because of curriculum changes, so the Year One curriculum is a lot more what I would consider academic, so there's a lot more focus on literacy, numeracy, reading, writing, which I can understand is important from a young age but I think it's such a contrast to the play-based learning that they've had – free-flow, child-led nursery/Reception that it makes it harder to make it smooth, if that makes sense? – EP3

[...] that's where I'm noticing more trickiness [...] something that is often said to me by class teachers, in my EP role is, how they are going to manage the increased structure for the rest of year 1 into year 2 because it's much more demanding of them really. – EP6

**Subtheme: *The curriculum is not child-centred***

Well, it's just awful. (laughter) - EP1

The curriculum, it's not child-centred. I think it's less to do with schools...it moves too quickly for child development and everybody seems to understand that it's too fast. Research shows it, yet we still plough on doing it. I think that's because we're not having an impact at that national level, at the DfE level. - EP1

We all know the children learn better when they feel like they belong and they've got the social skills for it [...] You just think, "What are we doing for these young people? What are we doing for these children at four, five, pushing them with their sounds?" You're getting onto my philosophy here now! - EP1

Another thing I have noticed in Reception is how quickly schools start pushing the curriculum. My most deprived school that I work in, (name), pushes the curriculum from day one, so they do very little settling. So we're straight into learning our sounds and getting into reading, because – to quote the SENCO – we *have to* with regards to results, whereas actually we know, as educational psychologists, we need to spend time building that community, that sense of belonging, working together, some of the play skills, properly assessing where young people are. I do think, again, that comes down to that ethos of interpretation of the national curriculum that we've got, whereas some schools go, "Let's just hold back a bit and get the skillset, get the learning environment right," whereas other schools are just like focused, focused, focused on results and, "We've got to start working from day one. Otherwise, we'll never get there," which to me seems a little bit crazy, but that was their argument for it. It is coming from wanting – well it's coming from what they're measured on, and they're measured on results, but yes, it just doesn't seem... - EP1

...and they're starting writing so early, you know. They just, yes, it seems ludicrous. EP1

[...] that's often in work where we have, in my EP role, conversations with teachers around how they (the child) are really now struggling to manage this increased amount of instruction and are struggling to manage the increased amount of academic rigour that's expected of them, especially with the recent adaptations with the curriculum. – EP6

[...] It's really difficult being a psychologist and having a children's development perspective that actually we ask children to do things that they're not ready to do – EP4

[...] in a totally political way, I would really welcome a completely different approach to early years education. So I would be much, I would be much, much happier with a sort of more Scandinavian system and have more of a kindergarten or early years education without formal, as much, formal teaching up to seven, and I think, developmentally, I kind of think that, you know to me, that makes much more sense. I don't understand why we are preoccupied by teaching phonics really early, and handwriting – EP4

Well, I think, we need to throw out the changes that Michael Gove forced through, that's basically... [laughing]...children don't need to know what compounded nouns are in Year 2 or whatever that rubbish was that my daughter was coming out with. It's too, there's too much of a demand being placed on them and they-on a very simplistic level and without knowing the details of what's asked, I don't know all the ins-and-outs of it, it needs to be scaled back. – EP6

I mean, in a utopian world you would change the whole the whole system so that they're allowed to follow what has interested them and weave the skills that they need to around something that's caught their interest, or something that's been on the news or something someone's brought in but that's not how, that's about a radical overhaul of how we teach our children. – EP6

[...] my friends that tell me about Steiner [...] you can really see the attraction to it. However, on the other hand you don't necessarily come out with qualifications. So as a parent who has a fuller education you're trying to negotiate or navigate: how can I protect my children from these bonkers decisions politicians are making? Which is killing our love of learning. – EP6

I would like all children to be out doing Forest School, and splashing about having endless play opportunities and I think it doesn't have any better outcomes. What we haven't done is manage to value some of those early years experiences and those early sort of play and development opportunities and I kind of think particularly at the moment we are seeing, sort of, like a collection of mental health, social...and engagement kind of, sort of, impacts from that – EP4

***Sub-theme: A lack of inclusion: some children get left behind***

[...] the drive then into the curriculum doesn't permit for a measured and valued approach to actually individualising the programmes for those kids who may just be a little bit additional needs at that point [...] - EP5

[...] the difficulty is when as a teacher you're obliged to go straight into the structured teaching of the Year One curriculum, and it doesn't make the necessary accommodations for those children who may have needs - EP5

[...] when the curriculum is putting pressure on schools to make sure that they are able to really focus in more, and that's quite unfair as the children are suffering if they're not there yet. - EP2

So either a child that's moved in that's new and seems back at the beginning or, the behaviours that they expect or the requirements in terms of where the child's at down to assessments. That they're not reaching certain levels that the majority of children are. [...] I think that as they progress a bit further, it is based a lot of the time on assessments and the gap widening maybe - EP2

[...] if you've got a child with a lot of needs who is coming from Reception into Year One, let's say they've got developmental delay or they're behind, they're not where they should be at the end of Reception, according to the government (laughs), I think schools probably worry and they probably, I don't know, they need to think a lot more about how they're going to either help the child to catch up or put in the provision to just understand that that's the child's baseline at that point. - EP3

[...] I kind of think there's a whole group of children where they miss the stage for correct letter formation because they're not ready to do the motor skills needed for it and then they just end up having terrible handwriting or - having missed all the bits of the teaching that they needed because it was provided at the wrong point - EP4

[...] when the curriculum is putting pressure on schools to make sure that they are able to really focus in more, that's quite unfair as the children are suffering if they're not there yet. - EP2

[...] they're really having to think hard if they've got someone who's really, really behind and needs that more play-based curriculum [...] I guess for some teachers it's just a part of their practice and quality first teaching and they're quite used to it, in terms of the differentiation, but I think for others it can mean that some children just get left behind. - EP3

That's the point where you see children who have been quite successful, you could argue have been held, but I would say they haven't, the curriculum has been right in Reception. Then they go into Year 1 and within four or five weeks, you're called in and you start looking for a specialist provision which is just heart-breaking at that age because you know if they had a couple more years at play-based curriculum, they could remain within their community school. - EP1

Now this little kiddie, not only is she going to feel 'Oh I've been in mainstream and now they're going to put me somewhere horrible!', in her head, you know you think you can't put a cost on that damage. - EP5

[...] the obvious things get missed. So, for instance, comprehension difficulties, if it's known, gets missed. If it's not known, the flowery language of the early years classroom carries on, and the kids are looking blank and people think 'Oh they're tired' (laughs). End of. - EP5

The right thing for them is to maintain them in their chronological year group but provide more play based opportunities. They do tend to be these ones that have all these bubbles of need around- and it's too soon to start teasing out. You know, usually, there are medical professionals, flying, going, "Do we need this, that and the other?" - EP1

[...] the difficulty is when, as a teacher, you're obliged to go straight into the structured teaching of the Year One curriculum, and it doesn't make the necessary accommodations for those children who may have needs - EP5

Every child used to matter, do you remember that? "Every Child Matters". - EP6

I did have one boy who, English was an additional language for him, and the school were starting to be concerned and didn't know whether to recommend to parents to hold him back and keep him in Reception. That was quite interesting because I had almost a completely different view to the school, I was like I'm not

sure where that would come from because he's actually doing really well, you know, and maybe his needs lie in different areas but would be fine I would say to just transition as normal. – EP3

[...] we're not sure that they are ready yet to do the Year One bit, and I think that's mainly to do with the increased expectation of academic tasks. So they're sort of sitting at a table and being able to focus, being able to concentrate, and the reducing of the amount of free play opportunities, free activity choice...is how I have experienced it for schools and children and families. - EP2

## Theme: Anxiety

### *Subtheme: Educator anxiety*

You know it might be that there's a sudden panic, 'oh my goodness, they're at the end of Reception and they can't do du, du, du, and we need them to get to there'. - EP2

There's always a huge amount of anxiety, I find, around the transition from nursery to primary... In my experience, you have a lot of nursery staff going, "Oh, God, they're really going to struggle when they get into primary." - EP1

[...] but I think it's probably a reflection of the curriculum going too quickly, and that anxiety of: "If I don't meet the expectations, if the children I'm teaching don't meet these expectations", that is also a school that does performance-related pay for the teachers, so there's that in the background, which is a huge anxiety for the teachers. It comes across. It feels like a very stressful environment. - EP1

I find the educators have a huge amount of anxiety. Sometimes, it's just about managing that. Then, six months down the line, that young person has adapted really well and you just don't have a crystal ball and we can only go on the evidence that we've got. Sometimes it is just about managing those anxieties. - EP1

(Y1) I think that's the tough one. I think for lots of children that's the one where schools are in touch and are panicking about- we're not sure that they are ready yet to do the Year One bit - EP2

The difficulties that arise before going into Year One, is invariably lack of independence skills [...] the panic happens at the end of Reception for Year One, I think it's more coming down from Year One expectations of the ability to sit and listen and attend – EP2

[...] over a number of years I would say that there's more of a bulge in terms of panicking about how they're going to cope with transition to year one. Because of the academic side or just more of an expectation of being able to sit, you know. I mean, even just sitting on the carpet and listening – EP2

But the schools don't raise as many children in Reception, I don't think. They give them more time to settle, and then maybe panic at Year One. Or transition to Year One. If they haven't made the progress throughout Reception. – EP2

I think they probably, if they're a bit overworked and obviously when you're in school you've got 30 plus students, so they're really having to think hard if they've got someone who's really, really behind and needs that more play-based curriculum – EP3

[...] if you've got a child with a lot of needs who is coming from Reception into Year One, let's say they've got developmental delay or they're behind [...] I think schools probably worry and they probably, I don't know, they need to think a lot more about how they're going to either help the child to catch up or put in the provision to just understand that that's the child's baseline at that point. – EP3

[...] situations where a child raises acute anxieties to the adults, then the adults go and collapse in the staff room, for a cuppa, and they start talking about the child and then it becomes Chinese whispers mixed with reality. So instead of a little bit of two second problem solving it becomes the monster in the classroom! – EP5



***Subtheme: Parental anxiety***

There are some whose parents who are particularly anxious about it. - EP1

So I often think my role is a lot around anxiety and it's most heightened for children with additional needs and first children with additional needs. The anxiety is usually much less if it's a subsequent child – because the parents have got some experience – or if the needs aren't too great. - EP1

I think it is quite scary for parents, it's such a big step – EP4

[...] for parents if they haven't got a diagnosis they become much more agitated and upset, understandably, because they're seeing their kid is upset, so you can end up with – that's the worst times when neither sides understand each other because that's why diagnoses are important to parents. It's something to hang onto. - EP5

[...] that transition of cuddly, cuddly early years into the more formal school setting is a big kick in the teeth to some parents, you know, they feel they're being deprived, 'what about my little person?' – EP5

[...] kids on the autistic spectrum [...] there's lots of parental anxiety in that group – oh, they've got so used to Mrs so and so being there and the routine and the rigour and the structure. How are they going to manage in a different building or a different room and a different person? – EP6

***Sub-theme: Managing anxiety: a role for the EP***

[...] the children we work with, often, people are worried about the transition, there's lots of anxiety and therefore it's really important that we hold onto, you know, who would ever want things to be the same all the time? That would be, terrible! – EP4

I think often the starting point is about people being anxious and having things they think will be barriers and therefore it's really important that those don't get minimised, because they need to be acknowledged, but it's also really important alongside that to have a narrative about new opportunities, things that will suit people, to have a kind of positive and developmental approach to transition. You know, who wants to be in nursery forever? Or pre-school? – EP4

I like to think that transition is generally positive, that it's about development, about markers, about noticing things changing and being able to embrace that, or to think about next stages, or development so, I guess, transitions are opportunities...like everything they require maybe some thought but for me it's kind of really helpful to take a very positive view of them and to think of them as something that we welcome, that we want children to experience, that we want to experience ourselves, and that are fundamental to human experience, so they're part of something very important that we want to be able to do all through our lives and therefore practicing them, or having the opportunity to do them, is something that we need to make sure that children get to do. – EP4

So I often think my role is a lot around anxiety and it's most heightened for children with additional needs and first children with additional needs. EP1

I find the educators have a huge amount of anxiety. Sometimes, it's just about managing that. – EP1

The challenge is handling that anxiety and allowing everybody to feel uncertain about what might happen, but actually planning for it anyway and just seeing how things go. - EP1

I think working with the parents so that there are no surprises for them as far as possible [...] It's fundamental because often in the course of the journey with special needs parents can misunderstand things or, you know, it's all jargon and stuff – EP5

[...] we're still talking about adult mental health and the pressures on grown-ups and teachers, you know, that still has to be addressed at some level. So it's only if you can really get into the system, be accepted as a trustworthy part of the system, that people will really talk turkey with you about the entire establishment, it's organisation and the wellbeing of the people inside, such that they are free to deliver a jolly good pedagogy to the little ones. – EP5

[...] for me the most important ones really to work with are the parents because a) they are at the centre as part of the family, under SEND b) they are the ones who if they don't understand fully what their choices are and what's going to be happening and how it's going to happen, they are the ones who are going to be very hurt and upset and will want to go down to tribunal, which is a quarter of a million pounds before you sneeze. And c) it's just about offering that reassurance and support which reinforces what very often the early years settings do very well. – EP5

## Theme: Collaborative approaches to support

### *Subtheme: Not a homogenous group*

The other really wobbly group of children are in care, who again similarly struggle with any transition and the difficulty there is around the need of making a strong relationship with the key adult and just feeling safe and secure in a new setting, accepting new boundaries and building up those new relationships. – EP6

I guess anybody who has additional needs generally are going to need a bit more on transition in terms of information and time for the teacher to prepare what works and liaising with the previous staff and seeing them in the nursery location where they are confident and secure. – EP6

[...] any children who've got emotional needs are going to be a bit more on that transition [...] So, children who are less secure, who've had more difficult starts to life, it's going to be more difficult for them to bounce back and readjust and manage that change because change in itself is going to be inherently scary and risky for them. – EP6

The mildly ASD, either not yet diagnosed or diagnosed as 'mild'. And they remain vulnerable throughout their entire schooling, because they're not so in your face that it's absolutely evident that they're on the spectrum but they can have behaviours such as, you know, stropiness, strong sense of justice, even when they're little, which look like unwanted behaviours but are not driven by behaviour. They're driven by communication. So very much for me anything around ASD. – EP5

[...] if they haven't been in a nursery setting where they've had the autism lens on that really makes it serious once they move into Reception because they go with a background of behaviour. You know, won't sit still, won't sit down, keeps running around, hides under tables, you know, wants to keep going to turn the taps on, all the stuff that we would automatically know but that staff might not if it wasn't a specialist setting. – EP5

Obviously, there are the complex needs, but the ones with EHCs are almost the ones who you can kind of almost say their needs are being met. – EP1

As I say, if they're clearly ASD then there can be sleepless nights if you're not feeling confident. But mild ASD, so they show little bits but you've got to have your eyes wide open. So very often on transition they're not diagnosed, you know, because they've just been happily, a bit different or quirky at nursery. – EP5

You normally tend to see a strange wariness between the peer group and the child, for the vulnerable ones which might be ASD and so that in itself is more tricky because, whereas more complex needs there's an attachment to, or clear ASD, you know they're included in a circle of friends, you know all rushing round, but the vulnerable ones where it's not clear, they just seem a bit aloof, they're not sure what's happening, they're not interacting. – EP5

If you've got a class of thirty and there's this little kiddie who's being quite quiet but, you know, they're still little so they're just looking round the room, walking round the periphery of the classroom, that's fine, they're not getting in your hair, but actually they're the ones who are at risk of being missed. They can be invisible. If they're mildly ASD. – EP5

I think, children with poor communication skills, so you know, [...] children who are more likely to communicate with their behaviour or non-verbally. And therefore, there's scope for people to miss distress or anxiety or elements that might be picked up on for other children. So, I suppose that's one vulnerable group, but I think maybe, children who find transitions difficult for whatever reason so, maybe children with attachment and trauma needs, cos' that's a sort of specific group although I'm not sure - I'd certainly say that I've done far less work thinking about transition for that group. A lot of the children that I've worked with will have been children with developmental delay, in it's more general sense, and I think maybe there is a risk for that group

that people sort of feel like their delay means things matter less in terms of continuity or picking up on what they need. I don't know if that's true, yea. I'd like to think it isn't but yea, yea. – EP4

[...] kids on the autistic spectrum spring to mind because obviously change is inherently difficult for those young people. However, there's lots of things that can be done to support that as well. – EP6

[...] children who have either got a diagnosis of ASC or present with social communication difficulties. Children who find going from one activity to the next, or one lesson to the next, difficult and that might be a child who has attachment difficulties as well, it's not necessarily just ASC. – EP3

I suppose any child technically is vulnerable between Year 6 and Year 7, or Nursery and Reception, if things haven't been well thought-out. But I guess those that have complex or special educational needs are more vulnerable, just by nature I suppose. – EP3

I guess maybe if children have, like, physical difficulties then they could potentially be more vulnerable because there's more to think about for them in terms of actually adapting the physical environment. – EP3

[...] lack of communication, speech and the other one it was around trauma and emotional difficulties – EP2

I do think about children on the autistic spectrum, who often find nursery and reception quite difficult and actually the transition into Year 1 feels a little bit easier because it's more structured. There's something in that. Sometimes they're the ones that you really struggle with and then they get into where they need, which is that structure. I don't know that there are any great themes of others. – EP1

Then, the other ones tend to be ones that have... I don't know, I'm not sure there's a pattern. - EP1

You get some who have just had missed life opportunities. They're not particularly catching up. They're often quite complicated because there'll be lots of needs. – EP1

There are the ones who have – because medicine has come on such a long way – who've been born prematurely. So we go on their physical birthdays as opposed to their expected birthdays. And there is a little cohort who, they just- They're the ones that should repeat a year because they were born too early and they are physically smaller, they're emotionally smaller, they're cognitively delayed for the number of days outside the womb, but actually if you go on their expected birthday, they're probably around where they should be. - EP1

So missed opportunities in the sense that they haven't experienced nursery provision or they haven't been to any play groups or anything like that. Usually, the reason they haven't is because family life is complicated for whatever reasons. There might be domestic violence or something. There's usually something and then with that, brings parenting and attachment. Then, mixed in with that, you're not too sure if there's a learning difficulty as well, which could be because they haven't had all the life experiences. At four or five-years-old, you can't tease any of that out because they've had such a short amount of time in education... They are the ones that you often end up having a conversation about keeping them back a year but it just doesn't feel right in the sense that they physically fit in and there were probably little pockets of skills that are the right side but you can see why educational professionals are going, "They just need to play more." Probably because they've missed out on life experiences, but we don't yet know if there's a learning need underneath. - EP1

[...] behavioural difficulties is often one, which can include things like spitting, and hitting and scratching, you know sort of lashing out, hurting other children, I understand that one. You know, from a head's perspective particularly, they can get quite concerned and worried because other children being hurt is then a real difficulty. But I think there's huge amounts that can be done. To really unpick what that behaviour is telling the school, and the parents. – EP2

[...] lots of the work I've done has been with children on the autistic spectrum and transitions are incredibly significant for that group of children. – EP4

I think a potential role would be to look at the... Would be to crunch the data [...] I'd love to do a piece of research to asking nursery staff: "Do you think this child is going to have an issue at primary? What do you think those issues might be?" Then at the end of reception, getting the teacher, going, "Does this child have any issues? What are they?" and seeing if the two match up, because that would allow you to realise: "Actually, are nursery staff highlighting things that become an issue? Or are they just generally a little bit anxious and actually nothing happens?" I think it's a combination of the two, but I reckon you would probably find pockets of individuals where actually the two match up. I think it would be good to know that: to know that children – potentially children who present as highly anxious at nursery – go on to have all sorts of issues through reception and have friendship needs or what have you at the end of reception. "Okay, well, we need to do

something about that, because it doesn't go away." [...] I think you might need to do something a bit longer term, but I think that sort of matching up – "What do people think?" and then measuring later down the line what actually happened – would allow some themes to come out.

I think you then might be able to pick out what are vulnerable groups in the nursery age range, because I don't think we really know what the vulnerable groups are. – EP1

You hear anecdotally, children who struggle all the way through primary and end up being excluded in Year 7, actually in nursery they presented with huge amounts of difficulties. It's like, "Maybe we should be doing more, rather than trying to just hold them and thinking they might just get better," but we don't know, I don't think. It's so difficult to have any idea about what the presenting picture looks like for those which quite often end up with difficulties later down the line. – EP1

### ***Sub-theme: Willing attitudes***

The complex needs kids do better on the whole because they tend to come with an awful lot of information behind them, so, as long as there is the understanding, acceptance and willingness on the part of the receiving school, they tend to be quite well catered for – EP5

I've seen some schools that really appear to not have a huge amount but they're just creative with the way that they put it in place. Then other schools who are quite like, "We're going to struggle to meet this child's needs in Year 1, so we're going to ask them to repeat Reception... Actually, what would be more helpful is if you put them into Year 1 and you offer a play-based time or intervention, potentially in a group, that supports other children. There's never just going to be one that needs it. There's always a little group and isn't it better that you meet the group's need rather than just putting an individual – EP1

Sometimes it's around how they choose to implement the curriculum and how focused they are on achievement. - EP1

I would say it does vary across schools about how willing they are to adjust the curriculum to meet that young person's need. And I used to think it was based on size of school. That a smaller school was more flexible. But I've seen some quite big schools, for example (name of a school), be incredibly flexible about how they deliver that Year 1 curriculum to meet the needs of their children. - EP1

So I think it's more to do with the ethos of the school than it is to do with the size or demographics. Just how creative they can be. EP1

Some schools are absolutely brilliant, and take, you know, children and they learn, they just learn, they put things in place, they train people up and I've got some schools that are absolutely brilliant at doing that. And some schools that are quite resistant, still, unfortunately. So that's what I find most challenging, actually, is lack of preparedness, to learn and to adapt and to make changes. Sometimes, and I understand this, sometimes the physical environment is hard, but I've got some schools where their nurseries have got two flights of stairs in them and they still make things work. – EP2

Just because this young person is very difficult in nursery does not mean they're going to be difficult in primary school. It's a completely different environment, with a different teacher, expectations, cohort, blah-di-blah. We just need to see. Don't go in with that sort of, "It's going to be hard work from day one," but, saying that, what can we put in place to ensure we have the best start? - EP1

It would be helpful if every early years practitioner who's got a key relationship with a young person could be with them in school when they start, but the likelihood and the ease of doing that when you're taking from all these different nurseries is actually very challenging. But you do feel like, actually, if there was a bit of scope to support that, it would have quite a big impact. For a child that's got all these complex, potentially social-emotional needs, to know that they're going to see a person they know on that first day in a new setting will be quite comforting for them. - EP1

[...] thinking about things like, you know, for a child with autism how the day could be structured so that its far more done through a visual timetabling, just basically visual resources, not necessarily visual timetable, but, erm, things that are really explicit for the child. – EP2

I think it's difficult if a school is aiming for inclusion but actually they're quite resistant to having that child in the first place, erm, which you do get, you get it especially if children have got particular behaviours or difficulties, like a choke hazard, or needing nappy changes [...] I've had a couple of children in X (city) where the primary schools have made it very awkward for the parents and the parents have been very upset that their child wasn't welcome at certain primary schools. – EP2

[...] it means that there is an active learning plan in place for the child and an active, proactive stance for adults to be taking to make sure that the kiddie doesn't get lost. – EP5

***Subtheme: Robust information sharing to facilitate personalised support***

[...] around Easter time, certainly in term 5 you'd want be wanting to meet with key personnel from the school and parents and sit down and have the discussion around the transition plan, making sure that if necessary the child had a communication passport so that if they have particular needs it's really helpful for, especially little people, to have something to go in the front of the register or the front of the electronic whatever, which just says 'I am so and so, I like to...throw things, I need to...', you know, 'I need visuals', but something which is crystal clear, a little something, that there's no excuse for any receiving member of staff not to have an understanding of the kiddie, or a supply member of staff. – EP5

[...] it's those pivot points and it's also the scope for things to be lost and, you know, things can fall down the gaps, and if we look at some of those things that go wrong it is often at those change points isn't it? So, we know that without sharing the information there is the scope for things to be problematic. And I think lots of times parents describe that – starting in a new class, it taking quite a while, and then feeling like they've lost a bit of time that their child could have had if there'd been a better transition and I kind of think that matters quite a lot – that we don't, we don't let children down by not making things as seamless as possible. – EP4

[...] just jointly thinking about what a child needs at each transition. I think that's really important. Making sure that it is, if it's a vulnerable child, that it is personalised so that they are really looking at what is it for that child? Not just maybe what their diagnosis is or you know this, that and the other. What is it that's going to work for them? And sharing that. – EP3

I guess the onus is on the receiving school, but then I also think the onus should be on the school that the child is coming from to share that information. It just means that they start in September that much further on but then there's the other side of the coin that sometimes a fresh start is what's needed. - EP1

There are pros and cons with the sharing of information because sometimes you can share concerns and then, almost, people see what they've been told to see as opposed to just working with what's just in front of you. There are pros and cons. - EP1

[...] these people from the nursery hold gold, you know, they have so much information to share about that child, because they've known it for, you know, they've known them for, like, two years or something if not more. And the parents as well, I mean the parents are the biggest experts of that child that can be in that room. And so it's just giving that information to those people who are about to take on that role, just so that they have enough skill and knowledge to be able to do it I suppose, in a way that's going to benefit the child. Rather than just, kind of, you know, 'off they go!' - EP3

Which isn't always an easy thing to do because I've having to train my schools and each school I've worked with haven't necessarily given me that information, it's not until afterwards that I, they've sort of said 'Oh yes well the physio report...' and you go 'What physio report?'. – EP2

[...] a few years ago- I got very frustrated with the sharing of information, which has been dire, and particularly for those that, at the time, when it was statements, didn't have statements. There just didn't seem to be the information sharing and it would all fall down. I would work in the reception class, and that's where, if you are working within a geographical location where you know different settings, and I'd say, "I've been involved," or, "I know another EP is involved." That involves the EPs talking to each other outside of the setting. They'd be saying, "Oh we didn't know that they'd seen an EP. We didn't have any information." That's not that long ago. It used to be absolutely dire. - EP1

Nursery to Reception, it seems to me that there's more onus on the reception staff having to collate and gather and do things – EP5

[...] there seems to be never enough time for there to be full dialogue between the sending class and the receiving class, so that people are really armed with the right information and ready to roll. – EP5

[...] it's quite sadly been the case where the actual information either hasn't been readily available within the class teacher's immediate grasp, or it has been available but people don't get round to actually reading it. And, as I say, it's not through lack of intent – its lack of time. – EP5

**Personalised support:**

[...] it feels like a 'one size fits all' has been put in place for transition with these half days. It just doesn't work for some children, particularly if somebody's on the autistic spectrum, but then what you do find is that schools will do something different for those. They will only offer mornings for those, rather than some schools do... A cohort will do mornings, and then that same cohort will just do afternoons, which could be very difficult for an autistic child: "I was doing mornings last week. Why am I just doing afternoons? Why aren't I going for the whole day?" You need something that stays consistent. - EP1

[...] just jointly thinking about what a child needs at each transition. I think that's really important. Making sure that it is, if it's a vulnerable child, that it is personalised so that they are really looking at what is it for that child? Not just maybe what their diagnosis is or you know this, that and the other. What is it that's going to work for them? And sharing that. – EP3

[...] just having it smooth and well thought out for that particular child, so individualised where possible – EP3

There was an example with this piece of work that I did that was actually in Foundation, where the nursery, in terms of their paperwork, they had written quite bland things like, 'calming strategies when she has a meltdown' and when we were talking there were some really specific things. Like they did this blowing, (makes blowing sound), and actually nobody would ever have invented that from the school's point of view, you know you'd never come up with it, or at least it would take ages, or you'd wonder what she was doing if she was huffing about, without that information. So, it's that sort of thing about who wants to invent the wheel, when somebody's already found a really good way of rolling stuff down hills, or whatever, you know – [...] if you don't share it you're not conscious of it - it's too much part of just what you've got used to. And then for new people it's really important not to be starting from scratch but to have that background. - EP4

***Sub-theme: The centrality of strong communication and building relationships***

[...] if the needs are clear on transition, as long as there's been a face to face meeting between the SENCO's of each school, which I think is really important so that each setting knows what has worked, what will work, and they can work out between them what they're going to do. – EP5

[...] good practice is when people communicate. So when the nursery, or early years setting, communicates well with the primary school and I would say that, to me, would look like more than just paperwork. So, ok, there needs to be a sharing of paperwork if there is important paperwork but there needs to be face to face meetings between key adults in both settings and for parents to be a part of that. And for the child to be a part of that where possible – EP3

So it often comes down to communication, which I think is building relationships and funding having a coffee together. It sounds... From the outside it looks like you're just funding people to sit down and chat but actually, if you put educational professionals together, they very rarely sit and chat about their holidays. They often talk about what they do, because they only work in their setting. - EP1

You need the class teacher from primary to meet the key worker from the nursery and those two need to sit down and have a conversation about that young person's needs. What often happens is the SENCO from the nursery talks to the SENCO of the primary school and the poor class teacher hasn't got a clue what's been said or is given a bit of paperwork. But it's not the same as actually talking to somebody and even visiting a different provision. I think that can be really helpful and does happen sometimes. - EP1

[...] often in the course of the journey with special needs parents can misunderstand things or, you know, it's all jargon and stuff so it gives them a chance to sit down and we can really help spell it out (EP5)

Well, with the SENCO, ensuring that we've got the right people around the table. – EP2

[...] definitely trying to work together and trying to involve the child as much as possible – EP3

[...] it's not the same as actually talking to somebody and even visiting a different provision. I think that can be really helpful and does happen sometimes. - EP1

The level of detail that I know about schools in (city), again some work quite well with that sort of transition, but it tends to be when they're onsite, when the nursery is part of the primary. But what happens in (city), because it's a high population and small area, one nursery feeds into lots of different primary schools, so that ability to go and visit is more complicated and involves, I think, probably good relationships. Again, thinking

about it, the ones where it works is because there's a historical friendship between the two adults who work in those different settings. Maybe the nursery staff worked at the school. - EP1

So, there seems to be, although schools generally do very well, there seems to be never enough time for there to be full dialogue between the sending class and the receiving class, so that people are really armed with the right information and ready to roll. – EP5

I guess that's really where the SEND code of practice has got a really valuable role in insisting that the family's at the centre. But I still think that's a work in progress for some settings which are hard-pushed, hard-pressed and feel they haven't got the staff or the money. And now with the cuts they haven't got the staff. So that's going to be a new knock-on effect where littlies, vulnerable littlies, are going to be even more at risk. – EP5

I don't see, which I would like to see a lot more of, the receiving teacher sending out to parents an introductory letter saying 'hello, my name is so and so, I trained at...or I live in so and so, but I came from.... I'm interested in...I hope to be able to...help your class...and please if you have any questions, be clear about when I can be contacted...blah, blah, blah'. But giving a little bit of a human face to the teacher receiving. [...] it's respectful, because would you give your child to some tom, dick or harry you've never set eyes on if you're out on the street? (laughs) I don't think so. But just to have a little flavour about what that person's about, it needn't be heavy, but I think it's a respectful way of saying 'hello, I'm part of your extended family now'. - EP5

And ensuring that things are put in place because so often they're not and I think one of my biggest things across all transitions is making sure the key members of staff are involved in any of the meetings [...] it depends on the school as to how much contact I have with the staff who are directly involved. That takes quite a long time to establish, that actually the person I really want to talk to is the person who is working with that child. But I need somebody from senior management to be in on those conversations so that you can hear what we've agreed and you tell me that that can actually be put in place. - EP1

[...] it's tricky in terms of those very vulnerable pupils who might need something over the summer or time to get to know the new person they're going to be working with in advance. There's budgetary constraints which make it very difficult for primary schools to come to a meeting in May or April, and be able to say your child is going to be working with Mrs So and So's class and then helping her in that class will be Mr So and So and here they are. That would be in ideal world, you're going to meet them at these 3 points this term, so that there's a very clear getting to know them, but that's just not possible. – EP6

It would be helpful if every early years practitioner who's got a key relationship with a young person could be with them in school when they start - EP1

[...] it's tricky in terms of those very vulnerable pupils who might need something over the summer or time to get to know the new person they're going to be working with in advance. There's budgetary constraints which make it very difficult for primary schools to come to a meeting in May or April, and be able to say your child is going to be working with Mrs So and So's class and then helping her in that class will be Mr So and So and here they are. That would be in ideal world, you're going to meet them at these 3 points this term, so that there's a very clear getting to know them, but that's just not possible. – EP6

### ***Subtheme: Observing the child in context***

It's helpful if a primary school can just... if the Reception teacher can spend a day in a nursery and just get a general feel for the nurseries, where the children are coming from. **Nurseries are really variable...** I think it's helpful if a reception teacher is **aware of some of the experiences that child has come from**. I know they do home visits, and I think that's really helpful, but again you often find that the home visit the reception teacher does isn't shared to the Year 1 teacher. I find that really annoying. - EP1

It's often not the class teacher who comes, it's the SENCO and then that's translated, and I think that misses a lot. So you get the SENCO from the primary school coming to visit the nursery to see the child who is about to move up. When, actually, it needs to be the class teacher. It very rarely is. - EP1

[...] maybe it doesn't always happen to the degree that the parents feel is necessary but in Reception, it's standard now, that teachers will go to the nursery of their new intake and see the child in context. Maybe not for a very long time but, you know. – EP6

***Sub-theme: Timely 'plan, do, review' activities***

I think because it's now realised that actually, if a child with additional needs, needs that extra support at the point of starting primary school, if you leave them to fail for the first six months, well, that's a lovely school experience and then you have to undo all of that. Then, they've missed the best year in primary school to make friends and to get into routine ready for Year 1 because the curriculum changes so much. - EP1

The planning is about the induction and careful thinking about how to help the early years little being in the next setting and what balance of need is going to be mixing in the class they're going to be in. So it's getting the environment right, as right as can be for the child. – EP5

I think if people don't prepare for transitions, it's a missed opportunity and often I think it's a really important summative point, you know, it's kind of, quite often people don't realise how much a child has developed and how much has changed – EP4

I believe in that 'Plan, Do, Review' cycle – that if you don't review what you've been doing then you've lost, you know, for a setting or a group of people who are moving a child into their next phase, if they don't have the opportunity to think about it and review what has and hasn't been effective then that's lost learning and that's a lost opportunity. – EP4

[...] because children's development is at a rate of knots in the early years, sometimes it's not helpful to have too much in place, because children change so dramatically over a summer. Sometimes they go downhill, admittedly, depending on their life circumstances, but I think sometimes you can say – and I think that's what I end up saying at these transition meetings – “This is what is right for now, but we just do not know what September brings,” because we've got three months, or two-and-a-half months, before we get there. - EP1

[...] if it's a child who has SEN, then some kind of plan that outlines strengths, needs and what works in the nursery, is going to be really helpful [...] but to have that information early on so that the primary school has got a chance to set it up ready for September, in Reception – EP3

[...] there's not a clear point of 'these are the concerns, this is where we go', and not through a lack of will or competence on the part of staff but just the actual physical time. – EP5

**Theme: An evolving role for EPs over time**

***Subtheme: Diverse experience working in multi-agency contexts***

**Strategic work**

I'd say the bit that I did that was more group focused was some of the work with the autism team which was about – where we did more work on transitions in general, supporting children with autism for transitions, and supporting schools to think about that, so more proactive really. And information that schools could use at a group level as well, or at a strategic level I suppose. -EP4

I was part of the early years panel which was, sort of, third of a year monthly panel meetings so I was, that was in X (city). So that was only, for the like two years before that, I was part of that process, so I'd see it at that strategic level in terms of funding applications for EP input or input from portage and things like that. - EP2

[...] the specialist EP in early years, so I'm sure she would have devised or helped devise SEN toolkits and that sort of thing. I haven't actually done that, mine has been more pragmatic at the individual family level of getting in there. – EP5

I created a one-page profile of, basically, the child's name. Not even address, just date of birth, year group, who's been supporting them, what interventions have been tried, how successful they've been, what they think their key needs are, professionals that have been involved and what they think should be put in place for transition, literally just one page of A4. It was most helpful for primary to secondary because that was another big fall-down, but it was helpful at nursery and primary. It was never something we did formally as a



service. It was never taken on that. I just did it between some of the schools that were particularly bad at communicating. - EP1

### **Systemic work in schools and early years settings**

At primary, so when they're in Reception into Year One, generally, it's been individual work apart from in one setting – (name) - where the presenting need of the reception cohort a couple of years ago , 70% had a speech and language need and 30% didn't. So rather than doing individual and group work with the 70%, we talked about delivering a curriculum to everybody, so everybody had the speech and language curriculum, and there was an extension for the 30% that didn't need it, so they kind of flipped it over and became the gifted and talented that you added something more to. - EP1

[...] the other thing I like to do actually, which can work in a nursery setting is looking at a cohort of children, so rather than, so they might say 'oh my goodness we've got a really tricky class in Reception, we really don't know what we're doing, we've got a number of children on the SEN register, we've got a number of children who have different needs, and we just don't quite know'. And so I'd go and do an observation of the cohort as a whole. – EP2

[...] things like meeting with the staff from Reception and just having a really good look with them as a whole, you know, if it's two classes or something, and saying "hey, what are your concerns, and how do we make it better for you in terms of early intervention?" – EP2

### **Consultation work**

Whereas prior to that we used to have three visits done each year in an early years' setting. In each of those visits you would talk through children causing concern. They're like a little mini drop-in and you offer little bits of snip bits, "Why don't you read this? How about trying this?" a few next steps stuff. But you could also say-you also had a certain amount of time that you could apply- that you, as an EP, could give to that setting. For (name) Children's Centre, I think I had those three visits, which were the statutory. Then I think I might have had two or three days which I could apply in any way I chose with the setting. So we would negotiate. They could apply for more, but they always had those three days, which meant there was a lot more preventative work done. [...] I would talk to the key members of staff as well, so it wouldn't just be a conversation with the SENCO. It would be with the key members of staff as well. They'd have an opportunity to come and talk to me for 20 minutes, half an hour about the child and their presenting problems, what they'd already tried, where they wanted to go. And we sort of problem solved together. They'd have a few things they'd go off and do. - EP1

I suppose it's to support the key adults in thinking, ok, this is what has worked in early years, so how are we going to reflect that in primary but how are we also going to help them move on as well? So not just trying to mirror the early years setting, we've obviously got to think about them slowly developing their independence and becoming those independent learners as much as possible, according to that child's need. So supporting in that. – EP3

I used to do loads more early years, just consultation work, you know, getting involved, "I have got a concern", "What are you doing?", "OK, have you tried these?", "Let's review those ideas". That's just not happening with the frequency that it used to. [...] And then, that would help, they could take the documentation that goes from that as part of the transition.– EP6

I used to do quite a bit at the early years end, thinking about nursery into Reception and would kind of work with the nursery setting and then the reception setting to kind of facilitate a meeting and that used to be quite standard so if we knew somebody that I had been involved with was about to transition into primary school we would set up a transition meeting with parents and relevant staff and the receiving school and I'd use a kind of visual format like maps or something like that to structure the discussion around what's worked well here at nursery, what do they need to keep doing and actions and next steps and giving parents opportunity to voice their concerns and have those concerns discussed or you know alleviated or you know that kind of thing. – EP6

[...] what I am interested in is people developing their thinking and their structures and their way of working by having somebody available to give them some space to do that, and some structure to do it as well. So, just like everything that's a consultation, what you'd hope for is that actually you're not going to do that much but that other people are going to change what they do and that it's an opportunity for people to prepare and to think through things so that they can be as effective as possible [...] But, also, the preparation that people might do in terms of how they're going to think about a child, or how they're going to notice a child's needs and work with that information in both those ways, so for transition.– EP4

[...] it's really easy to kind of get really 'advice-givey', but I think what I'd want is for somebody to feel that they had an opportunity to develop, or explore, what they wanted to happen and how things might work – EP4

[...] we work with the most concerned, and if the most concerned is the school then that should be part of the role, is trying to look at...and, because I quite like straight talking, you know, rather than going round the houses, you know, "what is it?" 'We don't want to do nappy changes'. Ok, let's talk about that one then. Yea? – EP2

[...] making sure everyone's together I suppose and knows what they're going to do from day one, as soon as they're in the new setting. So giving people that confidence that yes they can do it and they can support the needs and this is how they could do it – EP3

[...] working with them was about understanding the child's needs and bridging to the Primary School, or to the next setting – EP4

### **Offering a holistic perspective in a multi-agency context**

Variety of input, definitely, yea. I mean I suppose there are common things, it's around getting a quality meeting, making sure that you have invited the right people, making sure that I have seen the child and observed, you know observation as a minimum, and then maybe other things on top. But it's not always that that's my, what what's been asked for in my role I don't think, is to necessarily – they might have had lots of assessments from speech and language, or from occupational therapy, physiotherapy, etcetera and you know, so actually part of my role, I feel, is to look at the issues from the reports of previous, involvement, professionals, medical professionals often. – EP2

I love that kind of structure where you can get a sense of what things you need to be developing, what things are, where support will be necessary, where you can kind of take a really holistic view, and a developmental view of what a child might need – EP4

But also, offering that really wide perspective even at transition at an early age. How is the transition they're doing now, how is that going to impact long-term? You know, particularly if they're going to a specialist setting. I'll already be thinking, "But what does that mean for work later down the line?" "What are they missing out on?"- EP1

[...] a lot of the information has come by parental report, and, as we know, there's a bigger picture than simply, not simply, but only parental report. So one has to be full of respectful uncertainty in unpicking all the complexity that that involves. Weighing and balancing that with one's own professional judgements and consultations with other involved personnel. – EP5

[...] it would be the SENCo and the class teacher and the parents and then what we would try to do is arrange a wider transition meeting involving everybody involved basically to look at: what's gone well this year, what are the concerns of the parents, what strategies they need to move on to their next setting and any next steps. So, we were working with the adults involved with the child and just enabling and facilitating discussion and being able to, I think visually structuring it as well was helpful so that parents could see what the plan was, as it was emerging in front of them instead of lots of teachers and people scribbling down things on their own paper. – EP6

[...] we used to have lovely multi-agency meetings where you would get everybody round but it just doesn't happen now because everyone's so thinly spread [...] When I used the visual structure that everyone was clear where the meeting was going and things like that, where they needed to contribute especially liaising with speech and language in the early years is so helpful and, or, health visitors, nobody sees them anymore, or primary mental health specialists - we used to have those for early years. People who work with the families. – EP6

But in terms of the work that I would have done and that I have done with early years, erm, a lot of it would be around transition, actually, a lot [...] a lot of the time it was about trying to prepare them for school, you know, so joint meetings with the school that were intaking and establishing what's worked well and what needs to be transferred, but usually multi-agency because there'd often be lots of people involved if they were pre-school and were raised. – EP2

### **Working with parents**

When I was working in X before, we had an early years group and we did loads of, sort of, I don't know, putting together a timeline and information for parents that was very structured around, you know, in some ways it

was about helping parents give positive messages to their children, notice the developmental changes and the things their children were ready to take on, help them practice some of the skills that would be great for being in Reception. So we did quite a detailed pack that was for parents, and that was targeted at parents of children who had had some kind of early identification of Special Educational Needs, but it didn't have a particular focus, you know it wasn't for, say children with developmental delay, it was just about things parents might do to think about transition and help prepare with their child for that – EP4

[...] for me the most important ones really to work with are the parents because a) they are at the centre as part of the family, under SEND b) they are the ones who if they don't understand fully what their choices are and what's going to be happening and how it's going to happen, they are the ones who are going to be very hurt and upset and will want to go down to tribunal, which is a quarter of a million pounds before you sneeze. And c) it's just about offering that reassurance and support which reinforces what very often the early years settings do very well. – EP5

I think certainly for the parents where they just felt like 'what was the point of him being in school?', almost, because they couldn't see progress, partly because they were looking for progress that was very unlikely to happen, or certainly not going to happen in a fast or typical way. But they did need to know that there was difference, and that he was making progress, and that these were some of those very invisible cognitive skills about classifying, and generalising, you know, were feasible to develop in terms of his learning. – EP4

### ***Subtheme: A more limited current role***

[...] it's all individual work. There's nothing systemic. I don't know if there is somebody thinking about systemic stuff, but I don't think there is. Certainly around transition, my experience is there isn't. - EP1

#### **Discussing transition during general planning meetings/core visit:**

[...] it's mainly in passing so those reviews that we have, when we have a general planning discussion with a setting about their needs systemically as well the needs of the individuals and transition comes up I might have a checking in discussion with them going "Ok, that group might need a little bit of..." or with these moving on conversations sometimes that involves a discussion around transition because concern is around transition so I might do a light touch check in that the setting knows generally what they're doing and usually I find that they do and there's very little that I need to add to that. – EP6

[...] we talk about children who have come into the setting into Reception that maybe they're concerned about and maybe that transition hasn't gone so well, and maybe we will have a think about that together [...] that's the point where I might prompt them, have they set up the meetings? You know, what's their next point in their graduated response for that child? – EP3

[...] it tends to be that short discussion within the core visit, because early years is traded – EP3

[...] if the child transitions into a primary school on my patch I suppose I also see my role as having a bit of a check in when I come into the setting in September – EP3

[...] invariably I'm nosey and saying 'oh how's so and so getting on' even though they haven't asked for a review or haven't necessarily wanted to prioritise them. – EP2

#### **Supporting the transitions of children with complex needs (discussions around moving to specialist provision; EHCP assessments):**

[...] the settings I liaise with I find I have not much to add unless the child is really complex or the relationship has broken down somewhere or the parents are incredibly anxious about what's going to happen in primary or you know. So that's kind of when we might have more a role. – EP6

I wouldn't be involved unless there was a talk about going to specialist provision. That's when I would be involved, and that would be because their learning level or style of learning was so different or low, so really way behind or with an attention span of a sparrow. And then- I'm thinking of one individual girl at (name of school) who just, yes, had no attention span at all and was just all over the place and needed a much smaller physical environment with a much lower, sorry, higher ratio of children to adults and not too many people around because she's so easily distracted. She'd just be off all over the place. EP1

Sometimes our role is about considering all the options out there and helping the key adults make those decisions, so whether it's, you know, does this child need a specialist setting? Are we at that point of the graduated response? – EP3

[...] it's always the complex needs ones. In fact, sometimes it's none of the above now, I just don't have any involvement since we are traded out. But when I am involved it's the complex kiddies on the whole and therefore that automatically involves the parents and usually external agencies. So it is quite thorough in terms of shared information. – EP5

[...] last year, I saw three or four children but that was because of the statutory process, statutory assessment. – EP2

Now, very often, it's a case of the first sighting of a child is actually at the time of an Education Health Care plan being requested, which means that one goes in cold, so not only does one not know the parents, many of whom have been on a long and difficult journey, erm, but we have no background ourselves to the knowledge of the children. – EP5

#### ***Supporting staff with issues related to the transition from YR to Y1:***

I find often, now, that my role around transition from Reception into Year 1 is ticking the box that, 'Yes, you as the teacher can decide what is right for this young person which you know is to allow a play based curriculum and a child led curriculum'. But they need an outside professional to rubber-stamp that, as opposed to feeling like they can, as a teacher, as a school, make a decision about what is right for that young person. It's like there needs to be evidence or somebody else to say, "It's okay that we do this." EP1

I did have a piece of work come in from the early years panel last year which was for a young child not on my patch who was early years and they wanted advice around whether or not the move to primary school was the right time for that child and whether or not to hold back and where that child was developmentally. So I suppose that was a kind of advisory role and also just to help them make that decision, so bringing that to it – EP3

I did have one boy who, English was an additional language for him, and the school were starting to be concerned and didn't know whether to recommend to parents to hold him back and keep him in Reception. That was quite interesting because I had almost a completely different view to the school, I was like I'm not sure where that would come from because he's actually doing really well, you know, and maybe his needs lie in different areas but would be fine I would say to just transition as normal. So I had a bit of work there. – EP3

[...] things like being held back a year, so offering advice and support around making that decision – EP3

We're going to struggle to meet this child's needs in Year 1, so we're going to ask them to repeat Reception"... actually, what would be more helpful is if you put them into Year 1 and you offer a play-based time or intervention, potentially in a group, that supports other children. (EP1)

#### ***Subtheme: Reduced involvement in early years work***

I used to do loads more early years, just consultation work [...] that's just not happening with the frequency that it used to. - EP6

We don't do nearly enough systemic work in the early years settings. We don't do any (systemic work) anywhere – because it's quick consultations and then we bog off! (laughs). Go away! – EP5

[...] like I was saying, I haven't done an awful lot of early years work recently. - EP4

I haven't had a lot of Reception work, which is interesting, given that we should all be doing, you know, early intervention and everything. They don't tend to come up. – EP3

I am a bit worried about the lack of preventative early years work that we do, not necessarily just about transition but obviously it would relate to transition because they're only in nursery for a year or two years but just getting in there early enough and not when things have developed too much. – EP6

I don't feel like I do a lot of early years. So, apart from the patches that I have and the discussions that I hold within their core visits, I maybe had...two bits of traded early years work and one, maybe two, pieces of statutory work. So it's not that much, even though obviously we always talk about early intervention, there isn't much... - EP3

I'm going to have to go back a bit because I haven't done any early years work for a while, so at least a year – EP2

The last year, really minimal, really minimal. - EP1

A lot of it tends to be rather individual. There's far less systemic stuff than I would like and supporting staff with meeting children's needs and that sort of thing. So it's sort of dwindled. I used to do a lot more and it seems to have dwindled over the time that I've been practicing, which is a bit of a shame because I like to do all the age ranges and all the needs because I think that's a key part of being an EP, is being experienced in everything a child might experience from nought to twenty-five. - EP1

[...] it's not negative, but it is seeing it for truth and not pretending because it's not good. I mean early years has really gone downhill so badly, I think, and been so badly served. – EP5

### ***Subtheme: Scope for a wider role at various levels***

#### **Work with parents**

[...] going forward we could definitely have more of a role of working with parents, not just around transition but just generally around parenting and attachment using VIG, or, you know. That could certainly be a way where we develop our role to work with parents more directly, there's definitely a need there but at the moment it's in its infancy. – EP6

#### **Research role**

You hear anecdotally, children who struggle all the way through primary and end up being excluded in Year 7, actually in nursery they presented with huge amounts of difficulties. It's like, "Maybe we should be doing more, rather than trying to just hold them and thinking they might just get better," but we don't know, I don't think. It's so difficult to have any idea about what the presenting picture looks like for those which quite often end up with difficulties later down the line. Then what could we do to put an intervention in? – EP1

I'd love to have more of a systemic role and just say, "These are some themes," or, "This is what is really helpful." As I say, probably to evaluate the evidence base of these ridiculous short days at the start, or maybe having a drop-in day over the summer that you could do as some things that would be a bit, sort of, a broader brushstroke - EP1

I often don't feel I'm particularly well informed. I mean, I can look at research, but research is often about little pockets of need, so maybe just looking at attachment or, I don't know, just looking at those with learning difficulties. Actually, I want feedback on that in-the-world, really difficult decision, really difficult conversations, when you've got all these different things that we're trying to juggle and make an informed decision on. What was the feedback on that, you know? Just get some themes later down the line. - EP1

It is, and I think that, actually, that would mean we would become a bit more evidence informed as opposed to experience informed, which is what I think we are. - EP1

Whereas, I think if we had the feedback from the people who were in it, we'd become evidence informed, whereas me just on the outside going, "Yes, this is what psychology tells me, this is what the limited research in this area tells me," but it's not in the field. It's, if you look at evidence informed, so often the research is much more either very bespoke or quite clean, so it's a bit more clinical. We need this kind of evidence from the more dirty decision making that we end up doing. - EP1

You can draw themes, definitely, but no two individual situations are the same because there are so many confounding variables, which is, essentially, probably, why it's never researched (Laughter) but why we need to do it and why EPs would be the best people to do it. - EP1

[...] but it would be interesting to know what just generally what we do in early years now. Has that changed since people have become traded? Is there more of a role still for local authority EPs, do they do more early years work? I suspect they might. Do early years settings buy in independent psychologists? It would be fascinating to know or are people working systemically with early years? Supervising staff, facilitating cluster meetings and all that kind of stuff, working more systemically, that could be happening. – EP6

### **Revisiting and reviewing cases of vulnerable children**

Then, later down the line, something I think we don't do enough of as a profession is follow through. It's almost like, I feel that every fifth or sixth case- that's probably too many, but maybe to pick out five or six across my entire year that I choose to follow up in two years' time or something like that and just see what happened with those decisions that were made. How did things pan out? So that there's actually a bit of feedback [...] Because I think so often, you know, it's difficult- the longer you work in a local authority, you do get that feedback, but it's anecdotal. It's not the same as actually formally going, "Do you know what? This was a really complicated one and this is what I thought was right at the time," just revisit it four/five years later. "How did it pan out? Would I go back and do something different? What did the parents think of the conversations we had and how did that impact on people?" There's none of that follow-up on any of the decisions that we do. - EP1

I haven't got the opportunity to get the feedback from the young person or the family or the staff who were involved in that. Which, you know- they're the people who are living it. I'm just coming in from the outside. - EP1

### **Designing and carrying out interventions**

[...] to actually work in schools with those groups. Even if it's just small groups, I think working with a vulnerable group, and supporting them over time to build that resilience ready for that transition – EP3

[...] if you were going to do it targeted you'd target the more emotionally vulnerable but then thinking about it, it could potentially be quite useful for anyone so maybe the EPs would have a role in developing something like that, that kind of intervention and then training staff to do that and they run it as part of nursery and as part of Year 6 and maybe as part of Year 11 into adulthood. – EP3

### **Supporting Year One staff**

[...] that could be about working with Year One teachers, supporting their confidence and skills in terms of them feeling ok receiving children who might not be at that level yet. Erm, maybe it's about improving communication between key adults, maybe psychology can help there – EP3

### **Providing support for non-maintained settings**

it would be nicer to have more of a role to support the non-maintained settings who don't really know what they're doing, in the nicest possible way, at times because it's just that they're small little places in a church hall. They haven't got the experience of meeting the needs of the child with attachment disorder or I don't know. They're not big enough to have all of the skills and the resources and things like that and they're isolated. So if there was a way that we could support them more. – EP6

### **EPs based in early years settings**

I would see an EP being based within an early years setting. As a permanent base. At the helm really, working with the SENCo, having multi-agency input, meetings as need be. – EP5

## ***Sub-theme: Systemic barriers to engaging with work in the early years***

### **Systemic changes in the allocation of EP work within the EPS:**

The big challenge is the way the funding of EP time occurs in this service. It's held by someone else, not me. In the past, although I was given a limited amount of time, I could implement that time in a way that best fit the provision I was in, whereas now I'm told what to do and it's all individual staff, so there isn't anything systemic. There may be somebody else that takes it, but I certainly don't see it. So me, as an EP that works in an individual setting, I don't get a chance to have any input on anything systemic. I wouldn't say I have a chance to talk to anybody else about what could be helpful systemically, so lack of opportunity and lack of... Is it 'autonomy', the right word – to do what I think is right as a professional? That's completely taken away from me. I'm directed to do pieces of work. - EP1

It comes down to funding. It's the funding of EP time is held by one person, and that's because historically there wasn't a view of what EPs spent their... They did do stuff, but we couldn't really show what we'd done. So now one person holds the pot and dishes it out, but, of course, they only dish it out for individual work, because that's what they see us doing, whereas in the past we couldn't measure what we did, but I know that we were pretty effective in what we did. It's just that it was a lot more systemic stuff. - EP1

I think a lot of that is because - it changed in the last academic year - the ease with which (name of city) Early Years' settings could access EP support, it's really longwinded. They fill in the information. They send it to a panel, who decide that, yes, EP can be involved or not and then we become involved. Whereas prior to that we used to have three visits done each year in an early years' setting. In each of those visits you would talk through children causing concern. - EP1

I mean I would love to be doing more early years work, we used to do loads more, but it's just commissioning and things is bit of a barrier so our early years work has to go, has to be agreed by a panel now and if your setting, like one of mine are not - the SENCo to be fair to her teaches full time and has an afternoon a week to write really length funding requests and requests from our involvement and it just doesn't happen for enough children. - EP6

Yeah because the requests have to go through, just the time to sit down and make a request and then get it to the panel and for the panel to agree it. The early years have a limited pot of money of EP time that they can buy in and use. - EP6

[...] they certainly don't see us as support to parents in early years and things like that but we could, we are underused so I've been thinking a lot lately about who do we need to talk to. It's all about commissioning isn't it now so what evidence you would need to show to a health commissioner about the benefits of maybe buying us in to do a set intervention with a group of parents to be or a group of new parents. - EP6

[...] in the past it's been very much - there was more autonomy, so there comes a point where if an EP isn't allowed a certain degree of autonomy then I think we are being really hard pushed to do a good job - EP5

**The move to traded work:**

[...] going back before the days of being traded out of the service, the schools would opt to have us in at any time according to need - EP5

[...] the key reason is the business plan. That's the way of the world. The whole business plan has completely altered the way we work. Settings, unfortunately, if they can get an extra two LSA's in a classroom for a year, or they can have another three visits from an EP, they're going to say 'well, actually we know vaguely what we're doing, we'll do that'. - EP5

I just don't have any involvement since we are traded out - EP5

[...] we are a traded service so people would have to want to buy that in so they would probably want to know that it works. So maybe there might be a lack of evidence at the moment for that - EP3

[...] there's a perception of there being less time so I guess especially since we're traded the local authority will only, allow us, ask for us to be involved in a transition review for a young person with a statement or also maybe perhaps with very high needs funding but if there's a kind of a case that the placement is at risk of breaking down or they might be moving into specialist. That is, that's more of the more reactive end of things so we don't tend to be asked if the schools would have to use their own EP time. - EP6

[...] we used to do quite a bit of that but not so much now. And part of that is because you know those skills are properly embedded in a lot of the schools, lots of the schools wouldn't necessarily need me to do that, but also because schools have had to prioritise a bit more how they use their EP time. - EP6

**Lack of funding:**

I think its' probably, potentially, around finances. So I don't think there's enough budget in the early years EP bit, to commission an EP. Erm, that has to be spread out across the whole city. And maybe there's a bit of, a lack of accountability or responsibility, so maybe the nurseries don't get us in because they think 'oh the primary schools will do it when they go in', as it's a different pot of money, you see - EP3

[...] nowadays, sadly, because of the costings involved it seems that early intervention is not as prolific as it should be in most EP's eyes. - EP5

**Reduced involvement working with the whole school setting**

[...] it's only if you can really get into the system, be accepted as a trustworthy part of the system, that people will really talk turkey with you about the entire establishment, it's organisation and the wellbeing of the people inside, such that they are free to deliver a jolly good pedagogy to the little ones. (EP5)

[...] before there was an opportunity to build a proper, rich and full picture about a child's development from the entrance to, say, a Children's Centre or the nursery, so that you would have opportunities to build up, sort of a photo almost, a little album in your head, of how they're developing and their needs. – EP5

[...] we used to have lovely multi-agency meetings where you would get everybody round but it just doesn't happen now because everyone's so thinly spread [...] health visitors, nobody sees them anymore, or primary mental health specialists - we used to have those for early years. People who work with the families. – EP6

I really feel strongly that it's ethically irresponsible to be asked to write major reports about a child when you haven't had a chance to know them personally beforehand. – EP5

I don't honestly know what else you would do differently other than bring back reasonable time, because it's not just about – the best work goes on when one is embedded in a setting, when the staff feel that you are part of that setting, and that can only happen if you are constantly around the setting or in the setting less constantly but over time. And currently with the way things are there's a huge push to just give EPs so many schools and do it. So, there is no longer that sense of being able to build up the belonging in school settings and that doesn't help, because they meet a new EP face each year, and there are different expectations. – EP5

[...] at the moment, I think, we are getting more and more sucked into rush jobs, tick the box, and there's no knowing we are actually applying the right strategies or recommendations. Its more look down a list and 'oh quick, let's tick some'. – EP5

I can see absolutely no point as things are now. I find it ethically wrong to be going in, taking one eye-balling of a young child and making a full EHCP out of that. I think it should be a case of ready access to settings so that there's sufficient opportunity for EP's to be involved, to be able to do observational assessment over time, any sort of assessment over time, cos' they've only got the year anyway, you know, if its nursery to Reception, but there are those kiddies who need something more than a snapshot. – EP5

It's about consistency of input, more frequency of input and more valid input in terms of working, supporting the setting, the whole school setting, because that way you see all the vulnerabilities. – EP5

I suppose in truth it's a bit about the sense of loss of control as well, because, again, with different systems, going back, there were obligations on following through on kiddies. So, the transition wasn't a huge deal because in any case you'd started with the child so you'd be carrying on a bit before you finished. Whereas now it's the piece of work, get top-up funding, bang, gone. Hear about the child three years later. What actually happened that now you're shouting? (laughs) – EP5

#### **More focus on work on transitions into post-16 settings:**

I would very much like it if we were able to be used a bit more with transitions especially as you get through to the upper end and into preparation for adulthood and things like that. – EP6

I've done more work at the other end, about post-16, recently. But I think for me, the reason that I sort of mention that is that it's had a really big impact on me feeling different about earlier transitions, because it's given me a very *forward-looking* approach – EP4

#### **The voice of EPs is not being heard**

As EPs we're not great at that, really. That's something we're more aware of recently, that the AEP and DECP are trying to get us more vocal and active about. – EP6

Maybe as a profession we could be doing more to be organised around preventing and presenting data and information and trying to be heard. – EP6

EPs are not very good at being [...] we are terrible at responding to consultations from the AEP [...] it's not just for us to turn to if we are a bit stuck with work issues, it's also a way of us saying actually that stuff you're trying to do government that's not okay, simplistically [...] So we're not very good at prioritising the time to say 'ok this is worth 10 minutes of my time to help and give the AEP tools to then construct an argument at a government level'. – EP6



You know, we're not trying to get published, I think it's because we're all so busy and exhausted doing the job. [laughing] – EP6

[...] as a profession we need to be I think taking a more active role, somehow, in making sure that information gets out there and that our voices are heard systemically around decisions that the government are making about everyone's education. – EP6

The curriculum, it's not child-centred. I think it's less to do with schools...it moves too quickly for child development and everybody seems to understand that it's too fast. Research shows it, yet we still plough on doing it. I think that's because we're not having an impact at that national level, at the DfE level.- EP1

## Appendix H: PEP gatekeeper letter and consent form



Dear .....,

I am a postgraduate student and trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my Doctorate in Educational Psychology I am conducting my thesis research with the aim of exploring class teachers', parents' and Educational Psychologists' views and experiences of transition points in early education. Specifically, I am focusing upon two key transitions taking place in early childhood: the nursery to Reception transition and the Reception to Year One transition. My research comprises of three parts which together aim to:

- Identify what can be done by parents, teachers and other agencies to support all children, and those who are vulnerable, during transitions;
- Develop knowledge of the emotional journey involved in transitions;
- Understand neighbourhood and community influences on transitions; and
- Explore the past, current and potential role of EPs in supporting these transitions.

In parts one and two I will be exploring the views of class teachers and parents in three different schools. In part three I would like to find out what EPs consider their role to be in supporting schools with transitions in early education. The study will seek to establish implications for the practice of EPs in this area.

I am therefore writing to enquire whether you would be willing to give permission for:

- 1. Six EPs working for x to take part in separate semi-structured interviews (lasting around 30-45mins each) to explore their role in transitions in early education**

I am hoping to conduct the interviews in June, July or August 2017 at a time which is least disruptive to EPs and their work commitments. EPs will need to have a minimum of one year of qualified experience in order to participate. The link EP for each selected school will not be invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews as this may bias the resulting data. EPs with an Early Years specialism, now or in the past, will also not be invited to take part, as the inclusion of their views may bias the resulting data.

- 2. Three primary schools within x to take part in the research**

Schools that are at least two-form entry with attached nursery classes will be invited to participate. The schools will be informed that the study seeks to establish implications for the practice of EPs in this area. School participation will involve:

- Nursery, Reception and Year One class teachers taking part in separate focus groups (30-45 minutes each) to explore their experiences of transition points in early education
- a qualitative survey of parents' views regarding transition points in early education

I am hoping to conduct three focus groups during June and July 2017 during times that are convenient to school staff. The location is likely to be in the school which is most central to all three schools, and travel expenses will be reimbursed (up to £10). All qualified class teachers

in each school will be invited to participate. Class teachers will not be excluded on the basis of number of years teaching experience or full/part time status. Principles will be established at the start of the focus groups, for example, teachers will be reminded that ideas shared must stay within the group.

Parents with a child in the Reception year of school will be surveyed at two points:

1. In the summer term prior to their child's transition into Year One
2. In the autumn term after their child's transition into Year One

### **What will happen?**

The project will begin in May 2017. Head teachers of eligible primary schools in the local authority will be sent a gatekeeper letter and consent form. From those who give consent, schools will be organised to ensure that the final school samples represent a range of demographics. Three sample schools will then be selected randomly using a random number generator.

Next, information letters and consent forms will be sent to:

- a) EPs in the local authority via email.
- b) class teachers via the school gatekeeper;
- c) parents of Reception children via the school; and

Following this:

- Class teachers who give consent will be organised into focus groups, depending on sufficient numbers being available to do so (minimum six teachers per group). If this is not possible, participants from alternative eligible schools may be sought.
- Parents will be asked to return the consent form to their child's class teacher. They will be asked to provide an email address for the online survey link to be sent to by myself. Parents will also be given the option of completing a paper copy of the survey or a telephone survey. Parents will be asked to complete part one of the survey between 14<sup>th</sup>- 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017 and part two between 1<sup>st</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> October 2017. A part two reminder email may be sent to parents if necessary.
- EPs who have given consent will be randomly chosen to take part.

Additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study will be given to EPs, class teachers and parents via a verbal and/or written debrief after participation. Parents will be given the opportunity to speak to an appropriate support person in school if they would like to discuss any thoughts or emotions that arise as a result of completing the survey. Head teachers will be asked to decide which staff member in the school will be the most appropriate person for parents to contact. The parent will be alerted to who this is at the end of the survey via the de-brief form.

Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the raw data collected, however, anonymised transcripts may be accessed by the research supervisor. All data will be analysed and evaluated by January 2018. It will be used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no school, parent, EP or local authority can be identified.

## Key information

- The School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) have granted ethical approval for the research. Further information is available from the SREC on request if required.
- Within participant information forms it will be emphasised that data collected shall be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University (rather than on behalf of the local authority). It will also be highlighted that the implications of the research will be general in nature and that this will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the local authority.
- Feedback regarding results of the research will be thematic in nature and will not identify specific teachers, parents, EPs or the local authority in which the research took place.
- There are no potential risks or harm involved in taking part and there will be no negative impact on EPs, class teachers, parents, children or schools if they choose not to take part.
- Any individual who does not give consent will not participate.
- All participants will be informed that participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the research at any point until two weeks after data has been collected, when it will be anonymised.
- In all parts of the study, a confidentiality clause will be used to highlight that individual responses will not be recorded by name and/or shared unless there is a concern for pupil safety. If this is the case, information will be shared with the designated safeguarding officer in the school or local authority.
- The interviews and focus groups will be recorded using a dictaphone and the original recordings will be deleted two weeks later following transcription.
- Data will be kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of participant names.
- All anonymous data, including transcripts and survey responses, will be kept indefinitely following guidance of Cardiff University.
- Participants will be reminded that they do not have to answer any questions which make them uncomfortable and on the survey participants will be given the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer.
- Participants will be given both the researcher's and the research supervisor's contact details on the information sheet for further details of the study.
- Parents will be encouraged to speak to their child's class teacher or head teacher if they would prefer to discuss any issues of concern with an adult at the school.

**If you give consent for EPs and schools to be a part of this research, please complete the consent form attached to this email and return to me as soon as possible, in person or via email.**

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this research. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Sims

Student Name: Elizabeth Sims  
Position: Postgraduate student (DEdPsy)

Supervisor title and name: Dr Kyla Honey  
Position: Professional Tutor

Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University    Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University  
Telephone Number: 029 208 75393                      Telephone Number: 02920870366  
E-mail: AustinEC1@cardiff.ac.uk                      Email: HoneyK1@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints, then please contact the individuals listed above or the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committee:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT    Tel: 029 2087 0360    Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

## Principal EP consent form

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*If your answer to any of the following questions is 'no' then I would be happy to speak with you to provide further information regarding the nature of the project.*

**Please circle yes/no:**

- I understand that EPs will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview (lasting around 30-45 minutes) which will explore their perceived role in transitions in early education **Yes/No**
- I understand that Nursery, Reception and Year One class teachers in three schools will be asked to participate in a focus group (lasting around 30-45 minutes) which will explore their experiences of transition points in early education **Yes/No**
- I understand that parents of children in Reception in three schools will be asked to participate in a survey (pre and post their child's transition into Year One; lasting around 30-40 minutes) which will explore their views regarding transition points in early education **Yes/No**
- I understand that participants will be given the choice to take part in the research and that this is completely voluntary. I understand that participants will be free to change their mind at any time without giving a reason for this, until two weeks after the data has been collected. **Yes/No**
- I understand that there are no potential risks or harm involved in taking part and there will be no negative impact on EPs, class teachers, parents, children or schools if they choose not to take part. **Yes/No**
- I understand that the information provided by EPs, class teachers and parents will be confidential, such that only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) can trace this information back to them. I understand that data will be transcribed and anonymised within two weeks of the focus group **Yes/No**
- I understand that dictaphone recordings of interviews and focus groups will be retained for up to two weeks for the purposes of transcription, after which they will be deleted/destroyed **Yes/No**
- I understand that individual views will not be personally identifiable. If there is a concern for pupil safety, then information will be shared with the designated safeguarding officer in the school/local authority **Yes/No**
- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidentially under a password protected document such that only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) can trace this information back to participants. I understand that data will be anonymised within two weeks of completion of the focus groups/surveys/interviews **Yes/No**
- I understand that data will be kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of participant names. **Yes/No**
- I understand that participants can have access to their information up until the point when data has been anonymised (two weeks after the focus groups/surveys/interviews) **Yes/No**
- I understand that participants can ask for their information to be deleted/destroyed at any time up until the point when data has been anonymised (two weeks after the group discussion) **Yes/No**
- I will allow participants who give their own consent to take part **Yes/No**
- I understand that participants will be given additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study via a verbal and/or written debrief after participation. **Yes/No**

- I understand that information collected will be used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no school, parent, EP or local authority can be identified **Yes/No**
- I understand that data collected shall be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University (rather than on behalf of the local authority). I understand that the implications of the research will be general in nature and that this will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the local authority. I understand that this will be made clear to gatekeepers and participants within information forms. **Yes/No**
- I understand that I am free to ask questions and discuss concerns with Elizabeth Sims (researcher) or Kyla Honey (research supervisor) at any time **Yes/No**

I.....(NAME) give consent for EPs and eligible schools within (name of local authority) to participate in the study conducted by Elizabeth Sims, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, with the supervision of Dr Kyla Honey.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## Appendix I: Headteacher gatekeeper letter and consent form



Dear Head Teacher,

I am a postgraduate student and trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my Doctorate in Educational Psychology I am conducting my thesis research with the aim of exploring class teachers', parents' and Educational Psychologists' views and experiences of transition points in early education. Specifically, I am focusing upon two key transitions taking place in early childhood: the nursery to Reception transition and the Reception to Year One transition. My research comprises of three parts which together aim to:

- Identify what can be done by parents, teachers and other agencies to support all children, and those who are vulnerable, during transitions;
- Develop knowledge of the emotional journey involved in transitions;
- Understand neighbourhood and community influences on transitions; and
- Explore the past, current and potential role of EPs in supporting these transitions.

In parts one and two I will be exploring the views of class teachers and parents in three different schools. In part three I would like to find out what EPs consider their role to be in supporting schools with transitions in early education. The study will seek to establish implications for the practice of EPs in this area.

I am therefore writing to enquire whether you would be willing to give permission for the teachers and parents in your school to participate in this research.

### Participation would involve:

1. *Nursery, Reception and Year One class teachers taking part in separate focus groups (30-45 minutes each) with small groups of teachers from two other schools within x, to explore their experiences of transition points in early education*

I am hoping to conduct three focus groups during July 2017 at a time and location that is convenient to school staff. The location is likely to be in the school which is most central to all three schools, and travel expenses will be reimbursed (up to £10). Schools that are at least two-form entry with attached nursery classes are being invited to participate. All qualified class teachers in each school will be invited to participate. Class teachers will not be excluded on the basis of number of years teaching experience or full/part time status. Principles will be established at the start of the focus groups, for example, teachers will be reminded that ideas shared must stay within the group.

2. *A survey of parents' views regarding transition points in early education*

The views of parents with a child in the Reception year of your school will be surveyed at two points:

1. In the summer term prior to their child's transition into Year One
2. In the autumn term after their child's transition into Year One



## **What will happen?**

Once I have received consent from head teachers of eligible primary schools, schools will be organised to ensure that the final school samples represent a range of demographics. Three sample schools will then be selected randomly using a random number generator.

If your school is chosen, I will then ask you to send copies of information letters and consent forms (provided by myself) to:

- a) eligible class teachers in your school and
- b) all parents of Reception children in the school (the researcher will provide paper copies of the parent letters and consent forms in envelopes to class teachers and will ask class teachers to send these home with each child)

Following this:

- Class teachers who give consent will be organised into focus groups, depending on sufficient numbers being available to do so (minimum six teachers per group). If this is not possible, participants from alternative eligible schools may be sought.
- Parents will be asked to return the consent form to their child's class teacher by an agreed date. Class teachers may be asked to remind parents about the research, if necessary, and will need to keep returned consent forms in a confidential place. On an agreed date, teachers will be asked to pass all consent forms to an appropriate member of staff in school (e.g. the SENCo or a member of office staff) and the researcher will then collect the consent forms from school. On the consent form, parents will be asked to provide an email address for the online survey link to be sent to. Parents will also be given the option of completing a paper copy of the survey or a telephone survey. Parents will be asked to complete part one of the survey between 14<sup>th</sup>- 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017 and part two between 1<sup>st</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> October 2017. A part two reminder email may be sent to parents if necessary.

Additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study will be given to class teachers and parents via a verbal and/or written debrief after participation. Parents will be given the opportunity to speak to an appropriate support person if they would like to discuss any thoughts or emotions that arise as a result of completing the survey. You will be asked to decide which staff member in the school will be the most appropriate person for parents to contact. The parent will be alerted to who this is at the end of the survey via the de-brief form.

Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the raw data collected, however, anonymised transcripts may be accessed by the research supervisor. All data will be analysed and evaluated by January 2018. It will be used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no school, parent, EP or local authority can be identified.

## **Key information**

- The School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) have granted ethical approval for the research. Further information is available from the SREC on request if required.
- Data collected shall be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University (rather than on behalf of the local authority). The implications of the

research will be general in nature and this will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the local authority.

- The link EP for your school will not be asked to participate in the study. Feedback regarding results of the research will be thematic in nature and will not identify specific teachers, parents or X X.
- There are no potential risks or harm involved in taking part and there will be no negative impact on class teachers, parents, children, or your school if choosing not to take part.
- Any class teacher or parent who does not give consent will not participate.
- All participants will be informed that participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the research at any point until two weeks after data has been collected, when it will be anonymised.
- In all parts of the study, a confidentiality clause will be used to highlight that individual responses will not be recorded by name and/or shared unless there is a concern for pupil safety. If this is the case, information will be shared with the designated safeguarding officer in the school.
- The focus groups will be recorded using a dictaphone and original recordings will be deleted two weeks later following transcription.
- Data will be kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of participant names.
- All anonymous data, including transcripts and survey responses, will be kept indefinitely following guidance of Cardiff University.
- Participants will be reminded that they do not have to answer any questions which make them uncomfortable and on the survey participants will be given the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer.
- Participants will be given both the researchers' and the research supervisors' contact details on the information sheet for further details of the study.
- Parents will be encouraged to speak to their child's class teacher or head teacher if they would prefer to discuss any issues of concern with an adult at the school.

**If you give consent for your school to be a part of this research, please complete the consent form attached and return to me as soon as possible via email.**

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this research. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Sims

Student Name: Elizabeth Sims	Supervisor title and name: Dr Kyla Honey
Position: Postgraduate student (DEdPsy)	Position: Professional Tutor
Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University	Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Telephone Number: 029 208 75393	Telephone Number: 02920870366
E-mail: AustinEC1@cardiff.ac.uk	Email: HoneyK1@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints, then please contact the individuals listed above or the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committee:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT Tel: 029 2087 0360 Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

## Head teacher consent form

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*If your answer to any of the following questions is 'no' then I would be happy to speak with you to provide further information regarding the nature of the project.*

**Please circle yes/no:**

- I understand that Nursery, Reception and Year One class teachers will be asked to participate in a focus group (lasting around 30-45 minutes), with class teachers from two other schools, which will explore their experiences of transition points in early education **Yes/No**
- I understand that parents of children in Reception will be asked to participate in a survey (pre and post their child's transition into Year One; lasting around 30-40 minutes) which will explore their views regarding transition points in early education **Yes/No**
- I understand that participants will be given the choice to take part in the research and that this is completely voluntary. I understand that participants will be free to change their mind at any time without giving a reason for this, until two weeks after the data has been collected. **Yes/No**
- I understand that there are no potential risks or harm involved in taking part and that there will be no negative impact on class teachers, parents, children, or your school if choosing not to take part. **Yes/No**
- I understand that the information provided by class teachers and parents will be confidential, such that only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) can trace this information back to them. I understand that data will be transcribed and anonymised within two weeks of the focus group **Yes/No**
- I understand that dictaphone recordings of focus groups will be retained for up to two weeks for the purposes of transcription, after which they will be deleted/destroyed **Yes/No**
- I understand that data will be kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of participant names. **Yes/No**
- I understand that individual views will not be personally identifiable. If there is a concern for pupil safety, then information will be shared with the designated safeguarding officer in the school **Yes/No**
- I understand that the information provided by teachers and parents will be kept confidentially under a password protected document such that only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) can trace this information. I understand that data will be anonymised within two weeks of completion of the focus groups and surveys **Yes/No**
- I understand that teachers and parents can have access to their information up until the point when data has been anonymised (two weeks after the focus groups/surveys) **Yes/No**
- I understand that participants can ask for their information to be deleted/destroyed at any time up until the point when data has been anonymised (two weeks after the group discussion) **Yes/No**
- I will allow teachers and parents who give their own consent to take part **Yes/No**
- I understand that participants will be given additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study via a verbal and/or written debrief after participation. **Yes/No**

- I understand that I will be asked to decide which staff member in the school will be the most appropriate person for parents to contact should they wish to discuss issues of concern arising from the survey. **Yes/No**
- I understand that information collected will be used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no school, parent or (local authority) can be identified **Yes/No**
- I understand that data collected shall be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University (rather than on behalf of the local authority). I understand that the implications of the research will be general in nature and that this will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the local authority. **Yes/No**
- I understand that I am free to ask questions and discuss concerns with Elizabeth Sims (researcher) or Kyla Honey (research supervisor) at any time **Yes/No**

I.....(NAME) give consent for class teachers and parents in ..... (NAME OF SCHOOL) to participate in the study conducted by Elizabeth Sims, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, with the supervision of Dr Kyla Honey.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## Appendix J: School staff information letter, consent form and debrief form

Address

Date



Dear teacher,

I am a postgraduate student and trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my Doctorate in Educational Psychology I am carrying out my thesis research on class teachers', parents' and Educational Psychologists' views and experiences of transition points in early education. Specifically, I am focusing upon two key transitions taking place in early childhood: the nursery to Reception transition and the Reception to Year One transition. My research comprises of three parts which together aim to:

- Identify what can be done by parents, teachers and other agencies to support all children, and those who are vulnerable, during transitions;
- Develop knowledge of the emotional journey involved in transitions;
- Understand neighbourhood and community influences on transitions; and
- Explore the past, current and potential role of EPs in supporting these transitions.

To do this, I would like to explore the views of class teachers in three different schools. The study will seek to establish implications for the practice of EPs in this area.

I am writing to enquire whether you would be willing to take part in this research.

**Participation would involve taking part in a focus group, lasting 30-45 minutes, to explore your experiences of transition points in early education. The focus group would be with a small group of (NURSERY/RECEPTION/YEAR ONE) class teachers (approx. six) from two other schools in (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY).**

Schools that are at least two-form entry with attached nursery classes are being invited to participate. The focus group will involve a series of open-ended questions. I am hoping to conduct the focus group during June or July 2017 at a time and location that is convenient to school staff. The location is likely to be in the school which is most central to all three schools, and travel expenses will be reimbursed up to £10. All qualified class teachers in Nursery, Reception and Year One in your school have been invited to participate. Participation is not affected by number of years teaching experience or full/part time status.

### What will happen?

- There will need to be a minimum of six teachers per focus group. If this is not possible then class teachers from other schools that teach the same year group might be asked to join together. Guiding principles will be established at the start of the focus groups, for example, that ideas shared must stay within the group.
- You will not have to answer any questions which make you uncomfortable.
- The focus group will be recorded using a dictaphone and the original recording will be deleted two weeks later following transcription.

- Additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study will be given to you after the focus group via a verbal and written debrief.
- Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the raw data collected, however, anonymised transcripts may be accessed by the research supervisor.
- All data will be analysed and evaluated by January 2018. It will be used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no school, parent, EP or local authority can be identified.
- Data collected shall be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University (rather than on behalf of the local authority). The implications of the research will be general in nature and this will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the local authority.

### **Key Information**

- The School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) have granted ethical approval for the research. Further information is available from the SREC on request if required.
- There are no potential risks or harm involved in taking part and there will be no negative impact if you choose not to take part.
- Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any point until two weeks after data has been collected, when it will be anonymised.
- Your responses will not be recorded by name and/or shared unless there is a concern for pupil safety. If this is the case, information will be shared with the designated safeguarding officer in the school.
- Feedback regarding results of the research will be thematic in nature and will not identify specific teachers, schools or (local authority).
- Data will be kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of participant names.
- All anonymous data, including transcripts, will be kept indefinitely following guidance of Cardiff University.

**If you give consent to be a part of this research, please complete the consent form attached and return to (NAME OF HEAD) by (DATE IN MAY).**

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of taking part in this research. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Sims

Student Name: Elizabeth Sims	Supervisor title and name: Dr Kyla Honey
Position: Postgraduate student (DEdPsy)	Position: Professional Tutor
Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University	Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Telephone Number: 029 208 75393	Telephone Number: 02920870366
E-mail: AustinEC1@cardiff.ac.uk	Email: HoneyK1@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints, then please contact the individuals listed above or the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committee:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT Tel: 029 2087 0360 Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

## Consent form (class teacher/teaching assistant)

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*If your answer to any of the following questions is 'no' then I would be happy to speak with you to provide further information regarding the nature of the project.*

**Please circle yes/no:**

- I understand that I will need to participate in a focus group (lasting around 30-45 minutes) which will explore my experiences of transition points in early education **Yes/No**
- I understand that participation in this research is completely voluntary. I understand that I will be free to change my mind at any time without giving a reason for this, until two weeks after the data has been collected. **Yes/No**
- I understand that there are no potential risks or harm involved in taking part and that there will be no negative impact on myself, pupils or the school if I choose not to take part. **Yes/No**
- I understand that the information I provide will be confidential, such that only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) can trace this information back to me. I understand that data will be transcribed and anonymised within two weeks of the focus group **Yes/No**
- I understand that the dictaphone recording of the focus group will be retained for up to two weeks for the purposes of transcription, after which it will be deleted **Yes/No**
- I understand that my views will not be personally identifiable. If there is a concern for pupil safety, then information will be shared with the designated safeguarding officer in the school **Yes/No**
- I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidentially under a password protected document such that only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) can trace this information back to me. I understand that data will be anonymised within two weeks of completion of the focus group **Yes/No**
- I understand that data will be kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of participant names. **Yes/No**
- I understand that I can have access to my information and can ask for it to be deleted/destroyed up until the point when data has been anonymised (two weeks after the focus group) **Yes/No**
- I understand that I will be given additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study via a verbal and written debrief. **Yes/No**
- I understand that information collected will be used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no teacher, teaching assistant, school, or local authority can be identified **Yes/No**
- I understand that data collected shall be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University (rather than on behalf of the local authority). I understand that the implications of the research will be general in nature and that this will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the local authority. **Yes/No**
- I understand that I am free to ask questions and discuss concerns with Elizabeth Sims (researcher) or Kyla Honey (research supervisor) at any time **Yes/No**

I.....(NAME) give consent to participate in the study conducted by Elizabeth Sims, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, with the supervision of Dr Kyla Honey.

Signed:

Date:

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Dear teacher/teaching assistant,

Thank you for taking part in the focus group at school today. Your views are very important. It is hoped that the perspectives you have given will help to build a picture of how teachers, parents and other agencies can work together to support all children to have positive transition experiences. It is also hoped that the results of this study will inform the future practice of Educational Psychologists when supporting transitions in early education.

### What will happen next?

- The information collected will be analysed and used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no member of staff, school, pupil or local authority can be identified. Feedback regarding results of the research will be thematic in nature and will not identify specific staff, schools or x X.
- Data collected shall be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University (rather than on behalf of the local authority). The implications of the research will be general in nature and this will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the local authority.
- You are able to ask for the information you provided in the focus group to be withdrawn at any time during the next two weeks, after which point the data will have been anonymised.
- Your data will be kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of names. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the raw data collected, however, anonymised transcripts may be accessed by the research supervisor.
- The information you have provided will be kept in a safe, lockable place and will be stored indefinitely in case of any future queries about the research.
- All anonymous data, including transcripts, will be kept indefinitely following guidance of Cardiff University.

If you would like to discuss any concerns about the study, then please contact one of the individuals below or x at school.

If you have any questions about the research then please feel free to get in touch with me or with my supervisor at Cardiff University, using the contact details below.

Thank you very much again for your involvement with the study.

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Sims

Student Name: Elizabeth Sims

Position: Postgraduate student (DEdPsy)

Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Telephone Number: 029 208 75393

E-mail: AustinEC1@cardiff.ac.uk

Supervisor title and name: Dr Kyla Honey

Position: Professional Tutor

Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Telephone Number: 02920870366

Email: HoneyK1@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints, then please contact the individuals listed above or the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committee:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT Tel: 029 2087 0360 Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk



## Appendix K: EP information letter, consent form and debrief form



Dear EP,

I am a postgraduate student and trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my Doctorate in Educational Psychology I am carrying out my thesis research on class teachers', parents' and Educational Psychologists' views and experiences of transition points in early education. Specifically, I am focusing upon two key transitions taking place in early childhood: the nursery to Reception transition and the Reception to Year One transition. My research comprises of three parts which together aim to:

- Identify what can be done by parents, teachers and other agencies to support all children, and those who are vulnerable, during transitions;
- Develop knowledge of the emotional journey involved in transitions;
- Understand neighbourhood and community influences on transitions; and
- Explore the past, current and potential role of EPs in supporting these transitions.

In parts one and two I will be exploring the views of class teachers and parents in three different schools which are at least two-form entry with attached nursery classes. In part three I would like to find out what EPs consider their role to be in supporting schools with transitions in early education. The study will seek to establish implications for the practice of EPs in this area.

I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to take part in this research.

**Participation would involve taking part in a semi-structured interview, lasting 30-45 minutes, to explore your experiences of transition points in early education.**

The interview will involve a series of open-ended questions. I am hoping to conduct the interview in July or August 2017 at a time which is least disruptive to you and your work commitments. You will need to have a minimum of one year of qualified experience in order to participate. The link EPs for the three schools involved in this study will not be able to participate. EPs with an Early Years specialism, now or in the past, will also not be able to take part.

### What will happen?

- You will not have to answer any questions which make you uncomfortable.
- The interview will be recorded using a dictaphone and the original recording will be deleted two weeks later following transcription.
- Additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study will be given to you after the interview via a verbal and written debrief.
- Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the raw data collected, however, anonymised transcripts may be accessed by the research supervisor.
- All data will be analysed and evaluated by January 2018. It will be used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no school, parent, EP or local authority can be identified.
- Data collected shall be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University (rather than on behalf of the local authority). The implications of the

research will be general in nature and this will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the local authority.

### Key Information

- The School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) have granted ethical approval for the research. Further information is available from the SREC on request if required.
- There are no potential risks or harm involved in taking part and there will be no negative impact on yourself, children, teachers, schools or the local authority if you choose not to take part.
- Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any point until two weeks after data has been collected, when it will be anonymised.
- Your responses will not be recorded by name and only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) will be able to trace these back to you.
- If there is a concern for pupil safety, information will be shared with the safeguarding officer in the local authority.
- Feedback regarding results of the research will be thematic in nature and will not identify specific EPs, children, teachers, schools or (local authority).
- Data will be kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of participant names.
- All anonymous data, including transcripts, will be kept indefinitely following guidance of Cardiff University.

**If you give consent to be a part of this research, please complete the consent form attached and return to me via email. I will then be in touch with you to arrange a suitable date for the interview.**

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of taking part in this research. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Sims

Student Name: Elizabeth Sims	Supervisor title and name: Dr Kyla Honey
Position: Postgraduate student (DEdPsy)	Position: Professional Tutor
Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University	Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Telephone Number: 029 208 75393	Telephone Number: 02920870366
E-mail: AustinEC1@cardiff.ac.uk	Email: HoneyK1@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints, then please contact the individuals listed above or the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committee:

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## Consent form (EP)

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*If your answer to any of the following questions is 'no' then I would be happy to speak with you to provide further information regarding the nature of the project.*

**Please circle yes/no:**

- I understand that I will need to participate in an interview (lasting around 30-45 minutes) which will explore my views on transition points in early education **Yes/No**
- I understand that participation in this research is completely voluntary. I understand that I will be free to change my mind at any time without giving a reason for this, until two weeks after the data has been collected. **Yes/No**
- I understand that there are no potential risks or harm involved in taking part and that there will be no negative impact on myself, children, teachers, schools or the local authority if I choose not to take part. **Yes/No**
- I understand that the information I provide will be confidential, such that only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) can trace this information back to me. I understand that data will be transcribed and anonymised within two weeks of the interview **Yes/No**
- I understand that the dictaphone recording of the interview will be retained for up to two weeks for the purposes of transcription, after which it will be deleted **Yes/No**
- I understand that my views will not be personally identifiable. If there is a concern for pupil safety, then information will be shared with the designated safeguarding officer in the local authority **Yes/No**
- I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidentially under a password protected document such that only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) can trace this information back to me. I understand that data will be anonymised within two weeks of the interview **Yes/No**
- I understand that data will be kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of participant names. **Yes/No**
- I understand that I can have access to my information and can ask for it to be deleted/destroyed up until the point when data has been anonymised (two weeks after the interview) **Yes/No**
- I understand that I will be given additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study via a verbal and written debrief. **Yes/No**
- I understand that information collected will be used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no teacher, school, or local authority can be identified **Yes/No**
- I understand that data collected shall be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University (rather than on behalf of the local authority). I understand that the implications of the research will be general in nature and that this will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the local authority. **Yes/No**
- I understand that I am free to ask questions and discuss concerns with Elizabeth Sims (researcher) or Kyla Honey (research supervisor) at any time **Yes/No**

I.....(NAME) give consent to participate in the study conducted by Elizabeth Sims, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, with the supervision of Dr Kyla Honey. Signed: ..... Date: .....

Dear EP,

Thank you for taking part in the interview today. Your views are very important. It is hoped that the perspectives you have given will help to build a picture of how teachers, parents and other agencies can work together to support all children to have positive transition experiences. It is also hoped that the results of this study will inform the future practice of Educational Psychologists when supporting transitions in early education.

### What will happen next?

- The information collected will be analysed and used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no EP, school, pupil or local authority can be identified. Feedback regarding results of the research will be thematic in nature and will not identify specific EPs, teachers, schools or (local authority).
- Data collected shall be used for research purposes only, as part of doctoral study at Cardiff University (rather than on behalf of the local authority). The implications of the research will be general in nature and this will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the local authority.
- You are able to ask for the information you provided in the interview to be withdrawn at any time until (DATE), after which point the data will have been anonymised.
- Your data will be kept in a password protected document in an anonymous format using unidentifiable letters instead of names. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the information collected.
- The information you have provided will be kept in a safe, lockable place and will be stored indefinitely in case of any future queries about the research.
- All anonymous data, including transcripts, will be kept indefinitely following guidance of Cardiff University.

If you would like to discuss any concerns about the study, then please contact one of the individuals below or (NAME OF PEP). If you have any questions about the research then please feel free to get in touch with me or with my supervisor at Cardiff University, using the contact details below.

Thank you very much again for your involvement with the study.

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Sims

Student Name: Elizabeth Sims	Supervisor title and name: Dr Kyla Honey
Position: Postgraduate student (DEdPsy)	Position: Professional Tutor
Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University	Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Telephone Number: 029 208 75393	Telephone Number: 02920870366
E-mail: AustinEC1@cardiff.ac.uk	Email: HoneyK1@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints, then please contact the individuals listed above or the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committee:

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## Appendix L: Parent information letter, consent form, debrief form and survey questions



Dear parent,

I am a postgraduate student and trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my Doctorate in Educational Psychology I am carrying out a research study on class teachers', parents' and Educational Psychologists' views and experiences of transition points in early education.

I am looking at two important transitions in early childhood:

1. the move from nursery to Reception and
2. the move from Reception to Year One

My study contains three parts which together aim to:

- Find out what can be done by parents, teachers and other agencies to support all children, and those who are vulnerable, during transitions;
- Develop knowledge of the emotional journey involved in transitions;
- Understand neighbourhood and community influences on transitions; and
- Explore the past, current and potential role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) in supporting these transitions.

The study aims to create suggestions for future support that EPs might be able to give to schools during transitions in early education.

I would like to explore the views of parents in three different schools within X X. Schools that are at least two-form entry with attached nursery classes were asked to take part. Your child's school has chosen to take part.

**I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to take part in this research. To do this, you would need to fill out a two-part survey to explain your views on your child's transition from Reception to Year one:**

1. Part one of the survey will need to be carried out before your child moves to Year One, and completed between 17<sup>th</sup> July - 14<sup>th</sup> August 2017.
2. Part two of the survey will need to be carried out after your child has moved to Year One, between 2<sup>nd</sup>- 16<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

You can choose to do each survey in three ways:

1. online by clicking on a link that I will email to you.
2. by asking for a paper copy of the survey which you can return to me in a stamped addressed envelope (provided)

For the above two options, you will need to give written answers to a list of open questions. This is likely to take around 30 minutes for each survey.

3. If you would prefer me to go through the survey and write your answers down for you, you can choose to do the survey through a telephone call with myself.

### **What will happen?**

- You will not have to answer any questions which make you uncomfortable and it will be possible to leave these boxes blank.
- Extra information and feedback about the study will be given to you in a written debrief letter after completing the survey.
- After the survey, you will be able to speak to a member of staff in school if you have any concerns or if there is anything that you would like to discuss about the survey.
- Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the raw data collected, however, anonymised transcripts may be accessed by the research supervisor.
- All answers (data) will be looked at by January 2018. The data will be used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no school, parent, child or X X can be identified.
- Data will be used for research purposes only, as part of study at Cardiff University, rather than for X X. The results of the study will be general and will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of X X.

### **Key Information**

- Participation is voluntary.
- There will be no negative effect on yourself or your child if you choose not to take part.
- The School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) have given ethical approval for the research. Further information is available from the SREC if needed.
- There are no possible risks or harm involved in taking part.
- You are free to change your mind, leave the research and remove your information at any point without giving a reason (until two weeks after data has been collected, when it will be anonymised).
- Your responses will not be recorded by name and only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) will be able to trace these back to you.
- If there is a concern for pupil safety, information will be shared with the safeguarding officer in the school.
- Your information will be kept confidentially in a password protected document.
- All anonymous data, including transcripts, will be kept indefinitely following guidance of Cardiff University.
- Feedback regarding results of the research will be thematic in nature and will not identify specific parents, children, teachers, schools or x X.

**If you give consent to be a part of this study, please fill in the consent form attached to this letter and choose how you want to complete the survey (online, on paper, or on the phone).**

**Please return your consent form to your child's class teacher by Friday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2017.**

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of taking part in this research. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Sims

Student Name: Elizabeth Sims

Position: Postgraduate student (DEdPsy)

Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Telephone Number: 029 208 75393

E-mail: AustinEC1@cardiff.ac.uk

Supervisor title and name: Dr Kyla Honey

Position: Professional Tutor

Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Telephone Number: 02920870366

Email: HoneyK1@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints, then please contact the individuals listed above or the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committee:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff, CF10 3AT Tel: 029 2087 0360 Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

## Consent form (parent)

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*If your answer to any of the following questions is 'no' then I would be happy to speak with you to provide further information regarding the nature of the project.*

**Please circle yes/no:**

- I understand that I will need to participate in a survey which will explore my views regarding my child's transition from Reception to Year One **Yes/No**
- I understand that I will need to complete two surveys: one before the transition, and one after. I understand that each survey will require me to give answers to open questions and that this is likely to take around 30 minutes to complete **Yes/No**
- I understand that participation in this research is completely voluntary. I understand that I will be free to change my mind at any time without giving a reason for this, until two weeks after the data has been collected. **Yes/No**
- I understand that there are no potential risks or harm involved in taking part and that there will be no negative impact on myself, my child, or the school if I choose not to take part. **Yes/No**
- I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidentially under a password protected document such that only the researcher (Elizabeth Sims) can trace this information back to me.
- I understand that data will be anonymised within two weeks of completion of the survey **Yes/No**
- I understand that if there is a concern for pupil safety, then information will be shared with the designated safeguarding officer in the school **Yes/No**
- I understand that I can have access to my information and can ask for it to be deleted/destroyed up until the point when data has been anonymised (two weeks after the survey) **Yes/No**
- I understand that I will be given additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study via a written debrief after participation. **Yes/No**
- I understand that information collected will be used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no school, parent or local authority can be identified. I understand that my views will not be personally identifiable. **Yes/No**
- I understand that data will be used for research purposes only, as part of study at Cardiff University, rather than for x X. I understand that the results of the study will be general and will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of x X. **Yes/No**
- I understand that I am free to ask questions and discuss concerns with Elizabeth Sims (researcher) or Kyla Honey (research supervisor) at any time **Yes/No**

I.....(NAME) give consent to participate in the study conducted by Elizabeth Sims, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, with the supervision of Kyla Honey.

**How would you like to complete the survey?**



**Please select one of the following options:**

- I would like to complete the survey online. **Yes/No**  
The email address that I would like the online survey links to be sent to is:  
.....
- I would like to complete a paper copy of the survey. **Yes/No**  
The home address I would like the paper survey to be sent to is:  
.....
- I would like to do the survey on the telephone. **Yes/No**  
The telephone number I would like the researcher to contact me on is:  
.....

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## Pre-transition survey de-brief form (parent)

Date

Dear Parent,



Thank you for completing the survey today. Your views are very important. It is hoped that the views you have given will help to build a picture of how teachers, parents and other agencies can work together to support all children to have positive transitions. It is also hoped that the results of this study will create suggestions for future support that Educational Psychologists might be able to give to schools during transitions in early education.

### What will happen next?

- Part two of the survey will need to be completed after your child has moved to Year One, between **1<sup>st</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> October 2017**. The survey can be found by clicking on the following link:

(SURVEY MONKEY LINK)

**\*\*FOR PARENTS COMPLETING A PAPER COPY/TELEPHONE SURVEY, THE ABOVE DETAILS WILL BE ADJUSTED \*\***

- The information collected today will be looked at and used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no school, pupil or (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY) can be identified.
- Data will be used for research purposes only, as part of study at Cardiff University, rather than for (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY). The results of the study will be general and will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY).
- You are able to ask for the answers you gave in the survey to be removed at any time without giving a reason until (DATE), after which point the data will have been anonymised.
- Your information will be kept confidentially in a password protected document. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the raw data collected, however, anonymised transcripts may be accessed by the research supervisor.
- The information you have provided will be kept in a safe, lockable place and will be stored indefinitely in case of any future questions about the research.
- All anonymous data will be kept indefinitely following guidance of Cardiff University.

If you would like to discuss any concerns about the study, then please contact one of the individuals below or (NAME OF HEADTEACHER) at school. Please contact (NAME OF SUPPORT PERSON) in school if you have any concerns or if there is anything that you would like to discuss in relation to this survey.

If you have any questions about the study then please feel free to get in touch with me or with my supervisor at Cardiff University, using the contact details below.

Thank you very much again for completing part one of the survey,

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Sims

Student Name: Elizabeth Sims

Position: Postgraduate student (DEdPsy)

Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Telephone Number: 029 208 75393

E-mail: AustinEC1@cardiff.ac.uk

Supervisor title and name: Dr Kyla Honey

Position: Professional Tutor

Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Telephone Number: 02920870366

Email: HoneyK1@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints, then please contact the individuals listed above or the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committee:

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## Post-transition survey de-brief form (parent)



Dear Parent,

Thank you for completing the survey today. Your views are very important. It is hoped that the views you have given will help to build a picture of how teachers, parents and other agencies can work together to support all children to have positive transitions. It is also hoped that the results of this study will create suggestions for future support that Educational Psychologists might be able to give to schools during transitions in early education.

### What will happen next?

- The information collected today will be looked at and used to write a report for Cardiff University, but only in an anonymous form in which no school, pupil or (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY) can be identified.
- Data will be used for research purposes only, as part of study at Cardiff University, rather than for (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY). The results of the study will be general and will not have a direct effect on the policies and practices of the (NAME OF LOCAL AUTHORITY).
- You are able to ask for the answers you gave in the survey to be removed at any time without giving a reason until (DATE), after which point the data will have been anonymised.
- Your information will be kept confidentially in a password protected document. Only I, as the researcher, will have access to the raw data collected, however, anonymised transcripts may be accessed by the research supervisor.
- The information you have provided will be kept in a safe, lockable place and will be stored indefinitely in case of any future questions about the research.
- All anonymous data will be kept indefinitely following guidance of Cardiff University.

If you would like to discuss any concerns about the study, then please contact one of the individuals below or (NAME OF HEADTEACHER) at school. Please contact (NAME OF SUPPORT PERSON) in school if you have any concerns or if there is anything that you would like to discuss in relation to this survey. If you have any questions about the study then please feel free to get in touch with me or with my supervisor at Cardiff University, using the contact details below.

Thank you very much again for taking part in the study.

Kind regards,  
Elizabeth Sims

Student Name: Elizabeth Sims	Supervisor title and name: Dr Kyla Honey
Position: Postgraduate student (DEdPsy)	Position: Professional Tutor
Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University	Address: School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Telephone Number: 029 208 75393	Telephone Number: 02920870366
E-mail: AustinEC1@cardiff.ac.uk	Email: HoneyK1@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have any concerns or complaints, then please contact the individuals listed above or the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committee:

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## Appendix M: Example of a coded focus group transcript

Y1 teacher 3: 02:04	<b>Change in routine as well, the transition change</b> , maybe the routine may change when they transition.	Change routine
I: 02:10	<b>So</b> lots of sort of – I guess <b>the common theme there being kind of change and movement then?</b>	
	Ok and then to start quite generally how do you prepare for upcoming transitions? Thinking specifically about the move from Reception into Year One, so receiving children that are coming up from Reception. How do you prepare for that?	
Y1 teacher 1: 2:35	<b>We closely liaise with the Reception teachers. The Year One teachers and Reception teachers meet prior to handover meetings where we talk about the children in our class, and share safeguarding notes, share the children's abilities and their progress and their home life. So that's always a big meeting for us. We also make sure we compare timetables because things have developed in the Reception timetables and their learning, as it has in Year One and we always try to ensure that the Year One start of year timetable mirrors the end of Reception timetable. So that aids a smoother transition for the children and limits the number of changes for the children as they move to Year One.</b>	Team work Information sharing Planning in advance for continuity Familiarity
Y1 teacher 2: 3:31	We also have two <b>transition days</b> , at the end of the previous academic year, that just finished, when <b>the children come up and they have two full days with their new teacher and their new LSA. Just getting to know us and their classrooms.</b>	Getting to know each other
Y1 teacher 4: 3:50	<b>It's about making sure it's not daunting for them as well isn't it. So</b> like fun activities, still educational, but getting to know them on another level. <b>Taking that time to see their likes and dislikes and their triggers and things like that (laughs), it's quite helpful for you as a teacher and also for the children. They get excited about coming up instead of feeling a bit daunted.</b>	Daunting - excited Unique child
I: 04:12	Ah, ok, so it <b>sort</b> of helps to prepare them emotionally then?	
Y1 teacher 4: 4:	Yes definitely.	
I:	<b>So</b> it's two full days then?	
Y1 teacher 2: 04:18	Yea and the second day we- we send them home from our classrooms. So usually they come backwards and forwards but on the second day we dismiss them from our	

## Appendix N: Example of a coded interview transcript

<p>age group then they end up doing more and more of it, <i>erm</i>, and I've definitely been given more and more, in both jobs, of the post-16, and the older kind of college age so that means that I don't do as much. But in terms of the work that I would have done and that I have done with early years, <i>erm</i>, a lot of it would be around transition, actually, a lot. If a child has got a particularly significant need, so health needs is a big one, or a Down's Syndrome profile or diagnosis, <i>erm</i>, potential autism, etcetera, <i>erm</i>, then you would probably see them early on, you know Nursery would be raising them. But because it's a different process of raising them through a separate panel, in X (city), <i>erm</i>, actually thinking about it in X (different city) I did a lot of work in a specialist nursery provision so the early years would come through that, for the nursery aged pre-school. And a lot of the time it was about trying to prepare them for school, you know, so joint meetings with the school that were intaking and establishing what's worked well and what needs to be transferred, but usually multi-agency because there'd often be lots of people involved if they were pre-school and were raised.</p>	<p>Health needs Down's Syndrome ASC</p>
<p>Yea, so invariably the pre-school children have got more significant need, I think, and it's definitely very multi-agency at that point. If they're raised in Reception, the schools might want some advice on- 'they haven't come with anything so their needs aren't as severe but we are a bit concerned'. So for example, at a school locally I saw two children in nursery this last year just gone and, but that was obviously the school requesting, and, er, one of them it was around lack of communication, speech and the other one it was around trauma and emotional difficulties. But the schools don't raise as many children in Reception, I don't think. They give them more time to settle, and then maybe panic at Year One! Or transition to Year One, if they haven't made the progress throughout Reception.</p>	<p>Readiness -preparing the child -multi-agency work</p>
<p>I: Ah, ok, that's interesting. So they give them that bit of time and then that sometimes is what triggers the-</p>	<p>Level of need impacts on EP involvement</p>
<p>EP: Yea. The input, yea.</p>	<p>N-YR high needs YR-Y1 – panic</p>
<p>I: And how do you view your role with regards to those early transitions? How do you get involved?</p>	<p>Lack of progression YR</p>
<p>EP: So, slightly different to my job in X (current city) I was part of a very different model in X (different city). So I was part of a multi-agency team that was a locality team. So I'm very much into getting everybody around the table that's involved. And usually if it's a child that's early years there are lots of professionals, you know, So I'd hope to make a link with anybody working in the home, like the (inaudible) worker but invariably things like portage, if they're still involved. If a child's coming in, and I have had one recently where the SENCo said we've got a child coming into Reception and they're coming with lots of involvement, so that would be the critical thing to- they don't always set a meeting up when they're in pre-school</p>	<p>Role of EP – bringing people together  Part of multi-agency team</p>