Studies concerning the impact of organisational pupil grouping practices suggest that no one form of organisational grouping benefits all pupils. The benefits of retaining the primary structure during first year of secondary school seem unclear due to many confounding variables and a lack of comparable research. It also appears to be important to establish which children are the most vulnerable to transfer and are in need of additional support as research is inconclusive as to which children these are. The DCSF views of ‘home groups’ are also unclear. They have published several research reports (see below), however in each case they make clear that the views are those of the authors and not those of the DCSF.


Examined particular strategies to improve transition to secondary schools and considers the effectiveness of ‘home groups’. Discusses which children are thought to be vulnerable at transfer.

- Nisbett and Entwhistle (1969) identified the children most at risk from the transfer process as younger, less mature, less confident pupils; ones of non-academic disposition, often from a poor social and economic background. They felt these children had difficulty adjusting to both the physical and academic organization of the new school as well as the standards of work, and experienced problems with pupil and teacher relationships. In their study they maintained a primary ethos in the first year for those children they identified were most at risk from transfer. The gradually introduced changes over the entire year and found that this had a ‘marked effect’, however if is unclear what factors they were measuring.
Dutch and McCall (1974) agreed that compared to a control school, where pupils changed to a secondary style curriculum immediately after transfer, there were consistent though slight improvements in attainment, attitude, and personality measures. However they argued that these outcome measures were confounded by other variables such as ability.

The ORACLE5 transfer study 1975 -1980 (Galton & Willcocks, 1983 and Delamont & Galton, 1986) tracked pupils for two years in primary school before moving to secondary school. They found anxiety to be at its highest in June just before transfer. Levels then declined in November and fell further by the following June. A notable exception to this trend was found in two schools that maintained a primary ethos throughout the first year after transfer. They sat in groups not rows and had one teacher as far as possible responsible for all of the teaching. Although this did reduce pupils’ levels of anxiety in the immediate period after transfer, anxiety increased significantly by the end of the summer term compared to pupils who transferred into a ‘secondary ethos’. It was thought that the cause of much initial anxiety in other pupils at transfer was due to being separated from existing friends by being placed in new forms or sets. For those pupils who had experienced the ‘primary ethos’, this now took on a more of a significance around the period of the Year 7 summer term examinations when arrangements for the following year were decided.

Catterall (1998) suggests that in making judgments about which children are most vulnerable at transfer, teachers may operate at a level of generality that results in particular individuals or groups being either ignored or targeted. Many primary teachers identified pupils at risk who were isolated and lacked friends, whereas, after transfer, those underachieving were typically identified as those with behavioural difficulties (Hargreaves and Galton in press). Those children that were making adequate progress but were not enjoying school may be forgotten. Students identified in Rudduck et al.’s (1996) transition study who were failing, not because they lacked potential but because they had developed unsatisfactory friendships, might not receive necessary help. Authors suggest that traditional structures of schooling should be altered in ways that allow a greater degree of individual responsiveness.

The Effects of Pupil Grouping: A Literature Review

Reviews literature on pupil grouping and in part considers how the transfer from primary to secondary school may be affected. This was a DFES report however it makes clear that the views expressed are the authors’ and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education and Skills.

Some secondary schools have adopted the ‘primary ethos’ for pupils who transfer from Year 6 with either learning or behaviour problems. In an
unpublished evaluation by Galton (2003) carried out for Suffolk LEA, results showed significant improvement both in pupil attainment and attitude with pupils' motivations becoming effort rather than ability-orientated. Over the course of the year behaviour also improved with a marked reduction in truancy. It is notable however that these effects are often confounded with class size as these pupils are generally placed in classes of 20 or less compared to a more typical teacher-pupil ratio of 1:30.

Transition from Primary to Secondary School: Possibilities and Paradoxes. Howard, S and Johnson, B

Conducted a qualitative research project in New South Wales, Australia with 'resilient' students who discussed their expectations and experiences of transfer from primary to secondary school.

- Literature review suggests that the move from primary to secondary school involves a change in culture of schooling (Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan 1996; Cullingford 1999) from a caring primary school to an isolated secondary school characterised by the differentiation of students according to achievement. Authors suggest the effects of these changes can be anxiety, confusion, lack of stability and subsequently alienation and disengagement.

- They asked the children ‘What could be done to make things easier for kids when they are starting high school?’. Researchers cued participants with some standard ideas used in Australian middle schools including suggesting that a reduced numbers of teachers and subjects might make life easier, however but this was universally rejected (see also Garton 1987). Authors cite a study by Akerlind and Trevitt (1999) hat also reports high school students (and their parents) demonstrating resistance to change away from traditional classroom practices.

- Authors suggest student and parental voice is of the opinion that the current situation is satisfactory (however it is noted that the sample are resilient children who have been successful in the current conditions) whereas ‘theory (and increasingly, practice) suggests that radical school reform in the early years of high school is likely to improve the prospects and experiences of all students not just the resilient ones.’

What makes a successful transition from Primary to Secondary School? Findings from the Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 (EPPSE) Project

Presents the findings of a longitudinal study on transitions undertaken as part of the Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 (EPPSE 3-14
project). The report highlights what helps and hinders a successful transition and suggests how the transition experience could be improved to enhance continuity between primary and secondary school. (This was a DCSF report however it makes clear that the views expressed are the authors’ and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children Schools and Families.)

• Results showed that overall, children with special educational needs or those from other vulnerable groups did not experience a less successful transition than other children. It proposed that children with SEN were experiencing greater curriculum continuity between Years 6 and 7 and that the earlier and more individual transfer process that these children experienced prepared them for the move and the work they will do in Year 7.

• Highlights some aspects that aid successful transition including developing new friendships and improving self-esteem and confidence and proposed that “registration” or ‘form’ group could be used more constructively, encouraging children in the same class to work collaboratively to enhance children’s social skills and self-esteem.

**Transition from Primary to Secondary School: Current Arrangements and Good Practice in Wales**  

Presents the findings of a research that aimed to explore evidence of good practice in transition in Wales.

• Found that factors affecting lower performance after transfer included the loss of the close teacher/pupil relationship found at primary school due to being taught by a variety of teachers at secondary school. Different teaching and learning styles at KS3 was also thought to decrease performance as more whole-class teaching occurs and more independent learning is required.

Articles written by a number of people suggest that children should be educated in smaller groups during Year 7, however much of this seems anecdotal.

**A Guide to Reform in the Middle Years of Schooling**  
Peter Cole (July 2004)

• Claims that ‘by reducing the number of teachers with whom students interact on a regular basis, and having a stable team of teachers working with a consistent group of students, higher levels of rapport, trust and learning can be achieved and the potential for consistency between teachers enhanced.’

• Suggests that teacher-student groupings should be arranged so that
the number of different students encountered by each teacher each week is reduced, to enable teachers to have individual knowledge of students and of their learning needs and progress.

- a greater length of time is spent by teachers with the same students, increasing teacher knowledge of individual students and student relationships with teachers

- the number of different teachers encountered by students is reduced, for the same purpose

- small teacher teams are established, to provide greater consistency and flexibility in teaching each group of students, increased knowledge of individual students and their learning needs and progress, and increased professional learning.

**Recommendations on implementation of transition provisions in the Education Act 2002**

Providing advice to the Welsh Assembly Government on the implementation of transition provisions in the Education Act, 2002.

Many schools are seeking ways to smooth the transition to the more complex organisation of the secondary curriculum. Successful arrangements include:

- an induction period when pupils are taught by a small number of teachers for most of the time;
- grouping subjects within faculties, for example, in humanities and science, where one teacher teaches all the subjects within the faculty, sometimes using a thematic approach;
- timetabling some subject lessons in a form base that replicates a primary classroom;
- creating an area of the school where Year 7 pupils have a distinct identity and can undertake a range of responsibilities relating to their ‘home’ area and their year group;

**Mandeville School, Aylesbury**

**Jenny Thompson (Assistant Head)**

The school has a ‘Shape Day’. One day a week the children are placed in classes based on ability. The low ability and Gifted and Talented stay in the same classroom for the entire day. Fewer members of staff teach one project that spans over the whole day and often for several weeks, incorporating a variety of subjects, for example ‘The Water Cycle’. They say they have had very positive feedback from pupils, parents and staff and will continue to do the same next year.

**The Grange, Aylesbury**

**Wendy Jakeman (Assistant Head)**

Have reduced the number of teachers the Year 7 pupils have. They have assigned one teacher for humanities, the English teacher also teachers a language and the form tutor tends to teach a language.
Princes Hill Secondary College, Australia
Each Year 7 group has its own Home Room in which over half of their classes take place. Their work is on display there and their lockers are directly outside. All Year 7 Home Rooms are located together, creating a Year 7 area. Year 7s spend 80% of class time with the same group of students. Two teachers take each group for over 1/3 of their classes. These Home Group teachers will teach the core curriculum of English, Maths, Science and Humanities. They see students each day and also take pastoral care responsibility for the class.