Supporting Pupil Wellbeing During School Transition to Key Stage 2 in the UK Independent Sector

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Abstract

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This study explores strategies for supporting pupil wellbeing during the transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 in the independent sector, focusing on a cohort of children entering Year 3 at a UK preparatory school in September 2022. It examines the experiences of school transition from a variety of stakeholders, using a theoretical framework that incorporates Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Jindal-Snape's (2016) Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transition (MMT) theory.

Utilising a case study approach, the research integrates perspectives from pupils, parents and teachers, generating data through pupil questionnaires and focus groups, alongside interviews with parents and teachers. Analysis of the data followed Braun and Clarke's (2019) Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Viewing wellbeing as the balance point where individuals have the resources and skills needed to manage the challenges and life events they experience (Dodge et al., 2012), the findings suggest that the experience of transition is greatly influenced by three main factors: preparation and readiness; familiarity; and shared experience. These factors contribute to an individual developing a sense of community and belonging within their new environment, thereby signifying a successful transition.

This research makes an original contribution by addressing the under-researched area of school transitions at age 7 within the UK independent sector, offering a holistic perspective by incorporating the voices of children, parents and educators. A key outcome is the development of a child-focused conceptual model that identifies three core components of effective transition support – preparation and readiness, familiarity, and shared experience – which contribute to a child's sense of belonging. The model offers both theoretical and practical value, serving as a framework to guide future research and inform educational practice, including the evaluation and enhancement of school transition programmes.

List of Acronyms

AWS – All Weather Surface

BERA – British Educational Research Association

DT – Design and Technology

EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage

GCSE – General Certificate of Secondary Education

KS1 – Key Stage 1

KS2 – Key Stage 2

MMT theory – Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transition theory

ONS – Office for National Statistics

ORACLE programme – Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation

PE – Physical Education

PPCT model – Process Person Context Time model

PSHE – Personal, Social, Health and Economic education

SATs – Standard Assessment Tests

Chapter One: Introduction

Throughout an individual's lifetime, transitions of varying magnitudes will occur. These key events or turning points usually result in a degree of change or a move from one set of circumstances to another (Enz and Talarico, 2016; Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008), which individuals need to adapt to. Consequently, studies have shown that transitions can have a direct impact on an individual's wellbeing and life satisfaction (Clark et al., 2008; Lane, Leibert and Goka-Dubose, 2017; Switek and Easterlin, 2018) as they adjust to their new circumstances.

Within the context of education, transitions occur frequently. Whilst some are relatively small and occur daily, such as changes of lessons or activities, more formal educational transitions, such as progressing between year groups or moving between educational establishments, are marked events which signpost the various stages of schooling (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021). However, research has shown that transitions between schools can coincide with a decline both in children's wellbeing and academic attainment (Gutman et al., 2010; Symonds and Galton, 2014), factors which have been shown to positively correlate (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012; Public Health England, 2014). Unsurprisingly, there has therefore been increasing research and government interest in the impact of educational transitions on children's academic outcomes and wellbeing, particularly at age 11 when most children in the United Kingdom (UK) transition from primary to secondary school (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021). This case study research, however, whilst focusing on pupil wellbeing and school transition, considers children who are transitioning between educational establishments at the age of 7, specifically those who are moving from Key Stage 1 (KS1) at the end of Year 2, to Key Stage 2 (KS2) and the start of Year 3 in the independent educational sector.

Allen (2013) argued that unsupported transitions from KS1 to KS2 have the potential to cause children long-lasting emotional harm and result in plateaus or dips in their academic attainment. This correlates with findings from research on primary to secondary transition (Evans, Borriello

and Field, 2018; Gutman et al., 2010), yet there remains limited research on the transition from KS1 to KS2. Whilst it is understandable that the more common school transition for children in the UK is also the more researched, it is still important to explore school transitions which occur at the younger age of 7 to ensure that these pupils and their wellbeing are supported. Adding to the body of knowledge regarding this specific transition may help to identify similarities and differences between the two transitions and provide advice on how to best support pupil wellbeing when moving schools at this age.

This introductory chapter begins by first documenting my personal motives for engaging in doctoral research and undertaking this study, before locating the research topic within an educational context generally and providing a rationale for exploring pupil wellbeing during the specific KS1 to KS2 school transition. I then situate the study more precisely within the research setting by providing a brief overview and commenting on the role of reflexivity within the research, particularly considering my role as an insider researcher. Finally, the chapter concludes with a thesis outline.

1.1 The Journey to Doctoral Research: Identifying a 'Gap'

Having been a teacher for over ten years, I have experienced various educational transitions, including working as a Year 6 class teacher, helping to prepare and support children for their transition to secondary school. In 2017, I made the transition from the maintained sector to working at an independent preparatory school. Alongside my academic teaching responsibilities, I was asked to take on a pastoral role and be a tutor for Year 3. This resulted in me witnessing the other side of the transition process for the first time as a teacher. Although I had previous knowledge of preparing pupils for a school transition from teaching Year 6, the experience of helping my tutor group adapt and adjust to their new school was quite different. Whilst the end of Year 6 had been bittersweet due to the impending transition, the beginning of Year 3 and the start of a new school for these pupils took on a more hopeful tone of excited anticipation.

When I became Head of Year 3 two years later, I had become increasingly passionate about delivering high-quality pastoral care to support the wellbeing of all children. Part of my new role involved being responsible for overseeing the transition into Year 3 and supporting the children as they began a new school. I was therefore keen to ensure the school had an effective transition programme to help the pupils adapt to their new educational setting. However, from speaking to colleagues within my setting and those at the pre-preparatory school within the same charitable trust, it became apparent that the preparatory schools within the local area all differed in how they approached transition.

Teachers, as professionals, are expected to maintain familiarity with research that is guided by practice as well as practice that is informed by research (Burnard et al., 2018). Consequently, I began to explore evidence-based research on school transitions from KS1 to KS2 in order to inform my practice and provide effective support to the pupils undergoing this transition under my care. However, I encountered minimal literature regarding school transitions at this age, from both UK and international studies. To bridge this gap by adding to the body of knowledge concerning KS1 to KS2 school transitions whilst developing my own practice, I decided to complete an educational doctorate.

Being practitioner-led, educational doctorates can play a significant role in shaping the direction of education and teaching (Burnard et al., 2018), using educational research to inform educational policy and teaching practice (McIntyre, 2005). As Head of Year 3, I had already begun to make stronger links with the main feeder pre-preparatory schools, ensuring I did my best to get as much information about the children who would be starting each year and applying what I knew from my experiences of both sides of school transitions to help support the pupils. I therefore decided to develop this knowledge and experience by engaging in doctoral research in an area that directly impacted my practice, conducting a case study to explore the phenomenon of this specific transition in my professional setting (Crowe et al., 2011).

The need for schools to have robust and effective transition programmes has arguably become more important following the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption that education faced due to lockdowns and online learning. The transition programme within the case study school was required to be amended due to social distancing restrictions, yet this was not necessarily detrimental as it provided the school with an opportunity to review their provision and ensure that the pupils were being supported effectively. Even though social distancing restrictions no longer apply, there have been many features of the 'COVID transition programme' which have remained. For example, online events such as 'meet the tutor' calls and pupil question and answer sessions, where the current Year 3 students talk to the incoming cohort, are still used due to their popularity amongst children and parents, alongside the convenience and accessibility that incorporating online transition events provides.

In conducting this research, I intend to add to the body of knowledge surrounding transition by examining this phenomenon from a different perspective to most of the existing literature: the transition from KS1 to KS2 in the independent educational sector within the UK. Additionally, this study focuses predominantly on the child's experience of transition, including their perspectives and opinions within the case study research. By developing a deeper understanding of transition at this age, it aims to explore ways in which children's wellbeing may be best supported across KS1 to KS2 transitions to UK independent schools by presenting a conceptual model for supporting a successful school transition.

1.2 Contextualising the Research

A main reason for undertaking doctoral research is to advance the understanding of a particular research area (Burnard et al., 2018) and whilst there are likely to be personal motivations (as above), it is important to contextualise the research to fully understand the topic and therefore rationalise the need for such research (Pring, 2015). As this study concerns supporting wellbeing during KS1 to KS2 school transitions, I begin by locating the concept of wellbeing within an

educational setting, specifically considering a UK context, before considering school transitions within the UK education system generally, and then specifically those within the context of transitions to preparatory schools within the independent sector.

1.2.1 The Context of Wellbeing

Following the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, the concept of wellbeing has gained increasing prominence within educational agendas (Clarke, 2020). As will be discussed in Chapter Two, although there is no fixed or agreed definition of the term wellbeing (Ereaut and Whiting, 2008), within this thesis I consider wellbeing to mean a dynamic state in which an individual is able to develop appropriate resources and skills to manage challenges faced throughout their life and to achieve their personal and social goals. Stable wellbeing is therefore a state of balance where an individual has 'the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge' (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230).

Wellbeing is often used interchangeably with the medical term 'mental health' (Svane, Evans and Carter, 2019), with the World Health Organisation (2018, para. 3), for example, defining mental health as a state of wellbeing 'in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'. It is due to the close links between wellbeing and mental health that governments are increasingly promoting wellbeing as a goal of public policy (Fisher, 2019) because of the substantial human, social and economic costs of poor mental health.

In 2010, David Cameron, the then UK Prime Minister, launched a programme to measure wellbeing in Britain, aiming for the data to feed into government policy and thereby improve wellbeing (Cameron, 2010). The resulting National Well-being Programme, conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), considers ten domains of calculating wellbeing: personal wellbeing, relationships, health, what we do (in terms of work and leisure activities), where we

live (regarding the local environment and community), personal finance, education and skills, the economy, governance, and the environment (ONS, 2024).

However, despite this focus on wellbeing, the ONS found that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a decrease in personal wellbeing, with reductions in life satisfaction and happiness and an increase in anxiety (ONS, 2022). Decreases in wellbeing and mental health in the UK at that time have been well documented (O'Connor et al., 2021; Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022; Smith et al., 2020) and whilst reported levels of wellbeing have since increased, the number of UK adults reporting low life satisfaction in 2024 is still higher than pre-pandemic levels in 2019 (ONS, 2024). The full impact of the pandemic on wellbeing and mental health is anticipated to be long term (Armour et al., 2021), with the British Medical Association (2023: p. 13) reporting that '[t]he true extent of the damage done by the pandemic to the nation's mental health remains to be seen'. Of particular concern is the impact on children's wellbeing and mental health as a result (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022). Whilst children and young people's wellbeing now seems to have recovered close to pre-pandemic levels (Department for Education, 2023), there has been an increase in the rates of mental health disorders in children and young people (National Health Service, 2021), including a rise in anxiousness amongst both primary and secondary aged children (Hingley et al., 2022), which can impact school attendance (Finning et al., 2019).

Even prior to the pandemic, UK schools were being relied on to promote wellbeing (Samnøy et al., 2022), with the UK Government's response to the Green Paper 'Transforming children and young people's mental health provision' including a pledge for children in England and Wales to learn about mental health and wellbeing in the curriculum and for pupil wellbeing to be supported through whole school approaches (Department of Health and Social Care and Department for Education, 2018). Although there are currently no legal requirements for schools to have a separate mental health policy, English schools and colleges do have the responsibility to promote

and protect the welfare and wellbeing of pupils, as detailed by the statutory safeguarding guidance 'Keeping children safe in education' (Department for Education, 2024)[1], with pupil wellbeing generally coming under a school's pastoral care provision.

Pastoral care as a formal aspect of educational provision has been prevalent since the 1970s, with Marland's (1974) book 'Pastoral Care' being the first to name this aspect of educational provision and comprehensively examine the field in England and Wales. Although Marland's (1974, pp. 8-9) working definition of pastoral care involved 'looking after the total welfare of the pupil', there is no agreed definition for pastoral care or a fixed understanding of what is encompassed by the term. There is, however, general agreement that pastoral care is an organisation or school's provision for supporting the social and emotional needs of children and young people, including their welfare, wellbeing and development (Best, 1999; Calvert, 2009; Cleave et al., 1997).

Best (1999) argued that the reason for a lack of a clear definition is due to the evolution of pastoral care over time and how the term varies within contexts. Seary and Willans' (2020, p. 12) definition, for example, specified pastoral care as 'the concept of care and concern for the welfare of students within a learning environment that supports their physical, social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual development'. It seems natural that the scope of pastoral care would change over time as society itself changes and evolves. Consequently, the role of a school's pastoral care should be adaptable to the needs of the students, supporting them in developing the appropriate skills and resources needed to meet the various challenges they face in life and therefore safeguard their wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012).

[1] 'Keeping children safe in education' (DfE, 2024) is the statutory guidance for English schools and colleges that sets out the legal duties they must follow to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. It encompasses supporting children's needs, protecting them from maltreatment and enabling them to have the best outcomes.

The impact of the pandemic on children's wellbeing is arguably one of the biggest challenges facing pastoral care within schools (Carter, 2022), with concerns regarding long-term damage to children's development, wellbeing and attainment (Pascal et al., 2020) caused by the substantial disruption children and young people experienced following the first nationwide lockdown in the UK in March 2020. Schools were closed for in-person teaching to all pupils other than vulnerable students and the children of key workers, resulting in two extended periods of online learning. Furthermore, numerous children experienced additional remote educational provision due to self-isolation rules. This extensive disruption caused a significant increase in primary school aged children experiencing behavioural, emotional and attentional difficulties (Skripkauskaite et al., 2021).

In planning for children returning to school after lockdowns, the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England recommended that schools should have a 'significant focus on pastoral care' (Children's Commissioner, 2020, p. 28), and the children's charity Barnardo's called for a focus on the mental health and wellbeing of both students and staff over academic attainment (Barnardo's, 2020). They also specifically addressed the importance of supporting children and young people with the various transitions they would be facing post-lockdown, including transitions between educational establishments.

As a result of the pandemic and social distancing restrictions, many schools have had to amend or cancel parts of their transition programme in the last few years. Whilst this could be seen as a negative effect of the pandemic, it can also be viewed as an opportunity to review best practice and consider how best to support children's wellbeing during the period of significant change that is a school transition. Effectively supporting the wellbeing of children moving between schools is even more crucial considering the negative impact of the pandemic on children and young people's mental health (Skripkauskaite et al., 2021).

1.2.2 School Transitions in the UK

Following the Education Act 1918, which raised the school leaving age to 14 and planned to expand tertiary education, transitions between educational establishments have been commonplace in the UK. Most educational research on transitions focuses specifically on the move from primary to secondary maintained schools at age 11 (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021), with such research being conducted since the 1960s (Symonds and Galton, 2014).

The main transition points within the UK's educational system are the start of formal schooling and then the transfer through each of the five stages of education, from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to Key Stage 1 through to Key Stage 5 and then on to either Higher Education or entering the workforce (Farquharson, McNally and Tahir, 2022). Whilst not all these transition points necessarily feature a move between educational establishments for all students, all will cause children and young people to experience a certain degree of change to the environment they are educated in.

In England, children typically begin their formal education at the age of 5, progressing to secondary school for ages 11 to 16 and then remaining in some form of training or education until they are 18 (Farquharson, McNally and Tahir, 2022). The most common transition between educational establishments for children in England is therefore the move from primary to secondary school. There has been increasing research and government interest in the impact of this transition, both on children's educational outcomes and their wellbeing (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021), with the majority of UK research on educational transitions focusing on this age group (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021).

However, there are many children who face transition between schools at different ages due to various reasons, for example relocation to a new area. Additionally, there may be situations where an entire cohort is transitioning to a new educational setting, such as from an infant school to a junior school. Whilst such transitions may include co-located sites, as demonstrated in Matthiae

and Gaynor's (2008) research, this does not necessarily result in close links for transition or consistency in approaches. Furthermore, although most school pupils in England attend state-maintained schools, around 6% are schooled within the independent sector (Private Education Policy Forum, 2022), which has greater variety in its educational transition points than the maintained sector (Good Schools Guide, 2015).

1.2.3 The UK Independent Educational Sector

Within the UK, independent or private schools are fee-paying educational establishments that are not funded by the government. The independent school system usually comprises pre-preparatory, preparatory and senior schools, with the transition between the schools generally occurring at the age of 7 and then either 11 or 13 (Good Schools Guide, 2015). Preparatory schools differ from primary schools in that they are specifically designed to help prepare pupils for entrance examinations to senior schools, which can correspond to the maintained sector's transition to secondary school at age 11, or slightly later at age 13. The cohort of a preparatory school therefore may encompass Key Stages 2 and 3, whereas pre-preps cater for children in EYFS and KS1.

Similarly to state-maintained primary and secondary schools, there are linked preparatory and pre-preparatory schools, which can be either co-located or on separate sites. In this case, children at a pre- preparatory school generally gain automatic entry into a linked preparatory school. Within Greater London, however, many of the more competitive preparatory schools have a Seven Plus examination to gain entry. In these instances, the transition process begins in the autumn or early spring term of Year 2, with most Greater London preparatory schools holding their Seven Plus examinations between November and January.

Transitioning to a preparatory school brings with it a set of unique academic expectations, particularly within the Greater London area, where competition for places is high and children typically apply for multiple schools. Transition within this context therefore has the added

element of examinations and their preparation, with children commonly sitting multiple Seven Plus examinations before a final preparatory school is selected for them to attend. This process of sitting multiple entry examinations may, in itself, negatively impact on children's wellbeing ahead of the transition due to the pressures of examinations and the potential influence that not being offered a place may have. Even if a place is offered, the more competitive schools typically have high academic standards, requiring children to adapt to new academic demands, such as advanced programmes of study, increased homework and more frequent assessments. The development of time management and independent learning skills becomes paramount to meet these expectations, which can be particularly challenging for individuals who have not been prepared by their former schools, with possible discrepancies having the potential to influence a child's confidence and self-perception. Nevertheless, the enriched academic programmes, advanced teaching methods and specialised resources of preparatory schools provide opportunities for academic growth, which can lead to accelerated learning and development for children. Such advantages can therefore promote students' self-confidence, academic motivation and overall sense of achievement during the transition.

Another unique factor of preparatory schools is the distinct social environment they typically cultivate. Smaller class sizes and the close-knit nature of the school community can have profound implications for children's social wellbeing. A supportive and inclusive environment may facilitate a smoother transition, while a lack of inclusivity or a sense of isolation can create challenges. Understanding the dynamics of peer relationships, friendships, and social integration within this unique environment is crucial in assessing the impact on children's social wellbeing. This is particularly key when children from various backgrounds are moving to a preparatory school, as there is no prerequisite of having attended a pre-preparatory school prior to joining. Consequently, the transition has the potential to accentuate existing socioeconomic disparities among students and create a division regarding access to economic, social and cultural capital that varying families will inevitably have. Such disparities may influence children's

sense of belonging, social interactions and self-esteem, particularly if they come from less affluent backgrounds.

Independent school pupils tend to be from more affluent families (Farquharson, McNally and Tahir, 2022), with around 87% of pupils in independent schools having parents who are either business owners or who have professional or managerial backgrounds (Private Education Policy Forum, 2022). Nevertheless, tuition fees and associated costs can place a considerable financial strain on families, which may indirectly affect a child's sense of wellbeing. Worries about family finances, the burden of expectations and the potential social disparities related to economic backgrounds can influence a child's overall sense of security and belonging. Additionally, parents often have high expectations for their children's performance in independent schools, given the substantial financial investment and academic reputation associated with these institutions. High parental expectations can create additional stress and pressure for children, which may affect their self-esteem, anxiety levels and overall emotional wellbeing during the transition.

Furthermore, the transition in question occurs at a younger age than that which is typically researched in the UK (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021). Due to the variation in the educational systems between state-maintained and independent schools in the UK, transitions may take place at different ages. State-maintained schools typically follow a two-tier school system with the move from primary to secondary school occurring at 11 years old. Independent schools have more variation, with some also following a similar two-tier system with transition at 11 years old, whereas others use a three-tier system with transitions at 7 and 13 years old respectively. A further complexity for school transition within the independent sector is that some schools are all-through and encompass their pre-preparatory, preparatory and senior provision all on one site. For the purposes of this study, however, the transition being considered is that from pre-preparatory to preparatory at the age of 7 years old.

1.3 Research Rationale

Research has shown a correlation between pupil wellbeing and their academic achievement (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012; Public Health England, 2014); studies have also shown a decrease in both factors following the transition from primary to secondary school (Evans, Borriello and Field, 2018; Gutman et al., 2010). Understandably, research surrounding UK school transitions focuses mostly on this age group (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021), with it being the most common school transition faced by UK children. The transition from KS1 to KS2 within a UK context, however, has had limited attention from educational researchers, particularly where these transitions involve a move between educational establishments.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest a decline in academic performance then (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999; Tymms and Dean, 2004), although current research does not address the potential effects of school transition on pupil wellbeing at this younger age. Moreover, the full impact of school transition when younger is not entirely known due to the limited research available in this area (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019a). Even looking internationally, research on transitions between schools usually considers those between the ages of 10 and 14 years old (Evans, Borriello and Field, 2018) and so research is generally structured around these ages. However, a US study by Bagnall, Fox and Skipper (2021) found that the older students are, the easier transition is both for the individuals and other stakeholders. Whilst this study compared children who were making school transitions aged 11, 12 and 14 respectively, their findings suggest that more support is needed the younger the child who is transitioning between schools (Bagnall, Fox and Skipper, 2021). This is supported by Donaldson, Moore and Hawkins' (2022) findings, which acknowledged that although there will be some similarities, the experience of school transition is likely to be different depending on the age of the pupils that are moving schools. Further research on how to best support children during school transitions at varying ages is therefore needed.

Whilst all children develop at different rates and therefore have differing needs, there are typical capabilities in terms of physical and cognitive development, and social and emotional skills that are expected of most children at a given age (Melvin and Evans, 2012). One of the most prominent differences between children at the ages of 7 and at 11 is in terms of their physical development, with children at the age of 11 being far more likely to be experiencing the onset of puberty (National Health Service, 2018). The accelerated development which occurs physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually during puberty greatly impacts and changes an individual's life (Richards, 2011). During this time, important cognitive changes occur such as learning to problem solve using logic, making judgements and social comparisons of ability and developing self-esteem (Doherty and Hughes, 2013). The typical child at 7 years old is therefore developmentally very different to the typical 11-year-old and more likely to have a lower level of emotional and cognitive maturity (Melvin and Evans, 2012), resulting in the potential for them to require different support structures.

This research therefore contributes to the existing body of literature by exploring the under-researched area of school transition from KS1 to KS2, with a specific focus on supporting pupil wellbeing during this period. By exploring the lived experiences of children, parents[2] and educators, the study offers original empirical insights that centre the child's voice and foreground the emotional and social dimensions of transition, placing particular emphasis on the child's lived experience of moving to the case study school for the 2022–2023 academic year. In doing so, it responds to a significant gap in the literature, which has predominantly focused on the transition from primary to secondary education within the maintained sector.

This thesis further makes an original contribution through the development of an evidence-informed conceptual model for supporting successful school transition, grounded in Walker and

[2] Please note that whilst the terms 'parent', 'parents' and 'parental' are used throughout, these refer to the parental figures within a child's life, thus including carers or guardians.

Avant's (2019) concept analysis method and informed by theoretical frameworks such as Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Bioecological Model and Jindal-Snape's (2016) MMT theory. This model not only clarifies the concept of transition support but also identifies practical structures—preparation, familiarity and shared experience—that underpin a child's sense of belonging, identity and wellbeing in a new school environment. The thesis further addresses conceptual and methodological limitations of existing transition literature by explicitly aligning its philosophical stance, conceptual framework and analytical approach.

The following section outlines the design and scope of the study, providing an overview of the research setting, participants, and methods used to explore the phenomenon of school transition.

1.4 Study Overview

This case study research was conducted during 2022 and focused on the cohort of children who were transitioning to the research school for Year 3 in September 2022. At the time of the research, I was employed as Head of Year 3 within this preparatory school, and I therefore conducted this study as an insider researcher within my professional setting. The following section provides an overview of the study, including details of the research setting, the participants involved, the methodology and methods used.

1.4.1 The Research Setting

The research setting is a charitable trust which operates three independent day schools that are all situated in the South-East of England. Two of these schools are co-educational pre-preparatory schools for children between the ages of 3 and 7, and the third is a single-sex preparatory school for boys aged between 7 and 13 years old.

Despite links between the three schools within the trust, they operate as separate schools on individual sites within a ten-mile radius of each other. As both pre-preparatory schools end their

educational provision at the end of KS1, all their pupils move to a new educational establishment for the beginning of KS2. They do not necessarily stay within the trust, although a large majority tend to transition to the preparatory school. For example, out of the 57 pupils in the research cohort, 26 had previously been at one of the two pre-preparatory schools in the trust.

Appendix 1 provides more detail about the research cohort's previous schools, where most of the pupils transitioned from independent pre-preparatory schools. There are four main 'feeder' schools that tend to comprise most of the new cohort each year, with 74% of the research cohort attending one of these four. Two of these feeder schools are the pre-preparatory schools within the trust, whereas the other two are local pre-preparatory schools. In addition to independent schools, there is usually a small number of pupils transitioning from maintained local primary schools or from international schools abroad. Children who are not moving from one of the feeder schools typically make the transition either individually, as the only one, or in a small group of two or three.

Although the preparatory school age group encompasses both primary and secondary year groups, the school day operates more like that of a secondary school. From the first day in Year 3, pupils move from classroom to classroom for their lessons. Whilst there is support in place to help new pupils find their way in the initial weeks following the transition, the expectation is for this to be managed independently after about two weeks, once the pupils have adjusted to their new environment.

All pupils at the school are taught by multiple subject-specialist teachers and are assigned a tutor who is responsible for overseeing the pastoral care of their tutor group and possesses a general understanding of each tutee's academic progress. The tutor groups are of mixed ability and, as streaming does not begin until Year 4, these groupings also correspond to the teaching groups for Year 3. The pupils are therefore together for all their lessons, although there is the potential for the class to have up to ten different teachers on any school day.

The school environment at the case study school consequently contrasts quite significantly with the children's previous school settings. In both maintained UK primary schools and independent pre-preparatory schools, children tend to be taught in the same classroom, unless there are specific resources needed which require a different location, such as sports lessons. Within these settings, it is also typical for each class to have one main teacher for the majority, if not all, of their subjects. This model of schooling tends to be more secondary in nature, although the pupils navigating this context are considerably younger in age.

1.4.2 Research Participants

The cohort involved in this study included 57 pupils who were transitioning to the case study school to attend Year 3 in September 2022. Of these, 26 students, who were moving from one of the two pre-preparatory schools in the same charitable trust as the case study school, were invited to participate in the pupil questionnaires. However, consent was only received for seven. From the full cohort of 57 pupils, 15 were selected to participate in focus groups using simple random sampling.

This research also considered voices from other stakeholders involved in the school transition process. This included six parent interviews with a total of eight participants whose children were undergoing the transition to the case study school in September 2022. Additionally, three teacher participants were interviewed. These individuals were Year 2 teachers at feeder pre-preparatory schools who regularly send children to the case study school, identified as School A, B and C (Appendix 1).

1.4.3 Overview of Methodology and Methods

Due to the specific context of school transition to KS2 within the UK independent sector, I decided to follow a case study approach. Case studies enable a detailed and in-depth exploration of a research topic within its natural context (Yin, 2018), in this instance, the research school. Whilst

this study aimed to focus on the child's experience of transition, I planned to generate data from three different participant groups: pupils, parents and teachers. This was to provide multiple perspectives of the complex phenomenon of transition and acknowledge the impact a school transition has on a child's wider social circle (Jindal-Snape, 2016).

Data were triangulated using four research instruments across the participant groups (Hamilton, 2011). Data generation commenced with online teacher interviews in January 2022. Pupil questionnaires were conducted in person at four separate intervals that were roughly equally spread between March and December 2022. Following the pupils' transition to the case study school in September, pupil focus groups and parent interviews took place during the pupils' first term of Year 3.

1.4.4 Insider Research

This research was conducted within my own professional setting because I was inspired to conduct research from my experience within this environment. Thus, the tacit knowledge which occurs from working within a particular setting can be invaluable in identifying issues, problems or gaps which need to be addressed to improve practice (Campbell, McNamara and Gilroy, 2004). Insider research therefore allows practitioners to draw upon their professional knowledge and experience, whilst locating their study in a known, real-world context to examine a social phenomenon in that setting (Gregory, 2017). Research of this nature is conducted collaboratively with participants, rather than being conducted about them or on their behalf (Coghlan, 2019).

Insider research has been shown to enhance the professional practice of both researchers and their colleagues, while also contributing positively to the overall culture of the school in which the research is conducted (Cramp & Khan, 2019). As researching professionals engaging in research that is guided by professional knowledge and practice, insider researchers are uniquely positioned in relation to those taking part in the study (Burnard et al., 2018), making the recruitment of, and access to, participants relatively easy (Gregory, 2017). Furthermore, findings

by Cramp and Khan (2019) suggested that conducting research in one's own setting can contribute to more fulfilling working lives. There can, however, be challenges involved with anonymity resulting from revealing the researcher's identity (Gregory, 2017) and ethical considerations of power relationships between the researcher and participants must be considered (Brooks, te Riele and Maguire, 2014), with there being more chance that participants feel pressured into taking part (Coghlan, 2019). Nevertheless, these challenges can be mitigated through transparency within research (Campbell, McNamara and Gilroy, 2004), practising reflexivity (Coghlan, 2019) and by acknowledging my positionality and the impact this could have on the research (Basit, 2013). These considerations are discussed in greater depth in Section 3.2.4 Insider Research and the Role of Reflexivity, and also when considering the trustworthiness of the study and the ethical considerations in Sections 3.7 and 3.8 respectively.

1.5 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis comprises six chapters. This introductory chapter outlined the background and context to the study, providing a rationale for research into supporting children's wellbeing across school transitions to KS2 in the independent sector, alongside a general overview of the study.

Chapter Two sets out the conceptual framework used within this study and critically examines the current literature on the research topic. In this chapter, I discuss how school transitions represent a disruption to children's educational norms and the impact this can have on children's wellbeing, before considering the literature on supporting pupil wellbeing during this time. Specific research questions are then generated to focus the scope of the study.

Chapter Three details the methodological choices of the study and explains the rationale behind these choices. This chapter explains the journey taken within the research design, considering how and why the participants and methods were selected, along with justifying decisions made

during the data analysis stage. I also discuss the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study, as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter Four sets out the analysis process and presents the findings with reference to the themes which have been generated from the data, using evidence in the form of quotations to illustrate them.

Chapter Five expands on the analysis, discussing the meaning of the findings in relation to the literature base and conceptual framework of the study. It considers what constitutes a successful transition before setting out a conceptual model for supporting the process of a successful school transition and exploring ways in which the wellbeing of children can be enhanced during this time.

The final chapter provides a summary of the findings in relation to the main and subsidiary research questions. Strengths and limitations of the study are discussed, including the study's contribution to knowledge, before recommendations are given and suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a critical review of selected existing literature and develop a conceptual framework for this study. Following an explanation of the literature search strategy, the review begins with an initial consideration of transitions in general, which includes an outline of the two theories being adopted to conceptualise and shape the research: Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory and Jindal-Snape's (2016) Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transition (MMT) theory. School transitions across educational settings are then examined more specifically before exploring the links between transitions and wellbeing. The review then turns to how current literature suggests that pupil wellbeing can best be supported during the process of a school transition by the individuals within a child's microsystem, such as parents, teachers and peers, alongside the support provided by the academic institutions they are leaving and joining. Finally, the research questions developed from engaging with the literature are outlined and explained.

2.2 Literature Review Focus and Search Strategy

When setting out to begin searching for literature, I began by clarifying the focus of my research: supporting the wellbeing of children during transitions across educational settings to KS2. From this focus I produced a selection of key terms to input within the university's library database and Google Scholar, namely, 'wellbeing', 'children', 'school' and 'transitions'. During the initial process of searching for literature, I attempted several iterations of these search terms, including synonyms for each of the key terms, as well as additional terms which varied in their level of specificity, such as 'independent sector', 'preparatory schools' and 'Key Stage 2'. In doing so, I realised that there was a need to refine and explicitly set out my understanding and definitions of

certain terms, whilst still allowing the flexibility to encompass literature which was not strictly generalisable to the very specific context of my research setting.

As discussed more in Section 2.5.1, the term 'wellbeing', whilst being universally considered as a positive ideal (White, 2010), does not have a fixed definition (Ereaut and Whiting, 2008), and meanings can range from considering an individual's happiness to whether the individual has found purpose and meaning in life (Dodge et al., 2012). Even within these definitions, the state of wellbeing itself is a very personal and individualised notion and what may be deemed beneficial for one person's wellbeing may not necessarily be the same for another. Supporting a child's wellbeing may therefore vary quite significantly, which is key to consider when examining literature and indeed conducting research. Additionally, on a practical basis, there is no consensus as to how to spell the term 'wellbeing' (Dodge et al., 2012), resulting in the need to also have the alternative spelling 'well-being' within the search terms.

Another factor that needed clarifying was the specificity of transitions being across educational settings. The term 'transition' refers to a change in an individual's circumstances and their associated state of being (Bridges, 2004), which, even within an educational context, may be perceived quite broadly and include moving between year groups within the same school. Furthermore, the move from one school or educational establishment to another may also be referred to as a 'transfer' by some authors (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999). When considering research on school transitions, I therefore included both 'transition' and 'transfer' as search terms, manually filtering the studies to ensure they concerned children who were moving from one educational establishment to another, rather than research involving children beginning school or moving from full time education to employment.

However, despite the importance of being precise with vocabulary and terminology when exploring literature, searching for studies considering my specific age group of interest did not yield many results. Although research from the UK, and England especially, were of particular

interest due to my study being based in England, as the majority of UK research on school transitions concerns the move from primary to secondary school (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021), rather than school transitions from KS1 to KS2, international studies were also considered. The greater variety of age at school transition appearing in international literature was of benefit to this review, particularly ones which examined the impact of school transitions within three tier school systems, which were more comparable to the UK independent school system considered in this study. Therefore, the literature search extended to studies that had been conducted in the United States, Australia and Europe.

In addition to studies on educational transitions, I also explored literature on childhood development in order to make comparisons between the various studies which focused on different ages at transition. Furthermore, I revisited previous reading from earlier stages of the Educational Doctorate and extended my literature search using a snowballing approach, by including texts listed in bibliographies or recommended by my supervisory team. I excluded texts which were not written in English and limited the range to those that had been published within the last twenty years, barring seminal texts. Although the search process was wide-ranging and conducted in a methodical and purposeful manner, it cannot be deemed exhaustive and I am therefore cognisant of the need to consider the potential that the literature search was influenced by unconscious bias, alongside my ability to gain access to texts and the finite amount of time spent on searching for literature. Nevertheless, I have interacted with the literature following Wallace and Wray's (2021) critical analysis approach to help guide my engagement with the texts, thus considering the literature with a critical eye to determine potential limitations which may impact the robustness of the researchers' claims.

2.3 Defining and Conceptualising Transitions

Transitions are a fundamental aspect of life, involving adaptations to new situations, environments or relationships (Bridges, 2004). They generally refer to the processes or phases

that individuals or groups undergo when they move from one stage of life to another, or from one set of circumstances to another. Transitions can range from minor adjustments to significant life events, such as moving house, starting a new job or experiencing a loss or illness. Regardless of their magnitude, all lead to some degree of change (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008) and consequently result in a period of adjustment to the new stage of life or circumstances (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021). Whilst transitions can be challenging and stressful for individuals, especially when they involve significant changes to daily routines, relationships or sense of identity, they also provide opportunities for personal growth, learning and development (Bridges, 2004).

Individuals encounter a variety of different types of transitions throughout their lives and even on a day-to-day basis. Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead (2008) distinguished between horizontal and vertical transitions, where the former refers to regular or daily changes in routine or movements between settings or situations, and the latter concerns more significant moves from one setting to another and do not occur as frequently.

Vertical transitions can be further categorised as normative or non-normative. Normative transitions are socially prescribed and often occur at particular ages, such as retirement, or developmental stages, such as puberty. Non-normative transitions happen outside expected timelines or contexts, such as the unanticipated loss of a loved one or a sudden career change (Enz and Talarico, 2016). The nature of the transition, and whether it is anticipated, can influence how an individual adapts to change. However, even for normative transitions, multiple factors affect how an individual responds, including personal characteristics, immediate environment, and broader societal and cultural influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Many of the initial vertical transitions experienced in childhood are closely linked to educational institutions, such as starting school or moving from primary to secondary education (Arnold et al., 2007). Within the school environment, children and young people undertake many transitions. For example, horizontal transitions between lessons or activities occur daily, and

some children find these more challenging depending on their learning needs. More commonly, the term 'transition' within an educational context refers to the more significant, less frequent vertical transition of moving from one educational establishment to another (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008). Such transitions include milestones like beginning formal education, progressing between year groups or Key Stages, transferring between educational establishments, and moving from formal education into employment (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021). Although these transitions are typically normative and expected, they still involve changes to the individual's environment or situation that require adaptation, which can be challenging and impact children's wellbeing (Evans, Borriello and Field, 2018).

How individuals navigate transitions and adapt to changes in their environment can be conceptualised using the applied Process Person Context Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). This model represents the final development of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, which suggests that individuals are shaped by the various environments and people with whom they interact, viewing transitions as a disruption to the individual's position within their ecological environment. However, it is rare for a transition to impact only one individual in isolation. Jindal-Snape's (2016) Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transition (MMT) theory acknowledges the effect transitions have on an individual's wider social circle and the relationships between interlinked transitions. Therefore, it is through these two conceptual frameworks that the phenomenon of school transitions has been examined within this study.

2.3.1 The Bioecological Model of Development

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory focuses on how an individual's development is influenced by contextual factors. Later revisions placed greater emphasis on the characteristics of the developing individual, resulting in what is now known as the Bioecological Model of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). As illustrated in Figure 2.1, this model

identifies five interrelated environmental systems that impact a child's development, ranging from direct environmental influences to the effects of broader societal factors. The model also recognises the significance of interactions and relationships between these levels, as well as acknowledging the role of time in both a personal and wider socio-historical context.

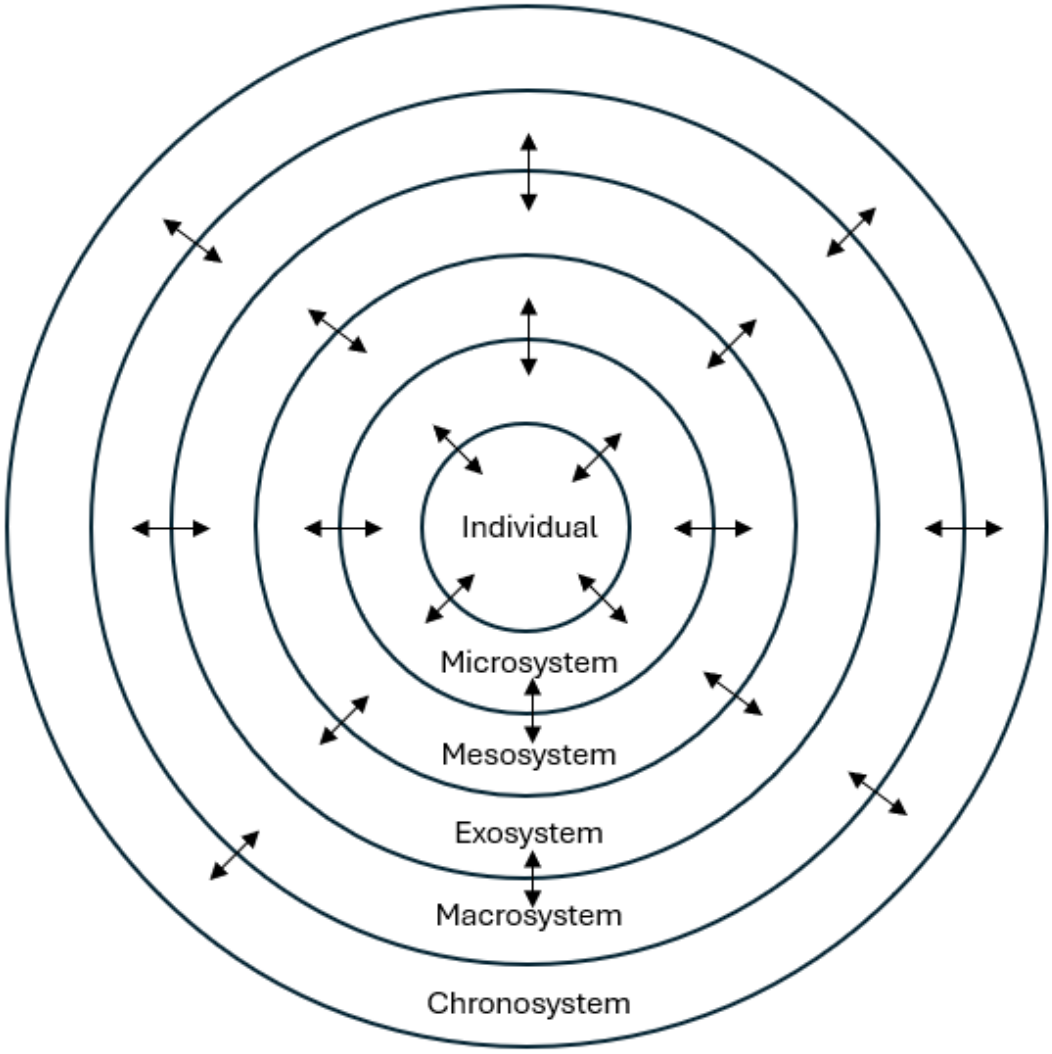

Figure 2.1: Bronfenbrenner's (1995) Bioecological Model of Human Development.

The first system, the microsystem, comprises an individual's immediate environment and the settings with which they have direct, regular contact, such as school, family and friends, while the mesosystem refers to the interrelations between two or more of these settings

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The exosystem denotes connections between settings where at least one environment does not include the individual, but one of their microsystems is nevertheless indirectly affected by these settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The macrosystem encompasses broader societal factors, such as the attitudes and ideologies of the individual's culture or social class (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and the chronosystem represents the cumulative environmental changes and transitions occurring over an individual's lifetime that influence their development, alongside historical events experienced during their life (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 26) defined an ecological transition as occurring 'whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered as the result of a change in role, setting, or both', explaining that these changes can occur within any of the systems comprising an individual's ecological environment. Deeming them both consequences and instigators of development, Bronfenbrenner believed that transitions were fundamental for human development because they require individuals to adapt to their environment as it changes.

As a result of all individuals having personalised ecological environments, experiences of transition can therefore be quite variable, depending on the child's background. A child moving to a new school, for example, will clearly experience a change to a setting within their microsystem, thereby affecting the interactions they have with their immediate environment. The degree to which this changes their microsystem, however, will depend on that individual child's particular set of circumstances. For instance, a child making a transition alongside peers from their old school may have fewer disruptions within their microsystem than a child who is moving independently of their current peers. Nevertheless, the adjustment a child will have to undergo in adapting to their new educational setting will not only be influenced by their individual characteristics but also by the views and opinions of those within their microsystem, such as their parents and peers. Furthermore, the links between the new school and the home are likely to be

affected by the transition, impacting the child's mesosystem and potentially causing further ramifications throughout the child's ecological environment.

The influence of individualised factors on human development led to the most recent version of the Bioecological Model, published posthumously in 2006 by Bronfenbrenner and Morris. The PPCT model amalgamated the various systems and their interactions, highlighting the importance of understanding an individual's development within the environmental systems and recognising how the individual and their environment influence one another bidirectionally (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). It recognises that the elements of human development have 'dynamic, interactive relationships' (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p. 795) and cannot be viewed in isolation, with actions in one part of the system causing repercussions for other elements. The PPCT model can therefore be used as a lens to consider the impact of each of these four elements on experiences and outcomes of educational transitions.

Proximal processes concern the interactions an individual has with their immediate environment, including both their relationships with other individuals and how they engage with their surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Within an educational transition, this could include relationships children have with their peers, teachers and parents, alongside their initial interactions and experiences with the new school environment.

The person relates to the individual themselves, with personal characteristics impacting development through the influence they have on social interactions (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Such personal factors may include, but are not limited to, age, gender and ethnicity, as well as socio-emotional and organisational elements, such as social skills, family background and levels of independence.

Context comprises the original four systems in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. These interrelated systems both directly and indirectly influence, and are influenced by, the developing individual

and the proximal processes that are occurring. Within the area of educational transitions, this may include factors such as how the school is structured, its culture, policies and procedures.

Lastly, the time element of the model relates to the chronosystem, considering the timing in the lives of the children and their families when the transition is occurring (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). For the children within this study, this element would include the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, as although during the time this research was conducted schools were open and all social restrictions had been lifted, this cohort in particular faced extensive disruption to their formative years in formal education. For the research cohort, Year 2 would have been the first year of compulsory schooling in which they attended school for the entire academic year, having experienced lockdowns and school closures during their time in Reception and Year 1. This unique experience of the first few years of schooling is likely to have influenced the children's feelings towards both education and their current school and may therefore impact upon their experience of school transition.

2.3.2 Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transition Theory

Alongside Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, I am also using Jindal-Snape's (2016) MMT theory to conceptualise transitions. MMT theory acknowledges the impact that transitions have on an individual's wider social circle and the relationship between interlinked transitions, proposing that an individual undergoing a transition is likely to experience multiple transitions simultaneously, across numerous domains and contexts (Jindal-Snape, 2016). For example, a child who is moving to a new school will experience multiple transitions within their life beyond the surface-level change in educational setting, such as fluctuations and changes in their friendship groups, new academic expectations, or even alterations to their morning routine of getting to school. Children are therefore simultaneously navigating multiple changes across environmental, academic, social and emotional domains, for which they require ongoing support from a range of different sources and individuals (Jindal-Snape, 2016).

This support is particularly key when considering the complex interactions between different individuals' transitions within the context of group transitions, such as moving schools. MMT theory explains how the multiple transitions an individual experiences not only impact each other but can also cause transitions for other people within an individual's microsystem and vice versa, resulting in transition overall being seen as a multi-dimensional process (Jindal-Snape, 2016). In the context of moving schools, this change in circumstances and situation is also felt by other parties within the child's life, such as parents, siblings, teachers and peers, causing them to also experience transitions (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016). Thus, these multiple transitions interact and impact on each other, potentially instigating other transitions for individuals, resulting in the need to consider the complex nature of this phenomenon through multiple perspectives (Jindal-Snape, 2016).

Furthermore, Jindal-Snape (2010) argued that transitions need to be perceived as ongoing and dynamic experiences, which involve adapting to new contexts and interpersonal relationships. Transitions are not simply isolated events which occur in a linear or sequential manner, but a process of adaptation from one set of circumstances to another (Sanders et al., 2005). How an individual feels about a transition is likely to change over time and depends on where they are in relation to the change taking place, for example, leading up to, moving through or emerging from the transition that is taking place (Anderson, Goodman and Schlossberg, 2012). As numerous changes can occur in an individual's life as a result of a transition, they therefore need to be conceptualised as multiple and synchronous (Jindal-Snape, 2016). Additionally, a transition does not solely pertain to one individual but rather effects multiple stakeholders (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019b). Consequently, the phenomenon of transitions needs to be explored in detail, acknowledging the multiple transitions individuals may be experiencing and considering the perspectives of those within the individual's ecosystem and the transitions they may be undertaking, which could impact or instigate other transitions for the individual.

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2.3.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework employed in this study draws upon and is informed by these two theories. By considering how an individual is influenced by their interactions with their environment and other individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), alongside how they are affected by both the multiple transitions they experience and those triggered for others within their wider social circle (Jindal-Snape, 2016), I aim to explore the complex phenomenon of transitions.

This conceptualisation of transitions likens the change event of a transition, and the resulting disruption to the norm, to a disturbance in a body of water. As illustrated in Figure 2.2, such a disturbance generates ripples of concentric circles, analogous to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems. These ripples, however, do not occur in isolation. Comparable to Jindal-Snape's (2016) MMT theory, multiple ripples emerge as the initial transition instigates corresponding and co-occurring transitions experienced by other individuals. These multiple ripples then overlap and influence one another at different points and in various ways, as numerous individuals not only undergo their own transitions but also affect and are affected by the transitions of others.

This conceptual model facilitates consideration of the multiple influences impacting a child's move to a new educational establishment, as well as how this transition affects the lives of those within that child's microsystem, triggering those individuals to also experience their own transitions. Conceptualising transitions in this way emphasises the bidirectional flow of influence within and between each individual's ecological systems.

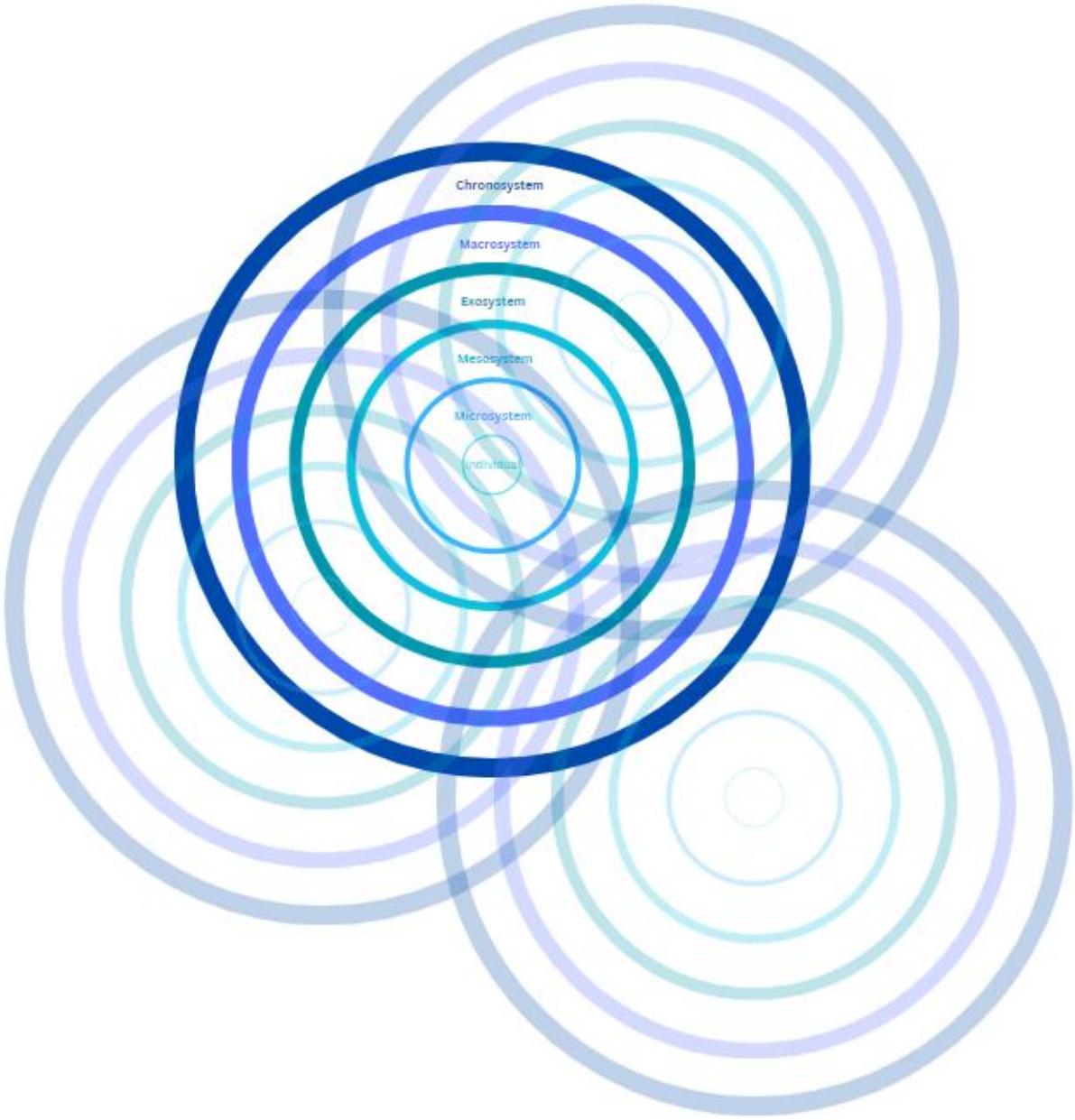

Figure 2.2: Conceptual model of overlapping ecological systems within transitions

2.4 School Transitions: A Disruption to the Norm

Transitions result in the need for individuals to adapt (Bridges, 2004) because they disrupt an individual's position within their ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This adaptation can be challenging, particularly during the adjustment period in which an individual acclimatises to their new environment or circumstances (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021). Children transitioning to

a new school face numerous environmental, social and academic changes to which they must adjust simultaneously as they navigate the disruption to their educational norm.

To contextualise the phenomenon of school transition, this section first considers the various changes children face when moving to a new educational environment, focusing predominantly on the primary-to-secondary school transition within the UK, as this is most similar to the specific context of this study. I then examine the impact of age at school transitions, drawing on international studies where school transition occurs at a younger age than the UK primary-to-secondary transition.

2.4.1 Adjusting to change

A move to a new school evidently results in a physical change of environment, with children typically transitioning to a larger, less familiar school site that has an increased number of pupils attending (Pratt and George, 2005). Furthermore, children are expected to navigate independently between classrooms for various subjects (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021), each taught by a different teacher, and it is generally their responsibility to ensure they have the correct equipment for each lesson. This constitutes a significant change from the typical primary school experience, where children are taught in the same classroom with all equipment provided and usually have the same teacher for most, if not all, of the school day (Jindal-Snape and Miller, 2008). Children are also adjusting from being the oldest and most established year group in their previous school to being the youngest and often physically smallest in their new one (Coffey, 2013). Consequently, children commonly report getting lost (Curson, Wilson-Smith and Holliman, 2019; Tobbell, 2003), with the increased number of people within the school setting (Pratt and George, 2005; Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013) cited as significant concerns.

This change in social dynamics can be challenging for children (Bagnall, Skipper and Fox, 2020; Mackenzie, McMaugh and O'Sullivan, 2012), particularly if they are not making the transition alongside peers from their old school. There is the potential for children to experience social

isolation if they lack pre-existing social networks, as they may find it difficult to fit in with their new classmates and feel excluded from social activities (Weller, 2007). Fears surrounding older children (Rice, Frederickson and Seymour, 2011) and difficulties in making new friends (Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006) are common concerns for students moving to a new school, with children perceiving friendships as key to facilitating a successful transition (Hammond, 2016).

Developing relationships with new teachers has also been shown to be important to children (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019a), though having a greater number of teachers may result in children needing to adjust to a broader **breadth** of expectations due to differences in teaching and behaviour management styles (Tobbell, 2003). This is in addition to changes in academic expectations and standards generally, which can be ongoing concerns for children in terms of anticipated extra work and level of challenge (Galton, Morrison and Pell, 2000; Mackenzie, McMaugh and O'Sullivan, 2012; Sirsch, 2003). Furthermore, the commonly reported 'dip' in academic attainment that coincides with transition from primary to secondary school (Evans, Borriello and Field, 2018; Gutman et al., 2010; Symonds and Galton, 2014) is noteworthy. Although often attributed to primary schools' overemphasis on the Year 6 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), academic dips following a school transition have been observed across different educational systems where transition occurs at various ages, such as in Australia (Hopwood, Hay and Dyment, 2017) and the US (Akos, Rose and Orthner, 2015). This suggests that the transition itself and the resulting changes may have a greater impact on attainment than academic pressures from the SATs. Research indicates that academic dips may be due to differences in teaching methods and curriculum discontinuity, as well as declines in children's motivation and engagement with learning (Hargreaves and Galton, 2002; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020).

The range of challenges presented by adjusting to the new environment can also impact children's emotions during the transition period. Bagnall, Skipper and Fox (2020) found that students moving from primary to secondary school in the UK experienced a range of emotions

during the transition, including anxiety, fear and excitement. Whilst some students conveyed positive anticipation for the new start and the opportunities it provided, this was often experienced alongside conflicting feelings of nervousness, with some even reporting a sense of loss and grief for the friends and familiar surroundings left behind at their previous school (Bagnall, Skipper and Fox, 2020).

Similarly, an Austrian study examining how students perceived the transition from primary to secondary school found that children experienced mixed feelings about the transition, generally perceiving moving schools as both a challenge and an opportunity for personal growth and development (Sirsch, 2003). Within this study, however, the term 'challenge' was used in contrast to a 'threat', with the difference being the anticipated result of either a gain or a loss. This presumes that school transition will be difficult to some extent, although the study found that those who approached the transition with a more positive, challenge-oriented mindset tended to have better outcomes in terms of academic achievement, motivation and self-esteem compared with those who perceived transition as a threat.

2.4.2 Managing School Transitions

Several authors (see Bharara, 2020; Hanewald, 2013; Symonds and Galton, 2014; Topping, 2011) have concluded that transition has a negative impact on students, decreasing academic progress, motivation and general attitude towards school, while increasing pupil anxiety. The significant changes to children's lives that transitions between schools present (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead, 2008) therefore need to be carefully managed, as an unmanaged transition can make adapting to change both challenging and difficult (Bridges, 2004).

Galton, Gray and Ruddock (1999) suggested that an effective transition involves managing five key aspects: managerial; social and personal; curriculum continuity; pedagogy; and managing learning. This recommendation followed the ORACLE (Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation) programme, a decade-long classroom research project carried out in the UK

during the 1970s. The first aspect addresses administrative issues between schools; the second involves measures to ease pupils' concerns and anxieties; the third seeks to maintain continuity within the academic curriculum to ensure progression; the fourth relates to teaching practices and the skills pupils are taught; while the fifth focuses on helping pupils become more independent in their learning (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999).

Similar conclusions were found in research commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, which surveyed over 500 UK children and their parents about factors they believed contributed to a successful transition from primary to secondary school (Evangelou et al., 2008). Notably, children's recommendations tended to focus on what they themselves could do, whereas parental recommendations targeted support that primary and secondary schools could implement. Overall, a successful transition was associated with forming new friendships and improving confidence and self-esteem; settling in well so as not to cause concern to parents; demonstrating increased interest in school and studies; adapting easily to new routines and school organisation; and maintaining continuity with the curriculum. The research also found that children who felt well supported by their new school were more likely to experience a successful transition (Evangelou et al., 2008).

A report summarising the findings of the School Transition and Adjustment Research Study similarly concluded that successful transitions resulted in children having positive attitudes towards school, demonstrated by academic and behavioural involvement, and developing a sense of belonging (Rice et al., 2015). This longitudinal study, conducted in the South-East of England, collected data from teachers, parents, and pupils. Parents were identified as a key source of support for children during the transition period, with the report recommending open discussions of transition concerns between parents and children and advocating for a whole-school approach to supporting transitions. It suggested that such an approach would include broad support strategies for common concerns delivered to all pupils, alongside additional

tailored support for more vulnerable pupils, adapted to individual needs (Rice et al., 2015). This individualised support helps ensure pupils receive adequate and personalised resources to effectively manage the transition.

While these reports all seek to define a successful school transition and share similarities in their recommendations for supporting students, only the ORACLE study included transitions to middle schools (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999). Generally, UK research on school transition focuses on the move from primary to secondary school, which typically occurs around age 11 (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021). For many children, this transition coincides with puberty, and research has shown a relationship between the timing of puberty and negative impacts of transition, such as lower self-esteem and body image (Bagnall, Fox and Skipper, 2021). However, while the primary to secondary transition is the norm in the UK, internationally—and within the independent sector in the UK—school transitions may occur at different ages, potentially impacting the transition experience and the type of support required to facilitate a successful move.

2.4.3 Age at School Transition

Globally, most children transition from primary to secondary school during early adolescence, typically between the ages of 10 and 14 (Evans, Borriello and Field, 2018). However, school systems vary considerably, alongside differences in academic calendars, resulting in children moving to new schools at different ages depending on their location. In the United States, for example, educational structures vary by state and school, with children transitioning between ages 10 and 14 to either middle or high school.

Research suggests that children generally adjust better to new schools when they are older at the time of transition (Holas and Huston, 2012), as older pupils are more likely to have experienced previous life transitions. These might include environmental changes such as moving house or identity shifts like the birth of a sibling, which can help children develop coping skills for new

challenges. However, as Symonds (2015) highlights, school transition often represents the first major change where the child is the central focus.

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Arens et al. (2013) investigated whether the timing of the primary to secondary transition affected German students' self-perceptions. Comparing two cohorts—grade 4 students (mean age 9.67) before transition and grade 5 students (mean age 10.75) after transition—they found that post-transition pupils reported lower self-esteem. The researchers attributed this to environmental factors rather than age at transition. However, the study's cross-sectional design limits understanding of long-term effects and other influencing factors.

More recently, Bagnall, Fox and Skipper (2021) examined three school systems in Northern California—the three-tier middle school, three-tier junior high, and two-tier systems—and found that older pupils generally experienced smoother transitions. Pupils with prior experience of educational transitions (e.g., moving to middle or junior high school) were better prepared emotionally for high school. Conversely, younger pupils transitioning earlier reported higher stress and anxiety, with even one additional academic year significantly enhancing maturity and readiness (Bagnall, Fox and Skipper, 2021). These findings align with Holas and Huston (2012), who reported poorer academic, self-esteem, and social outcomes for students transitioning to middle school earlier compared to those transitioning later.

While neither study explored long-term impacts of earlier transitions, the evidence suggests a need for further research on supporting younger transitioning pupils. Donaldson, Moore and

Hawkins (2022) emphasize the importance of considering the wide age range at transition in their systematic review of wellbeing interventions, noting that experiences and needs are likely to differ considerably with age. This is particularly relevant as limited UK research on earlier transitions than the typical move at age 11 tends to focus on academic outcomes and curriculum design (Matthiae and Gaynor, 2008; Morris et al., 2010; Withey and Turner, 2015).

Interestingly, despite the ORACLE study including schools with transitions at ages 9, 11, and 13, transition practices were notably similar across these settings (Galton and McLellan, 2018), suggesting that support strategies may not be sufficiently tailored to the developmental needs associated with pupils' ages.

2.4.4 UK Research on School Transitions at a Younger Age

Despite the prevalence of school transitions at the age of 11, there are many UK children who make a transition at the earlier age of 7 to either a junior school in the maintained educational sector or a preparatory school in the independent sector. Despite the Plowden Report (1967) identifying that transition at the age of 7 was before children were ready and therefore recommending that the length of schooling in infant schools should be extended by a year so children were leaving at *'a stage at which they can tolerate a change of school'* (Plowden, 1967, p. 142), there remains limited literature regarding school transition at this age.

Wyatt (2017) investigated effective transition management within the UK's three-tier schooling system and found that pupils generally viewed their school moves positively. They reported feeling well prepared and did not perceive major shifts in school culture or classroom expectations—issues often noted by pupils transitioning at 11. However, Wyatt's research focused on transitions from first to middle school, which occurs at age 9 in the three-tier system. It is also important to note that this study was commissioned by the National Middle Schools' Forum, an organisation advocating for middle schools in England (The National Middle Schools' Forum, 2023).

In a related publication, Wyatt (2018) argued that three-tier transitions are better managed because they take place at a developmentally appropriate stage, avoiding the complexities of puberty. The organisational structure of middle schools provides a gradual shift from generalist primary teaching to specialist secondary education, with continuity in expectations and school culture across the stages. Wyatt also noted that pupils in three-tier systems tend to outperform their peers in other state-maintained schools nationally at GCSE level (Wyatt, 2018).

Conversely, a study by Withey and Turner (2015) did not find that there was a significant difference in achievement outcomes when comparing junior and primary school SATs results. The end of KS1 SATs results for junior schools had been provided by the pupils' former infant schools and were, on average, higher than the comparative primary school results, yet the end of KS2 SATs results for both junior and primary schools showed little variance. While it could be interpreted as evidence of a decline in academic progress following the transition from infant to junior school, Withey and Turner (2015) argue that this perceived drop is more likely attributable to educational institutions prioritising preparation for assessments on which they are evaluated, rather than a genuine decrease in pupil attainment. Infant schools are measured on their KS1 SATs results, whereas primary schools place more emphasis on their KS2 scores, along with value-added (a pupil's improvement in their ability). This does, however, pose a further challenge for pupils who are transitioning between schools if the academic expectations and preparation lack continuity and cohesion.

Comparable findings were found within a small-scale project by Matthiae and Gaynor (2008), which explored KS1 to KS2 transition between an infant and junior school in Birmingham. Whilst the two schools were part of a soft federation and co-located, the schools worked relatively autonomously, with Year 3 teachers perceiving that KS1 SATs results were over-inflated, resulting in children transitioning with unrealistic academic levels. As a result of the project and the two schools working more closely together, the schools reported that academic outcomes became

more consistent and transition arrangements for pupils were improved (Matthiae and Gaynor, 2008). Whilst the report predominantly focused on the staff perspective and enhanced understanding between Year 2 and Year 3 teachers, by improving their communication practices, the schools felt that they were able to facilitate a smoother transition and enable pupils to feel more settled at the start of Year 3.

Similar findings concerning the importance of communication across schools to enable a successful transition were found in a study conducted for the Welsh Assembly (Morris et al., 2010). Whilst this research was examining transition from the early adopting Welsh Foundation Phase schools to the KS2 curriculum, it also compared this transition to the move from KS1 to KS2. Across both transitions, children move from one phase of education to another at the age of 7, and the findings for both suggested that good communication not only enables pupils to meet the expectations of KS2 teachers but also eases the transition for pupils.

It seems unsurprising that good communication is key to a more effective transition. Greater information sharing between the parties involved in school transitions can help to identify the factors which may influence the child's ability to adapt to their new school environment. Appropriate support and resources can therefore be implemented to achieve a balance with the challenges that the individual faces due to environmental, social and academic changes they are having to navigate. In general, research indicates that children who feel appropriately supported and prepared for the changes and potential challenges resulting from a school transition find the move to a new school easier (Evangelou et al., 2008; Rice et al., 2015; West, Sweeting and Young, 2010).

2.5 Transitions and Wellbeing

Moving to a new educational establishment can have an adverse impact for children, with evidence suggesting that most children experience some level of stress and/or anxiety

surrounding the primary to secondary school transition (West, Sweeting and Young, 2010). Furthermore, the transition from primary to secondary school has been shown to coincide with a decline in pupil wellbeing (Evans, Borriello and Field, 2018; Gutman et al., 2010; Symonds and Galton, 2014). Acknowledging that educational transitions can be a challenging time for children and therefore impact their wellbeing, this section focuses on the relationship between the two. I begin by defining the term 'wellbeing' generally before considering children's wellbeing more specifically. I then discuss the potential impact of transition on children's wellbeing, in relation to school transitions.

2.5.1 Defining Wellbeing

Since the early 21st century, the concept of 'wellbeing' has gained increasing prominence in political discourse, both in the UK and internationally (Spratt, 2016). The term is now widely used in both formal and informal contexts, frequently appearing in media coverage and government publications, and is often associated with mental health (Svane, Evans and Carter, 2019). Reflecting this growing attention, scholarly interest in wellbeing has expanded over recent decades (Dodge et al., 2012). This trend is likely to continue, particularly in light of the widely documented decline in wellbeing and mental health in the UK following the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns (O'Connor et al., 2021; Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022; Smith et al., 2020).

Although understandings of wellbeing differ depending on context, White (2010, p. 160) suggested that the concept is 'intuitively appealing' due to the term's positive connotations, holistic outlook, and person-centred approach. This is supported by Ereaut and Whiting's (2008, p. 5) research into the use of the term wellbeing by government departments in the UK, which found that, although universally accepted as a positive ideal, 'wellbeing has a 'holographic' quality; different meanings are being projected by different agents and what is apparently meant by the use of the term depends on where you stand'. Whilst this enables the term to be malleable

and change over time, adapting to the context it is being used in, it also demonstrates the importance of defining the term.

Dodge et al. (2012) identified two main theories of wellbeing: the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches. The former tradition, which is also known as subjective wellbeing, regards wellbeing as an individual's life satisfaction or experience of happiness, whereas the latter defines wellbeing as behavioural or psychological factors which are commonly accepted as contributing positively to living well. Although Dodge et al. (2012) recognised that the majority of researchers now believe wellbeing to be multidimensional, they proposed a definition of wellbeing as 'the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced' (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230). Thus, wellbeing is an equilibrium between the resources and skills individuals develop to cope with the challenges and life events they experience. Stable wellbeing can therefore be represented as a balanced seesaw, which can become askew should an individual not have the relevant resources needed to meet a particular challenge.

This definition demonstrates that wellbeing is a personalised notion which pertains differently to different individuals and their unique sets of circumstances. Maintaining the wellbeing equilibrium, and therefore managing the adjustment process, is an ongoing process, which corresponds with Bronfenbrenner's (1995) understanding of how contextual factors and personal characteristics influence individual development. As the individual's life evolves and they experience new challenges and life events, they must adapt by developing new skills and resources.

2.5.2 Children's Wellbeing

Children's wellbeing is widely recognised as influential on cognitive development and learning (Durlak et al., 2011; Public Health England, 2014), yet there does not appear to be a consensus on its definition. Generally, there are two main distinctions in the understanding of child wellbeing which feature in the literature: the developmental perspective and the children's rights

perspective (Marjanen, Ornellas and Mäntynen, 2017). The former is more likely to focus on deficit measures, such as poverty or illness, and centres on factors of wellbeing which enable children to accumulate the skills they will need in the future as adults to both take their place in society generally and to enter the workforce. Alternatively, the children's rights perspective is more concerned with the present state of a child's wellbeing, with measures that are more focused on opportunities, including the child's potential and their strengths.

As made clear by the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989), children's immediate and present wellbeing is equally important and contributes to their development and future life chances. Total wellbeing therefore should incorporate both an individual's present circumstances and their predicted future experiences (Ben-Arieh and Frønes, 2011). Statham and Chase's (2010) report for the Department for Education also supported the idea that children's wellbeing should not solely consider long-term future outcomes, suggesting a blend of approaches to understanding child wellbeing. The report recommended a multidimensional view of wellbeing which considers both objective and subjective perspectives, including those of children themselves, and acknowledges the importance of the individual and their context (Statham and Chase, 2010).

This understanding of child wellbeing corresponds with the aforementioned view of wellbeing as a seesaw in equilibrium: having sufficient resources and skills to approach challenges in life (Dodge et al., 2012). This definition unites the importance of both the 'here and now' of children's wellbeing and a child's potential future wellbeing. Like adults, children play an active role in their wellbeing through their interactions with their environment 'by balancing the different factors, developing and making use of resources, and responding to stress' (Ben-Arieh, 2008, p. 6). Children's wellbeing, both current and future, is therefore influenced by a multitude of factors due to the multidimensional nature of children's lives, which includes considerations of the transitions they experience.

2.5.3 The Impact of School Transition on Wellbeing

As previously indicated, while transitions can be seen as opportunities for personal growth and development, they can also be viewed as stressful or challenging (Bridges, 2004). A change or transition within an individual's life can impact their wellbeing by introducing new challenges for which they may not already have the specific skills and resources needed to cope (Dodge et al., 2012). An individual who is not adequately prepared for an upcoming transition may therefore experience a negative impact on their wellbeing due to this imbalance. To restore equilibrium, the individual needs to develop the relevant skills and resources needed to manage the new challenges they are facing as a result of the transition in order to enable them to successfully adapt to the new environment or situation. This process of adaptation and restoring the wellbeing equilibrium can be facilitated by the individual receiving appropriate support and resources during the transition process to help them prepare for the impending change (Arnold et al., 2007; Nicholson and West, 1988).

Studies have shown that transitions can directly impact an individual's wellbeing, both positively and negatively, depending on the particular transition that is taking place (Musick and Bumpass, 2012; Switek and Easterlin, 2018). However, it is widely acknowledged that the transition from primary to secondary school coincides with a decline in pupil wellbeing (Gutman et al., 2010; Symonds and Galton, 2014) and an increase in pupil anxiety (Bharara, 2020; Hanewald, 2013). During the initial school transition period, many children experience feelings of stress and anxiety (White, 2020) as they struggle to cope and adjust to the numerous changes occurring in their school environment (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016). Should the magnitude of these challenges outweigh the resources the child already possesses, there is the potential for their wellbeing to be negatively impacted (Dodge et al., 2012). Arguably, this situation is more likely for children due to their relative inexperience with transitions (Holas and Huston, 2012), resulting in them having

a smaller pool of skills and resources on which to draw. Preparing and supporting children in the lead-up to and during school transitions can therefore help to safeguard their wellbeing.

2.6 Supporting Pupil Wellbeing During School Transitions

A transition between schools is a significant change for any child and, like any transition, preparation and support throughout the process are important to facilitate successful adaptation to a new environment (Arnold et al., 2007; Nicholson and West, 1988). Studies have shown that supportive relationships with parents, teachers and peers can help to facilitate a successful transition (Kiuru et al., 2020; Virtanen et al., 2019), placing importance on connections between home and school throughout the process (Hanewald, 2013).

Research indicates that higher levels of wellbeing correlate with high levels of school engagement and academic achievement (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012; Public Health England, 2014), yet the transition from primary to secondary school has been found to coincide with a decline in both pupil wellbeing and attainment (Gutman et al., 2010; Symonds and Galton, 2014). An effectively managed transition through supporting pupil wellbeing is therefore pertinent and arguably of even greater importance following the disruption and impact of the pandemic (Dewa et al., 2024; Panchal et al., 2023).

2.6.1 School Support

Supportive school environments have been shown to positively impact on children's experiences of transition (Ganeson and Ehrich, 2009; Jindal-Snape et al., 2019b), with Fabian (2013) placing the onus on schools to consider how to make transitions as smooth as possible and protect children's confidence and sense of wellbeing. While transition programmes are often designed to support children and their families (Hanewald, 2013), Bagnall, Skipper and Fox (2020) critique the practice of leaving such programmes to the summer term because this can cause students to suppress their emotions regarding the transition, yet they also acknowledge that addressing

transition too soon can lead to increased anxiety for pupils. Nevertheless, Australian research by Hopwood, Hay and Dyment (2016) found that helping children gain a better understanding of the routines and structure of secondary school through regular preparation in Year 6 can help to reduce their anxiety and increase their readiness for Year 7.

Preparation and support for transition should be the responsibility of both the current and future school (van Rens et al., 2018; Waters, Lester and Cross, 2014; Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999), with evidence showing that positive experiences of transition are more likely for pupils who feel well prepared for the move by their current school (Jindal-Snape and Cantali, 2019) or for those who receive more help from their future school (Evangelou et al., 2008). Although immediate transition concerns, such as making friends, the size of the school, and workload, have been found to be relatively short lived (Gray et al., 2011), the move to a new school is a more positive experience if children have had a chance to familiarise themselves with the new setting, routines and expectations (Evangelou et al., 2008; Sirsch, 2003). This can also help to build positive anticipation regarding the transition, which has often been found to contribute strongly to their reported wellbeing before the transition occurs (Clark et al., 2008).

As secondary schools experience a high volume of pupils transitioning at the beginning of Year 7, they often organise induction programmes to help new pupils acclimatise. However, Jindal-Snape and Miller (2008) argued that the school focus is often solely on logistical and organisational matters. This concurs with earlier research by Pratt and George (2005), which claimed schools do not place enough emphasis on the changing dynamics of friendships and peer relationships which occur due to transition. Contrary to this, West, Sweeting and Young (2010) found that children had more concerns regarding the new school itself than peer relationships during the transition period. Regardless of differing concerns from varying cohorts, however, all transition programmes would benefit from being personalised and tailored to the needs of the individual students transitioning (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019b), with pupil involvement

in the planning and development of such programmes helping to increase positive expectations of the transition (Waters, Lester and Cross; 2014).

Building strong relationships and having open communication between schools, parents and pupils throughout the transition process has been shown to be vital for a successful move to a new school (Coffey, 2013; Hanewald, 2013; Morris et al., 2010). Research by O'Toole, Hayes and Mhathúna (2014, p. 124) found that communication between primary and secondary schools was 'quite strong' and focused on both the academic and the holistic. This contrasts with previous findings by Topping (2011), who found that the information shared is often more focused on academic progress and attainment, rather than pastoral issues, which Jindal-Snape and Miller (2008) found were more prominent concerns for pupils and their parents. Nevertheless, schools often communicate with one another to help with putting individualised support structures for specific children in place, which teachers believe is essential to aid a successful transition (Hopwood, Hay and Dyment, 2016). However, research by Jindal-Snape and Cantali (2019) found that there is a need for effective collaboration and communication across schools to ensure a shared understanding regarding transitions, having identified a lack of parity in transition practice, including the optimum timeframe for planning and preparation.

2.6.2 Teacher Support

The support from schools during the transition period is clearly linked to the support pupils receive from their teachers (Hanewald, 2013; Spernes, 2022), with Lester and Cross (2015) finding a correlation between pupils' wellbeing and their feelings of safety and connection to school and their teachers. Numerous studies have identified the benefits of close relationships with teachers in facilitating successful school transitions (Bharara, 2020; Jindal-Snape and Miller, 2008; Morris et al., 2010) and this refers to teachers in the settings either side of the transition, helping children to prepare in advance of the move and then navigate challenges in the new environment following the transition (Coffey, 2013).

Teacher interviews by Hopwood, Hay and Dyment (2016) found that both primary and secondary teachers believed that communication between old and new schools, curriculum continuity and adequate teacher support were all needed to support a successful and positive transition, findings which correspond with Galton, Gray and Ruddock's (1999) research.

Support from teachers during the process of moving to a new school is significant in helping pupils feel more settled (Bailey and Baines, 2012; Coffey, 2013) and students who feel closely supported by their primary school teachers have been found to experience a smoother transition overall and develop more positive relationships with teachers in their new school (Waters, Lester and Cross, 2014). This corresponds with findings by Symonds and Galton (2014), who found that children who receive greater emotional support from teachers report higher levels of self-esteem and reduced symptoms of depression during the transition period, and Evangelou et al. (2008), who identified that support from teachers immediately following the transition enabled children to more easily adjust to the new school.

New school environments with an increased number of teachers can be challenging for pupils (Tobbell and O'Donnell, 2013), though Bagnall, Skipper and Fox (2020) found that having a single form tutor who is nurturing, supportive and able to get to know their pupils well, can greatly aid the transition and first year at the new school. Overall, teachers are seen as key in helping students to settle into their new school (Coffey, 2013). Conflict with teachers negatively affects pupil wellbeing (Kiuru et al., 2020), whereas a more positive transition is enabled when teachers make learning engaging and enjoyable (Ganeson and Ehrich, 2009), whilst being supportive and caring (Hammond, 2016).

2.6.3 Parental and Family Support

Alongside schools and teachers, parents play a vital role in supporting and encouraging children throughout the transition process and helping to protect their wellbeing (Kiuru et al., 2020; Virtanen et al., 2019). Increased levels of parental support have been shown to correspond with

children experiencing fewer symptoms of anxiety during the transition process (Duchesne et al., 2009) and a longitudinal study by Waters, Lester and Cross (2014) found that parental support and involvement were the most significant predictors for a successful transition, potentially due to parents being able to provide a consistent relationship and source of continuity for children, during a time when many other aspects of their lives are uncertain (Zeedyk et al., 2003).

It is not solely parental relationships that help to facilitate a smoother transition between schools, but also family involvement generally (Bharara, 2020; Hanewald, 2013), with children reporting that their family was the main source of support when transitioning to secondary school (Topping, 2011). Furthermore, children who have an older sibling or relative already at the school they are moving to are more likely to experience a positive transition due to their increased familiarity and insider knowledge of the new setting, reducing anxiety and limiting negative perceptions (Evangelou et al., 2008; Mackenzie, McMaugh and O'Sullivan, 2012). Of course, the opposite can be the case if siblings or relatives choose to share negative experiences prior to the transition (Jindal-Snape and Foggie, 2008).

Parental support can come in various forms, such as being aware of and involved in school events; maintaining structure and routine at home to ensure consistency; fostering independence; and helping to reinforce the raised expectations of secondary education (Hammond, 2016; Hanewald, 2013; McGee et al., 2004). Bagnall, Skipper and Fox (2020) stress the importance of parents and children having open communication concerning how they are feeling throughout the transition process. Discussing how the experience is going is particularly important as a child's attitude and confidence towards the transition can directly affect it (Fabian, 2013). A study by Fortuna (2014) found that parents were usually more accurate than teachers in gauging the emotions of their children during the transition process, which Fortuna explained may be due to parents having closer relationships with their children, who may only be revealing their true feelings at home. Nevertheless, he did caution that the parental voice could be

influenced and skewed by the parent's own feelings towards the transition (Fortuna, 2014). This corresponds with findings by Lucey and Reay (2000), who found that parent and child anxieties can be bidirectional, with it often being difficult to distinguish between the two.

It is therefore key to recognise the transition that the parents are also undergoing, particularly if this is the first time they are experiencing a school transition as a parent, where they too are having to develop sufficient skills and resources to cope with the new challenges they are facing (Dodge et al., 2012). Parents are therefore potentially negotiating a change in their parental role as their child moves to a new school (O'Toole, Hayes and Mhathúna, 2014), alongside adjusting to the differences in communication and concerns surrounding their child being overlooked in a larger environment (Zeedyk et al., 2003). Such anxieties can become more intense if parents receive limited support from schools (Coffey, 2013), which could, in turn, elevate children's concerns and impact their anticipation of the transition (Lucey and Reay, 2000). Supporting parents through the transition that they are making alongside their child may therefore indirectly also benefit the child and enable a smoother transition.

2.6.4 Peer Support

Moving to a new school inevitably results in changes to relationships amongst peers (Rice et al., 2015; Ng-Knight et al., 2019). It is therefore unsurprising that the social aspect of moving schools and potential issues with, or disruptions to, friendships are a main concern for children throughout the transition (Bagnall, Skipper and Fox, 2020; Rice, Frederickson and Seymour, 2011), with the changing nature of friendships being identified as a prominent issue impacting children during the process of transition from primary to secondary school (Curson, Wilson-Smith and Holliman, 2019).

Weller (2007) explained that relationships with peers over the transition period can be classified into three main categories. They may either endure the transition through moving to the same new school and class, become ruptured through moving to different schools or being separated in the

same school due to differing classes or even evolving interests, or they may be transitional, which are short term friendships that are developed to support each other during the early stages of changing schools (Weller, 2007). During the lead-up to the transition, children can experience significant distress due to tensions within their friendship groups, resulting in worries and concerns about making new friends in the new school environment (Waters, Lester and Cross, 2014). Prior friendships may become strained or even rupture as children develop transitional relationships with peers moving to the same school as they attempt to manage their apprehension and anxiety regarding the transition (Weller, 2007).

It is these transitional relationships that have been shown to have the greatest influence on children positively anticipating the transition, especially for those who are moving alongside peers from their former school (Waters et al., 2012), with transitional relationships helping children to manage the transition through building their confidence and helping to foster a sense of belonging (Weller, 2007). Th is consistent with research by Evangelou et al. (2008), which found that children were more likely to experience a positive transition if moving schools with the majority of their primary school friends. Hanewald (2013) similarly concluded that moving with peers can increase children's confidence, resilience and emotional intelligence, helping to provide children with the social skills needed to make new friends. However, Jindal-Snape and Cantali's (2019) longitudinal study found that moving with peers did not influence children's expectations of potential issues during the transition.

Nevertheless, pupils acknowledge the benefit of peer support both before and after the transition (Spernes, 2022; O'Toole, Hayes and Mhathúna, 2014; Waters, Lester and Cross, 2014) and changes in peer support have been shown to directly affect pupil wellbeing both positively and negatively during school transition (Kiuru et al., 2020; Lester and Cross, 2014; Virtanen et al., 2019). Even merely anticipating the continued support of friends has been shown to help students regard transition in a more positive light (Tsuzuki, 2012), with social support from friends

specifically (Martínez et al., 2011) and social acceptance by peers generally (Vaz et al., 2015) being seen as fundamental during the transition process.

Peer support can be particularly key in helping children adapt to their new environment, especially if they are feeling the loss of previous friendships and experiencing concerns, fears or even loneliness during the initial transition period (Jindal-Snape and Miller, 2008). Children who move schools without any friends from their primary school, or who have previously had negative friendship experiences, have been shown to achieve poorer outcomes (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019a), whereas children who maintain close friendships across the transition have been found to experience fewer behavioural and emotional problems and achieve greater academic progress (Ng-Knight et al., 2019).

2.6.5 Collaborative Support

Support during school transition comes from various sources and individuals within a child's life. Children who have positive relationships and good communication with their parents, teachers and peers have been shown to experience fewer challenges in adapting to their new schools (Hanewald, 2013), with students' interpersonal relationships with these stakeholders helping to increase both academic achievement and wellbeing following transition (Kiuru et al., 2020). As different stakeholders support various aspects of the transitions in unique, collaborative and cumulative ways, Jindal-Snape and Foggie (2008, p. 16) have suggested that 'the responsibility for smooth transition lies not only with the school but with the child, parents and community as well'. This corresponds with research by El Zaatari and Maalouf (2022), who found that numerous school climate factors played a role in directly influencing a child's sense of belonging to their school, including peer interactions, teacher-student relationships and parental involvement, as well as school safety, school social practices and having an effective learning environment.

Generally during the transition process, the role of schools is to increase familiarity with the new environment (Evangelou et al., 2008; Sirsch, 2003) and help prepare children for the new routines

and structures they will experience (Hopwood, Hay and Dyment, 2016), with supportive relationships with teachers helping children to settle and successfully adapt to the new environment (Coffey, 2013; Hammond, 2016). Parents also support and encourage children emotionally (Kiuru et al., 2020; Virtanen et al., 2019), providing continuity during a tumultuous time (Zeedyk et al., 2003), whereas positive relationships with peers help children to develop feelings of belonging in the new school (Weller, 2007).

Support is therefore multi-faceted, and studies suggest that the key to a successful transition is clear communication and positive relationships between all those involved (Bagnall, Skipper and Fox, 2020; Davis, Ravenscroft and Bizas, 2015; Fabian, 2013), which is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) emphasis on the importance of strong connections between individuals comprising a child's mesosystem. However, research has shown that the various stakeholders affected by school transitions all have different concerns regarding the move between schools (Bagnall, Skipper and Fox, 2020; Jindal-Snape and Miller, 2008). Topping's (2011) review of 88 transition studies found that teachers mainly focus on academic matters and attainment, whereas pupils' concerns are more related to social and emotional issues. However, it appears that there is limited evidence of transition programmes that are designed to collaboratively accommodate the needs of all parties involved (van Rens et al., 2018) and which place the child's experience at the centre. This is despite research showing that parents are more likely to support their child's transition effectively if they are involved as equal partners (Davis, Ravenscroft and Bizas, 2015) and that pupil involvement in developing transition programmes positively affects the experience of transition (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019b). The evidence therefore suggests that considering school transition as a collaborative process would benefit all parties involved and viewing transitions from a variety of perspectives would enable effective transition programmes to be implemented. This is particularly pertinent as it is not only children who are adapting to new roles, expectations and identities but also their parents, teachers and peers (Hanewald, 2013), which in turn can influence and impact the child's experience of transition.

2.7 Research Questions Emerging from the Literature

Transitions play a crucial role in the educational, social and emotional development of children (O'Toole, Hayes and Mhathúna, 2014). However, school transitions are also recognised as a period of upheaval in children's lives, during which they face numerous new challenges and changes that can impact their wellbeing (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021). Supporting children during this time of educational transition is essential in helping them adjust to their new school setting and adapt to the new rules, routines, and expectations they will inevitably encounter (Arnold et al., 2007). This involves ensuring that they possess sufficient resources and skills to meet these challenges and, in doing so, safeguarding their wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012).

This support can come from a variety of different sources and individuals within a child's life, such as parents, teachers and peers, working both in isolation and collaboratively to help uphold children's wellbeing during this time of change (Hanewald, 2013; Kiuru et al., 2020; Virtanen et al., 2019). Experiencing supportive proximal processes throughout the transition can positively influence how children adapt to changes in their environment. These processes are further strengthened through robust connections within their mesosystem (O'Toole, Hayes and Mhathúna, 2014). It is therefore important to view transitions as multi-faceted and to consider them from a range of perspectives (Jindal-Snape, 2016).

Given the relative lack of research in this area, this study seeks to explore the ways in which children can be supported when moving between educational settings from KS1 to KS2, with a particular focus on children's wellbeing. The study is situated within the context of pupils transitioning into the independent sector of education in the UK. Therefore, the main research question guiding this study is:

How might children's wellbeing be best supported across Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 transitions to UK independent schools?

Whilst most of the existing literature on school transitions focuses on the move from primary to secondary school, this research aims to examine how best to support the wellbeing of pupils transitioning from KS1 to KS2, specifically within the context of two different educational establishments, where the latter is an independent preparatory school. Although there may be some similarities in the types of support structures required, it is likely that younger children transitioning between schools may need additional or different forms of support. Transitions at a younger age are often considered more challenging, as children typically have lower levels of cognitive and emotional maturity (Bagnall, Fox and Skipper, 2021) and are less likely to have had prior experience navigating educational transitions independently (Symonds, 2015).

To comprehensively address the main research question and to explore the phenomenon of school transition in this specific context, the following subsidiary questions will also be considered:

- How do the two different educational establishments support children who are transitioning between them from KS1 to KS2?
- To what extent and in what ways do parents support their child's transition between schools?
- How are parents supported during their child's transition?
- How do children's feelings about the school transition change and how does this impact on their wellbeing through the transition?

These questions reflect the multi-faceted nature of support during the transition period and how children are prepared – both directly and indirectly – at home and at school. They also consider the co-occurring and resultant transitions triggered by a child's move to a new school, while conceptualising the transition as an ongoing, evolving process rather than a single event. Through these questions, the study aims to examine the various sources of support and strategies that

can help safeguard children's wellbeing during transitions from KS1 to KS2, particularly within the context of UK independent schools.

2.8 Summary

This review has explored the existing literature on supporting children's wellbeing during school transitions, with particular attention to the disruptions that transitions can cause within a child's microsystem. It has examined a range of approaches that may ease a child's adjustment to the new circumstances brought about by such transitions. The evidence highlights that support should come from multiple sources within a child's life to ensure they have the necessary skills and resources to navigate these changes successfully.

This research seeks to investigate the specific support required to safeguard children's wellbeing during the transition to Key Stage 2 within the independent sector. It addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on younger children, in contrast to the more widely studied primary-to-secondary school transition, and considers the differing perspectives of stakeholders involved in and affected by the process. The following chapter outlines the methodology and methods used to achieve these research aims.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

3.1 Introduction

The literature review chapter has indicated the extensive research on transitions in education, but the focus has not necessarily been on children's wellbeing, thus identifying a research gap. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore ways in which children's wellbeing can be supported during school transitions, with this chapter providing an overview and justification of the choices and decisions taken regarding the methodological approach used within this research, along with the methods chosen to generate and analyse the data.

The reason for using the term 'generation', rather than 'collection' is to acknowledge my active role as a researcher in generating and co-constructing data with the participants (Goldkuhl, 2019). To collect data implies that data are independent entities existing in the world and waiting to be found, rather than data becoming data through the research process. Generating implies that the data have been created and, indeed, in this study it has been formed alongside the research participants' views, perspectives and experiences, as well as my own.

This chapter begins by presenting and justifying the research design of this study, before providing an overview of the research project. Sampling strategies and data generation methods are then set out, as well as a summary of the data analysis approach used within the study. The trustworthiness of this research and ethical considerations are also discussed, illustrating how ethical conduct has been maintained throughout the project, especially in considering my status as an insider researcher.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

Research design is informed by the beliefs and assumptions the researcher holds about knowledge and its development (Mack, 2010), with the researcher's positionality impacting all aspects of their research (Basit, 2013; Greenbank, 2003). Acknowledging this influence through the process of reflexivity can enable researchers to minimise bias and enhance the transparency of their research (Patton, 2015). The design of this study has been guided by an interpretivist paradigm, comprising my interpretive axiology, relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology. Each of these philosophical assumptions has contributed to informing the research, leading to the selection of a case study approach.

Adopting an interpretive axiological position acknowledges that research cannot be value free because it is directly influenced by the researcher's beliefs and assumptions (McNiff, 2012). My choice of research topic is based on my subjective first-hand experience as Head of Year 3 in the case study school, and conducting research within my own professional setting as an insider researcher will undoubtedly influence the study, explored in greater detail in Section 3.2.4.

Whilst my experiences and knowledge will impact and influence the research, my ontological and epistemological position acknowledges that both reality and knowledge are subjective, and therefore there is much to learn from the perspectives of others. As all individuals interpret events from their own unique perspective (Mack, 2010), research should consider the differing realities and experiences of all stakeholders (Suter, 2012). My experience of the transition being explored within this study, for example, could be substantially different from that of others, such as the children, their parents and indeed other teachers.

This viewpoint corresponds with the conceptualisation of transitions under MMT theory (Jindal-Snape, 2016), which sees transitions as multiple and synchronous, impacting upon multiple

stakeholders and resulting in them also experiencing transitions of their own. When a child moves to a new school, they are not the only individual to experience a transition as their parents, teachers and peers also experience multiple interconnected transitions. To fully understand this complex phenomenon, transitions should therefore be viewed through the perspectives of those experiencing them (Jindal-Snape, 2016; Spernes, 2022), considering and appreciating the varying realities and experiences of the different stakeholders undergoing the transition. Consequently, the inclusion of a range of voices and perspectives will add to a more detailed understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied.

3.2.2 Qualitative Research

The view that knowledge is a subjective construct (Greenbank, 2003) and that individuals interpret events according to their own perspective (Mack, 2010) means that interpretivism has close links to qualitative research methods. Qualitative researchers seek to understand how individuals make sense of the world (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) through interpreting human behaviours and experiences (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013) whilst accepting and appreciating the contributions and influence both the participants and the researcher have upon the study (Carr, 2015). This approach therefore allows the phenomenon of transition to be explored in its natural context, providing a more holistic view by uncovering rich and nuanced insights (Creswell, 2014) to enable a broader understanding of school transition.

Corresponding with MMT theory's conceptualisation of the numerous individuals impacted through a given transition (Jindal-Snape, 2016) and the wide-ranging effects this process of change has on a child's ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), an interpretivist qualitative approach seeks to reveal multiple perspectives and understandings of reality (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013) rather than searching for a single objective reality. The choice of qualitative research therefore encapsulates my desire to understand a range of different participants' perspectives and experiences of the transition process.

Each child's experience of transition is unique, as is the indirect experience faced by individuals within their ecological environment, and all of these experiences are key to painting a broad and detailed picture of the transition process. I therefore seek to explore how children can be supported during this time with the full acknowledgement that there is no 'one size fits all' approach and that different children will require different amounts and types of support.

3.2.3 Case Study Approach

This research aims to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of how pupil wellbeing can be supported during transition to KS2 in the independent sector. As previously highlighted, a school transition will impact upon multiple stakeholders (Jindal-Snape, 2010), who will have differing experiences and perspectives of the process. To fully understand the complex and multi-faceted phenomenon of school transition, I therefore sought to include a variety of different perspectives within the research and thereby provide a voice to the various stakeholders impacted by a school transition. Furthermore, to maintain the authenticity of the experiences of the participants, I wanted to explore school transition within a real-life context. These aims therefore led me to choose to adopt a case study approach, an empirical inquiry where a contemporary phenomenon is explored in depth within its natural context (Yin, 2018).

Case study research allows the exploration of complex and context-bound phenomena by providing an in-depth understanding of a particular case (or cases) through the examination of context and nuances that may be missed by other research methods (Stake, 2006). It enables a more detailed understanding and multidimensional perspective of the research topic (Remenyi et al., 2002) by examining the phenomenon in its real-life setting (Crowe et al., 2011), using multiple sources of evidence and information (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Moreover, Yin (2018) defined three types of case study: exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. Exploratory studies seek to investigate a phenomenon with the intention of identifying new directions for research, whereas explanatory studies look for causal factors to explain a given

phenomenon (Priya, 2021). The purpose of a descriptive case study, however, is to provide a detailed description of the phenomenon in its real-life context (Yin, 2018), which is the aim of this research.

Whilst a phenomenological research approach would also have focused on the lived experiences of transition for the individuals involved, the key to case study research is centring the issue within a real-life setting (Creswell and Poth, 2018), which in this study is the independent boys' preparatory school where this research took place. Through conducting case study research, the uniqueness and complexity of transition within this specific setting can be studied and a broader awareness of the issues surrounding supporting pupil wellbeing gained.

Despite its benefits, case study research is still open to criticisms regarding its lack of replicability and generalisability to other settings and the potential for researcher bias (Priya, 2021). For example, within this research, the small participant group and the specificity of the independent boys' preparatory school context may limit the study's broader applicability, along with the impact of my interpretations as a qualitative researcher. However, it is important to consider that as this is a qualitative study, the focus of the research is therefore on the experiences of the participants involved in the case study, rather than obtaining data with a solid statistical basis, helping to gain a complex and rich understanding of the phenomenon of transition within this specific context. Nevertheless, it is still important to ensure that high quality research is conducted. To do so, I sought to adhere to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) principles of trustworthiness, which will be discussed in greater detail in Section 3.7, alongside practising reflexivity, addressed in the next section.

3.2.4 Insider Research and the Role of Reflexivity

The influence of my professional context on my choice of research area and the desire to explore school transition within its natural setting led me to choose to conduct insider research within my professional setting. For case study research, insider knowledge of the research topic and

setting is an advantage, aiding the development of expert understanding of the research area. Nevertheless, Stake (2006) emphasised the importance of the researcher being reflexive and recognising their own biases and assumptions when conducting such research.

Within interpretivist research generally, the researcher is viewed as part of the social reality being studied (Grix, 2018). Research is seen as a 'collaborative enterprise, which sees participants as co-researchers who enter fully into the process' (Maxwell, 2006, p. 22). The relationship between the researcher and the participants is therefore bilateral, with the influence that both parties have on one another recognised within the research, along with the impact they both have on the research process. However, acknowledging one's positionality and its influence upon the research is key to maintaining transparency (Basit, 2013; Patton, 2015) and arguably even more crucial for insider research due to the researcher themselves being the instrument (Burnard et al., 2018; Greene, 2014).

Within this study, during the period of data generation, I was employed as an English teacher and Head of Year 3 at the school where this research was conducted. I therefore had a prior relationship to some degree with all the participants, having worked professionally with the teachers and had either taught or was the Head of Year for the students, and therefore knew their parents. For some of the teachers and parents, this relationship had been established for many years by virtue of having taught at the school for over four years prior to commencing the study.

Being an insider researcher brings with it both advantages and challenges (Greene, 2014). Having a pre-existing knowledge of the research context (Bell, 2005) meant that I knew what participants were referring to when they mentioned things that were context-specific, for example, terminology such as 'prep', which is the term used for homework. However, increased familiarity can also lead to a greater risk of the researcher making assumptions based on prior experiences (DeLyser, 2001). Insider researchers should therefore be cautious that they do not project their opinions or views onto participants or influence data analysis (Greene, 2014).

Insider researchers also benefit from easier access to participants (Gregory, 2017) which may help them build rapport with participants more swiftly, who may appreciate the opportunity to talk with someone who they know understands their specific context (Bell, 2005). Again, however, caution must be exercised concerning the researcher's influence, such as possible bias and the potential impact of power relationships with participants (Brooks, te Riele and Maguire, 2014). This was a key consideration of mine due to my role as Head of Year 3. I did not want any of the participants to feel obliged to take part in the research, nor did I want them to adapt or amend their answers to what they thought I wanted to hear. Whilst as an interpretivist researcher, I acknowledge the influence of my positionality, values and experiences on all aspects of the research (Basit, 2013; Greenbank, 2003), I still wanted my research to authentically represent the voices of my participants. I therefore tried to be as transparent as possible, explaining to all the participants that I wanted to hear about their experiences, good and bad, and stressing that everything they said would be anonymised.

To further minimise bias, throughout the research process I have sought to practise reflexivity by considering how my subjectivity and positionality have shaped the various stages of the research, from the initial design of the research, through to the analysis and interpretation of the data (Bukamal, 2022). Although reflexivity is sometimes criticised as a justification for a lack of objectivity in research (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023), from an interpretivist standpoint, research—particularly qualitative studies—cannot be regarded as entirely objective, as it is unavoidably shaped by the researcher's experiences and values (McNiff, 2012). Rather than being a limitation, the researcher's subjectivity is recognised as an integral and valuable component of the research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

As a qualitative researcher, my role is not to seek out objective facts regarding school transitions. Rather, I am attempting to understand the lived experiences of my participants, which are in themselves inherently subjective. Through reflexivity I have tried to be consciously aware of my

position when interacting with participants (Bukamal, 2022) so that I can accurately represent their experiences as they have been presented to me. However, I also acknowledge that the data generated have been formed alongside both the participants' subjectivity as well as my own. Furthermore, I am cognisant that the themes within my analysis have not emerged from the data but rather have been constructed and developed through my subjective interpretation and understanding of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2020).

As a result of conducting this study under an interpretivist paradigm, it would be impossible to remove myself entirely from the research. Therefore, through practising reflexivity, I have sought to be transparent with my positionality and all aspects of the research process, critically considering how these influence and impact upon one another. This chapter now describes the research design and the methods used, along with the ethical considerations.

3.3 Overview of Research Project

In designing this research project, I sought to include three participant groups: teachers, parents and pupils. Four research instruments were used, which are discussed in more detail in Section 3.5. The Gantt chart (Table 3.1) details the timeline of data generation, following the piloting of the research instruments, which took place in the previous calendar year.

Research Instrument	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Teacher Interviews												
Pupil Questionnaires												
Pupil Focus Groups												
Parent Interviews												

Table 3.1: Gantt chart illustrating data generation timeline during 2022

The pupil questionnaires were placed at three-month intervals to enable a longitudinal aspect to the study and help to gauge how anticipated experiences compared to actual experiences more

accurately than relying solely on hindsight. Originally, I had intended to identify two points of data generation for the parental interviews but due to a change in gatekeeper consent, the interviews had to occur in the new academic year. Most of the data generation for pupils and parents therefore happened between September and December, which enabled those participants to describe their recent experiences of beginning a new school. This also provided them with the opportunity to reflect on the preparation that had occurred in the lead-up to the transition and comment on their opinion of its effectiveness.

3.4 Sampling

Sampling is an important aspect of qualitative research as it helps to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the findings. As qualitative case study research involves an in-depth exploration of a particular case (Yin, 2018), sampling is critical to ensure that the participants selected are representative of the chosen case and can provide rich data that can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This in turn can help to minimise bias in the study by enhancing the transferability of the findings, whilst also helping to ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of participants (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013).

Within this study, there was a separate sample for each of the research instruments (see Table 3.2 for population and sample sizes). In all cases, the process of selecting participants was clearly outlined in the participant information leaflet and, for the child participants, this information was additionally provided during a year group assembly to the cohort. Detailed below is an explanation of the sampling process for each research instrument.

Research Instrument	Population	Desired Sample	Actual Sample
Teacher Interviews	4	4	3
Pupil Questionnaires	28	28	7
Pupil Focus Groups	59	12	15
Parent Interviews*	59	6	6

** The numbers for the parent interviews correspond to sets of parents for each child*

Table 3.2: Table illustrating the numbers of participants sampled from the study

Teacher Interviews

As previously mentioned, the study school belongs to the same charitable trust as two pre-preparatory schools. These schools act as 'feeder schools', with approximately 50% of the Year 3 cohort having previously attended one of them. Two additional local pre-preparatory schools are also considered feeder schools for the case study school, although they are not part of the same charitable trust. Nevertheless, all four feeder schools maintain close professional links with the case study school, including shared professional development opportunities such as peer observations across settings.

Teacher participants were selected using purposive sampling, where individuals are chosen based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives because they 'are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information' (Kelly, 2010, p. 317). For this study, the criteria required that participants be Year 2 teachers at one of the feeder schools, who had experienced at least one transition process from that school at the end of Year 2 and were currently class teachers of children due to join the 2022 cohort at the case study school. This produced a sample of four potential interview participants, though consent was received from only three.

Pupil Questionnaires

For the pupil questionnaires, a purposive sample was drawn from children in the two pre-preparatory schools owned by the same charitable trust who were due to transition to the case study school in September 2022. While other children in these schools were moving on to different settings—and additional pupils from various schools were also joining the case study school—the selected sample focused on pupils from the trust schools transitioning to the case study school. This decision was made for ease of access and convenience in distributing the questionnaires across the planned four data collection points. Although this generated a potential sample of 28 pupils, consent was obtained for only seven.

Due to a response rate of 25%—considerably lower than anticipated—I revised the research design to include pupil focus groups. This addition aimed to enhance the depth of data and strengthen pupil voice within the study.

Pupil Focus Groups

Simple random sampling was used to generate a sample size of 20% of the pupils in the entire 2022-2023 Year 3 cohort to participate in the pupil focus groups. This population did not just include pupils who had previously attended one of the two pre-preparatory schools in the same charitable trust, but all pupils who started attending the case study school in September 2022.

To select the sample, all pupils in the 2022-2023 Year 3 cohort were listed alphabetically by surname in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and each child was allocated a unique random integer between 1 and 59. Consent from pupils and their parents was requested for the children who had been allocated the numbers 1 to 12. Whilst no reason was supplied for the lack of consent, as the forms were simply not returned, this response rate for consent forms was very much in keeping with usual patterns of documents being returned in the context of wider, everyday school engagement. Where consent was not obtained for individuals, I continued sequentially down the list of random numbers until I had a total of twelve participants. The first four, ordered by their random number, became the first focus group and so on.

I had originally planned for three focus groups (each with four children) but one of the children in the third group was ill on the day of their session. Whilst I still carried out the focus group with three children, I found the group dynamic was very different with a smaller number of children and the conversation did not flow as well as for the previous two focus groups. This, combined with the fact that the child who had been absent was very keen to still take part in the research, caused me to increase the sample size when they returned to school, by inviting three more participants (also chosen using the same simple random sampling method) for a fourth focus group to take place.

Parent Interviews

Simple random sampling was also used for the parent interviews, with newly generated random numbers being allocated to each of the pupils in the Year 3 2022-2023 cohort. The invited parents were therefore not necessarily the parents of the boys who had either completed the questionnaires or taken part in the focus groups, although there was some overlap.

A sample size of 10% was generated in a similar way to how pupil participants for the focus groups had been selected. However, as the sample size was smaller, I only sought consent from the parents of the first six names on this list. Only one parent declined to give consent, due to being out of the country on business. Again, where consent was not obtained, I continued down the list of random numbers until a total of six sets of parents had been selected. Within this sample of six, the parents of two of the children both wished to participate in the interviews, resulting in eight parent participants.

3.5 Data Generation Methods

In seeking a comprehensive insight into the area of transition and the more specific topic of children's wellbeing during this process, I triangulated the data using several different methods and involved multiple participant groups (Hamilton, 2011). Through the involvement of a range of different participants, including teachers, parents and pupils, I was able to consider multiple perspectives from the individuals involved in and affected by a child's school transition (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019b).

The data generation occurred over a year, from January to December 2022, which spanned the transition period for the 2022-2023 pupil cohort. The four different research methods involved are now described, along with a rationale for their choice. For each instrument, the design, the piloting process and the data generation are outlined. The piloting for each research instrument is presented as part of each instrument's research design, rather than all of the piloting being

discussed in a single section, as each contributed to the research design of the corresponding instrument and influenced how the data were generated.

3.5.1 Research Instrument 1: Year 2 Teacher Interviews

Teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating transitions between educational establishments, particularly in the development of the pupils' social, emotional and academic abilities (Eccles and Roeser, 2011). Through their direct and continuous interactions with the pupils they teach, teachers can provide valuable insights into pupils' experiences and feelings during school transition. By describing their observations, interpretations and reflections on pupils' behaviour, academic performance, social interactions and emotional responses surrounding the transition, they can provide rich and diverse data to deepen the understanding of how pupil wellbeing can be supported during this time of change, along with identifying barriers and challenges that may impede pupil transition (Keenan, Evans and Crowley, 2016).

I was therefore keen to include teacher perspectives within this study and considered the best way to enable an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences was through interviews, rather than questionnaires. Interviews provide a rich and detailed understanding of the research topic, as participants can share their personal stories and unique insights (Goldkuhl, 2019; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Questionnaires are typically limited to closed-ended questions which may not capture the complexity and nuance of participants' experiences, often leading to incomplete or ambiguous responses (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Even where open-ended questions are used within questionnaires, the questions themselves are fixed and therefore lack the flexibility of interviews, whereby researchers can probe deeper into participants' responses, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their perspectives (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015).

Design of Interview

The Year 2 teacher interviews were designed to be semi-structured with a few key prompt questions to allow a balance between flexibility and structure (Yin, 2018). The questions were open-ended to enable participants to provide a detailed account of their perspectives and experiences, whilst also ensuring that the relevant topics were covered (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The initial questions (Appendix 2) focused on how the responsibility of supporting students during the process of transition falls to both schools, a view that had been prominent in the literature (van Rens et al., 2018; Waters, Lester and Cross, 2014). These questions were later revised following piloting, which is discussed later.

Using semi-structured interviews allows for rich and detailed responses, where the researcher can ask for clarification or elaboration where needed (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015), enabling the detailed and comprehensive data generation desired for case study research (Yin, 2018). Such interviews also provide the flexibility to adapt the interview questions to the emerging data if necessary (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

The semi-structured interviews were with individual teachers as they were all from different schools and therefore had separate experiences and perspectives of transition from their professional setting to the case study school. They were designed to last for approximately 30 to 40 minutes to avoid participant fatigue and maintain the quality of the data (Warren, 2012). For convenience, the interviews were conducted online, eliminating the need for travel, and enabling greater flexibility of scheduling. The interviews were recorded to aid with transcription, saving time and reducing errors in the data generation and analysis stages of research (Kivits, 2005).

Despite their benefits, online interviews have limitations, such as the potential for technical difficulties and the reduced opportunity to build rapport compared to face-to-face interviews (Varma et al., 2021). To minimise the likelihood of issues with the technology, I used Google Meet software, with which I was familiar, having used this platform during online learning. I also had

the advantage of having prior professional relationships with all of the Year 2 teachers who were interviewed. Therefore, building rapport was not an issue, although this did mean I needed to be conscious of the potential for response bias due to the power dynamics (Brooks, te Riele and Maguire, 2014; Greene, 2014).

Piloting

Piloting an interview is an important step in qualitative research as it helps to identify and address any issues with the questions being asked or the format in which the interview takes place before conducting the actual data generation (Braun and Clarke, 2021). A pilot study involves testing the interview questions and procedures with a small sample of participants to assess their clarity, feasibility and appropriateness (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006). In particular, I wished to identify if any of the questions were unclear or ambiguous (Braun and Clarke, 2021) and to check for any potential logistical or technical issues that may arise during data generation (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006), particularly as the interviews were being conducted online.

I arranged a pilot interview with a former colleague who is a Year 6 teacher in a maintained primary school. Whilst her setting is not the same as that of my research, the knowledge and experience she has of pupil transition between educational establishments was suitable to trial the questions and identify if any changes were needed. The pilot interview was conducted using Google Meet software and recorded, the same process I intended to use for the study. Through using the same software and equipment, I aimed to reduce the risk of technical problems such as poor sound quality or data loss (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006) and was pleased that these were not evident.

There were, however, revisions made to the questions following the pilot interview, through reflecting and engaging with the data alongside the literature (Appendix 2). Specifically, the new questions had an increased focus on parental involvement in the transition process (Hammond, 2016; Hanewald, 2013; and McGee et al., 2004) and asked more directly about the type of

information regarding individual children that is passed from one school to the next (see Jindal-Snape and Miller, 2008; Topping, 2011). Both were themes that had been prominent in the literature yet were not included in the semi-structured pilot interview.

Data Generation

As my experience of conducting interviews was limited, I scheduled the teacher interview stage of the data generation as early as possible to provide ample time to reflect on the interviews and analyse the data. I was cognisant that most data generation would occur between September and December. As the teacher interviews were not as time sensitive as the later stages of data generation, which focused more on specific individual experiences of a particular transition, I was keen to complete these interviews as soon as possible.

I sent out invitations for the Year 2 teacher interviews to the four Year 2 teachers who fulfilled the criteria for the purposive sampling (see Section 3.4 Sampling) in December 2021. Three of these teachers agreed to participate and provided written consent (see Appendix 3 for example consent forms). The interviews were then arranged and conducted online over a two-week period in January 2022.

3.5.2 Research Instrument 2: Pupil Questionnaires

Understanding the pupil perspective and experience of school transition is key for research into supporting pupil wellbeing at this time in their lives. The transition from one school to another can be a significant source of stress and anxiety for students (Rudasill et al., 2018) so data from pupils themselves can provide valuable insights into the factors that contribute to a successful transition and the support that can be provided to facilitate this process.

In my initial design, the pupil questionnaires were the entirety of pupil voice within the study, chosen to access a large number of participants to increase transferability. Whilst, as previously mentioned, the questionnaire did not have the desired response rate, asking all the pupils

participating the same questions made it easier to compare and analyse responses, thus helping to improve the trustworthiness of the data (Johnson and Rasulova, 2017). This was particularly key as I wanted to distribute questionnaires at multiple points throughout the transition process to track how feelings towards transition changed over time and compare potential differences between the anticipated and actual experiences of transition, as was seen in the literature (Jindal-Snape and Cantali, 2019; Waters, Lester and Cross, 2014).

Design of Questionnaire

A longitudinal pupil questionnaire was designed to be distributed at four separate intervals bridging the transition period. The wording of the questions did change slightly between the questionnaires distributed before and after the move to the new school. However, as can be seen in more detail in Appendix 4, this was mainly in terms of tense. For example, the question 'What are you looking forward to about your new school?' was changed to 'What are you most enjoying about your new school?'.

The questionnaire was designed to include mostly open-ended questions to encourage respondents to provide more detailed and thoughtful answers (Babbie, 2020). Whilst I had considered predominantly using closed questions to aid the consistency and comparability of responses (Bryman, 2016), open-ended questions reduce the likelihood of participants being constrained by inbuilt expectations, enabling a broader range of answers and a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Flick, 2018).

The age of the participants was a key factor that I considered throughout the design of the questionnaire. I ensured that there were not too many questions, keeping the questionnaire to one page so it did not appear daunting. A child- and dyslexia-friendly font was used for the questionnaire, along with attractive school-themed cartoon pictures. I was very keen for the questionnaire not to appear too formal or like a test of any kind and I did not want the children to feel obligated to complete the questionnaire or that there were any 'correct' answers. As part of

this and not wanting to use any leading vocabulary, I also amended the language of my original design to remove the term 'worried' in case it implied that a transition was only a negative experience, and replaced this with a broader question asking how the child was feeling in relation to the transition and the new school.

Piloting

To decide whether changing the wording on the pupil questionnaires from the original design would have an impact on the data generated, I decided to pilot two different pupil questionnaires for comparison (see Figure 3.1 and 3.2 below), where the third and fourth questions both differed in the vocabulary used and the third question was adapted from a closed-ended Likert scale question to an open-ended question.

Pupil questionnaire 3 & 4: post-transition to Year 3

1. What are you most enjoying about your new school?
2. What has been the most difficult thing about your new school?
3. How worried are you about being at your new school?
   Circle a number from 0 (not worried at all) to 10 (worried a lot).
   0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4. If you are still worried, what are you worried about?
5. Who can you talk to if you have questions about your new school?

Figure 3.1: Original post-transition pupil questionnaire questions.

Pupil questionnaire 3 & 4: post-transition to Year 3

1. What are you most enjoying about your new school?
2. What has been the most difficult thing about your new school?
3. How do you feel about being at your new school?
4. Why do you feel like this?
5. Who can you talk to if you have questions about your new school?

Figure 3.2: Modified post-transition pupil questionnaire questions.

The two questionnaires were piloted by children who attended the case study school but were in the school year above the research sample. They therefore did not make up part of the final sample. Six pupils completed the original questionnaire (see Figure 3.1) and six completed the updated version which used more neutral language (see Figure 3.2). Whilst the general tone of the responses did not vary considerably, the updated version appeared to prompt more detailed and varied answers. This did surprise me as I had initially been concerned that asking children a more general question on how they were feeling about transition could be too broad and potentially elicit one-word responses or that children of this age could struggle with verbalising their feelings and the reason behind them. Whilst I appreciate that the updated questionnaire producing more detailed responses could have been coincidental, particularly due to the small size of the two trial samples, I still decided to use the modified questionnaire's more neutral language to ensure I was minimising the risk of including leading questions.

Data Generation

Four data generation points were chosen to span the transition period, occurring at roughly three-month intervals. The pre-transition questionnaires were distributed whilst the research cohort were in Year 2 at the pre-preparatory schools, in March and June, whereas the post-transition questionnaires occurred following the move to the new school in September and December. I administered all questionnaires in person, visiting the pre-preparatory schools for the first two so that the participants were able to complete the questionnaires in a setting they were familiar with and comfortable in, to elicit more honest and accurate responses (Atkins and Wallace, 2012).

3.5.3 Research Instrument 3: Pupil Focus Groups

Due to receiving a lower response rate than anticipated with the pupil questionnaires, I was keen to increase pupil voice within the study. Although I used interviews for generating data from the adult participants within the study, I decided to use focus groups with the pupils mainly due to the age of the children who were participating and concerns that a one-to-one interview might

not be as comfortable an experience for pupils and result in them being less willing to participate (Bryman, 2016). Focus groups also provide a more comprehensive and diverse range of perspectives than individual interviews, which can enrich the data generated and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Krueger and Casey, 2015).

Whilst interviews provide the opportunity for participants to express themselves more freely and in more depth than in a group setting (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015), the social interaction of focus groups allows for a more interactive and dynamic exchange (Goldkuhl, 2019), where participants can build on each other's ideas and experiences, generating new insights and perspectives that may not have been revealed in individual interviews (Bryman, 2016). Focus groups also allow pupils to share their thoughts and feelings with peers who are going through similar experiences (Horner, 2000), which may help to reduce feelings of isolation or anxiety. Helping to normalise a shared experience within a group setting can lead to more honest and open discussions, alongside facilitating social interaction and peer support, which can be particularly beneficial when considering the research topic of pupil wellbeing during school transition. Conversely, this normalisation process could be seen as counterproductive as it has the potential to narrow the breadth of viewpoints expressed within the discussion. It is therefore important to monitor the group dynamics carefully to ensure that all participants are able to contribute their views. Additionally, holding multiple focus groups is a further way to ensure a representative range of views are conveyed.

Design of Focus Groups

The focus groups were designed to generate data which complemented and enhanced the level of pupil voice obtained from the pupil questionnaires. Gibson (2007) suggested that smaller sized focus groups are more appropriate for younger children and that due to younger children generally having shorter attention spans, they may benefit from shorter group sessions. I therefore decided to design focus groups comprising four participants and aimed for the sessions to last

approximately 20 minutes to half an hour, understanding that it would be important to monitor the pupils' engagement and attention during the focus group and adjust the length of the session accordingly.

The focus groups were designed to be held at the case study school in person and were recorded. To help the pupils feel comfortable and encourage them to participate, I planned for each session to begin with an age-appropriate game as recommended by Morrow (2008). Four question prompts were designed to facilitate the conversation (see Figure 3.3), which were similar in content to the questions asked in the questionnaires, but there was also considerably more freedom for the conversation to evolve as the participants engaged with one another and built on their peers' ideas (Bryman, 2016), as well as for follow up questions to be asked if needed.

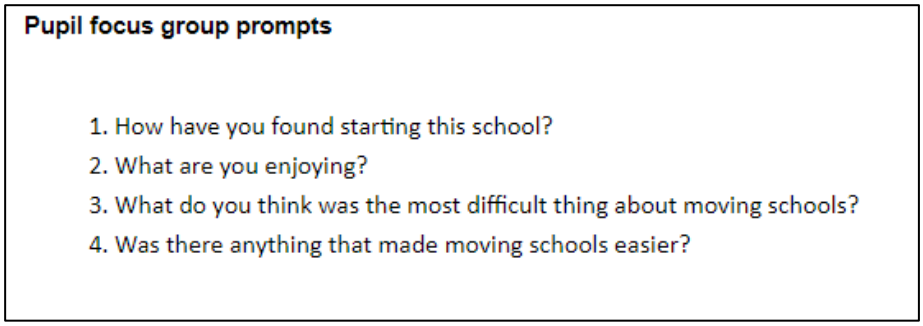

Figure 3.3: Focus group question prompts

Piloting

Piloting a focus group can help improve the quality of the data generated and increase the trustworthiness of the study (Krueger and Casey, 2015). By identifying any potential issues before the actual research is conducted, any necessary adjustments can be made (Barbour, 2007), such as changing the size of the group, the length of the session or refining the questions that are asked. I also wanted to be sure that this method would be effective in producing rich qualitative data that was appropriate for helping to answer the research questions.

The pilot was conducted using an almost identical approach to how I planned to conduct this aspect of the actual research. The only things that differed were the children involved, who did attend the case study school yet were in the school year above the research cohort, and the time

of year at which the pilot took place, in the summer term of 2022 as opposed to the autumn term. The data generated were not part of the research as the children were not in the research sample and I was cognisant that their responses were likely to be impacted by the length of time that had passed since they transitioned to the case study school in the previous year.

Four pupils took part and to ensure all children had an equal opportunity to participate and share their perspectives, I encouraged turn taking. I was conscious of the potential power dynamics between children in the focus group (Horner, 2000) so I made sure to address each of the children by name to enable them all to have the opportunity to provide their views (Gibson, 2007). The session took place in a classroom at the case study school and lasted around 20 minutes following the ice breaker activity. As time progressed, the children increasingly interacted with one another, and I helped facilitate the discussion by directing questions or prompting those who were less forthcoming with their responses.

Unfortunately, I did have issues with technology and not all the audio was recorded. Despite this, the sound quality was adequate for transcription and enabled me to identify the participants. Nevertheless, I decided to do a second pilot where I recorded both sound and video footage using a laptop with Google Meet software, with which I was more familiar than the initial recording equipment. The inclusion of visual media made transcription easier and had the added benefit of enabling me to reflect more easily on body language and group dynamics when analysing the focus group's responses. However, it was evident at the beginning of the focus group pilot that the children were aware they were being recorded and were changing their behaviour as a result, which is commonly referred to as the Hawthorne effect in research (McCambridge, Witton and Elbourne, 2014). Moving the laptop off-centre and playing the ice breaker activity resulted in the children ignoring, or potentially forgetting, that they were being filmed. This provided a more focused discussion which appeared more natural and akin to the normal classroom discussions I had experienced as these children's teacher. I therefore decided to use Google Meet software

to record both sound and video footage of the focus groups for the actual study, although I made sure to note the importance of allowing the participants to get used to the filming during the ice breaker activity and prior to the discussion.

Data Generation

The focus groups were held in late September and early October 2022, to coincide with the end of the first half term at the new school for the research cohort because I felt that this would be a good time to discuss how they had settled into Year 3 having had six weeks in the new school environment. Although the focus groups took place between the third and fourth pupil questionnaires, they were separate data generation processes, with the focus groups drawing on a wider sample size than the questionnaires, which were limited to pupils who had previously attended one of the two pre-preparatory schools owned by the same trust. The increased sample size therefore enabled a more comprehensive and diverse range of perspectives (Krueger and Casey, 2015), including children from a range of educational backgrounds and both pupils who had transitioned with peers and those who had moved to the new school independently of their previous classmates. There was, however, the potential for participants to overlap between the two samples, resulting in three of the children completing both the questionnaires and taking part in the focus groups.

Four focus groups were conducted at the case study school over a two-week period. They were held during the school day but as I did not want the pupils to not miss out on any lesson time, the sessions took place during assemblies, which therefore limited them to the planned timings of twenty to thirty minutes. As previously mentioned, the third group only contained three pupils due to illness, resulting in a fourth focus group being held to ensure sufficient data were generated.

The language used throughout the focus groups was child friendly and the purpose and nature of the research was explained clearly so that the pupils were fully informed (Gibson, 2007). I was also cautious to minimise social desirability bias because I felt it likely that the pupils may alter

their responses to align with what they perceived to be socially acceptable or desirable (Krueger and Casey, 2015). This was of particular concern due to my role as a teacher and Head of Year for the pupils participating in the research. I therefore reminded the children that their participation was voluntary and encouraged them to be as honest as possible, even if their views or experiences were different to someone else in the group, assuring them that their responses would not be attributed to them individually when used in the research (Barbour, 2007). I also made sure that the children got used to having a laptop recording them during the ice breaker activity to help minimise the potential of the Hawthorne effect during the focus group proper.

3.5.4 Research Instrument 4: Parent Interviews

The support of parents and family members during the transition process was a key theme in the literature. As shown by Bronfenbrenner (1979), a child's microsystem partly comprises their family, which, as illustrated by the MMT model, is impacted through the transition process with the family also experiencing a transition of their own during this time (Jindal-Snape, 2016). With regard to supporting children's wellbeing throughout the transition process, parents are also likely to have a unique insight into how their child is feeling regarding moving schools. Hanewald (2013) explained that anxieties or concerns which children may experience in response to such changes may be displayed in a variety of ways, with parents often being privy to different behaviours at home which do not necessarily manifest in the school environment.

I was therefore keen to include the parental perspective within my research and decided that interviews were also the best method to use for this participant group. By hearing the experiences and perspectives of individual parents, I hoped to gain a better understanding of the specific challenges and concerns that they may have had during the school transition period, as well as their strategies for supporting their child's wellbeing (Gorard, 2013).

Viewing transitions as ongoing processes (Jindal-Snape, 2010), I had initially wanted this aspect of the data generation to also be longitudinal, aiming to capture the journey that parents

undertook alongside their child during the transition. However, this plan had to be adapted due to the headteacher, and therefore gatekeeper, of the case study school changing their mind regarding me communicating with parents before their children joined the school. Therefore, only one interview was conducted with each of the parent participants, after their child had moved to the case study school.

Design of Interview

The parent interviews were also designed to be semi-structured, with open-ended questions allowing participants to explain and elaborate on their responses (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The question prompts (Appendix 5) focused both on how the parent perceived their child had experienced the transition, along with how they themselves had experienced the process of their child moving schools.

I conducted one-to-one parent interviews rather than focus groups due to the individual and potentially sensitive nature of the topic of children's wellbeing during school transition. Parents may be less likely to share personal information within a larger setting, particularly if they are concerned about how their comments may be perceived by other parents in the group (Gorard, 2013). A one-to-one interview can therefore provide a more intimate and confidential environment for parents to discuss their experiences and perspectives, which can help to establish trust and rapport between the researcher and the participant.

To further increase the participants' comfort and to enable greater flexibility of scheduling, these interviews were also held online and recorded using Google Meet software. By giving parents the ability to choose a location and time convenient to them, I hoped to increase the response rate and achieve the desired sample (Bryman, 2016). I also designed the interviews to last for approximately 30 to 40 minutes to minimise demands made of the participants (BERA, 2018), appreciating that the parents were giving up their time to help with my research.

Piloting

Piloting an interview is key to assessing and potentially rectifying any issues with the format of the interview or identifying whether any of the questions need revising (Braun and Clarke, 2021). I therefore piloted the questions with a friend whose daughter had recently transitioned from primary to secondary school. Once again, this pilot was arranged with a participant whose setting and experience of transition was different to that of my research, yet the similarities were sufficient for me to test the feasibility, relevance and clarity of the questions (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006). On a professional development level, I also found the discussion very useful to gain a greater understanding of strategies that a different school had implemented to help support students in their transition.

The pilot interview was conducted online using the same parameters I planned for the actual parent interviews. The length of time (approximately 35 minutes) enabled a meaningful conversation about transition and no changes to the questions were identified in the discussion we had following the interview. I did, however, note that having already having a relationship with my friend may have made the interview easier and that in the actual interviews I would have to build rapport and trust with the parents in a short space of time. I also needed to consider the potential for response bias due to my professional role.

Data Generation

The parent interviews took place throughout October and November 2022, following the research cohort starting Year 3 at the case study school. Six interviews were conducted, with four of them being on a one-to-one basis and two as a pair, where both the child's parents were interviewed together. As planned, the interviews were conducted online at a time of the participants' choosing to ensure convenience and they were digitally recorded.

The interviews began with a reiteration of the purpose and aims of the study, alongside an explanation to the parents of how data would be used and their right to withdraw. In addition, I

spoke to the participants about how my role as a researcher was separate to my role as their son's Head of Year and that I really valued them providing their honest opinions and accurate experiences of the transition process, clearly stating that everything they said would be kept confidential and not able to be traced back to them.

Despite my position within the research school, I had not previously interacted with all the parent participants. The need to build rapport therefore differed between participants due to varying levels of familiarity. Some of the conversations were difficult at times, with parents disclosing challenges and concerns they had either had or were still having regarding their child's transition. It was during these interviews that the potential conflicts of being an insider researcher were most apparent; my role as a researcher was to listen to the participants' experiences, whereas my instinct as a teacher was to reassure and try to help. I therefore did arrange separate follow up meetings with parents who had raised ongoing issues so that their concerns could be addressed in a more appropriate forum.

3.6 Data Analysis Approach: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The data generated were qualitative in nature and analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis. This is a revised approach to their earlier work (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which places greater emphasis on the researcher's reflexivity throughout the application of thematic analysis, continually revisiting and revising the analysis as new insights and perspectives are gained (Braun and Clarke, 2019). By adhering to the revision of Braun and Clarke's work, my intention was to recognise my role within the research and do justice to the data that had been generated (Byrne, 2022), acknowledging the importance of reflexivity throughout all phases of the research process.

Although Braun and Clarke's (2019) approach contains six stages, they emphasise that the process of analysis is not linear and that the various stages will need to be revisited. Reflexive

Thematic Analysis as a method is therefore time consuming so, to avoid being overwhelmed by the quantity of qualitative data generated and to ensure that it was useful and valuable to the study, the analysis occurred alongside the data generation as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested. This also enabled me to initially analyse the data from each participant group separately before considering the data in its entirety.

All of the data generated from the study were digitally transcribed and then collated using NVivo 12 software. Triangulating data from multiple sources enhances the credibility and dependability of a study (Suter, 2012) so being able to integrate data in one programme for analysis was a strong benefit of using NVivo. Transcription of the interviews and pupil questionnaires helped with familiarisation of the data, which is the first stage of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2016). This familiarisation included adding notes to the data files on NVivo to document my initial thoughts on the data (Byrne, 2022), alongside rereading the transcripts several times and watching the interviews to be able to comment on body language and word emphasis.

I then used NVivo to generate the initial codes by moving systematically through the data and coding anything I believed would be useful in addressing the research questions (Byrne, 2022). I used an inductive approach, where the codes were developed based on the data itself, as I wanted to reduce my influence on the data analysis and limit preconceived ideas that may have arisen from using a coding framework. During this process, codes were revised, amended and even removed as I made sense of the data. I then searched for themes by considering how different codes from across the data sets 'may combine to form an overarching theme' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 89).

In the same way that the codes had been revised, the themes were also reviewed and modified as I engaged with the data and the themes I had generated (Braun and Clarke, 2019), practising reflexivity throughout and acknowledging that the qualitative data would be analysed in a way that was personal to me and influenced by my perspective (Suter, 2012). As Braun and Clarke (2020)

argue, the researcher plays an active role in generating codes and themes relevant to the research question, rather than simply finding them within the data. As a result, individuals can differ in their interpretations of the themes which are constructed during data analysis (Bazely, 2006), so checking the consistency of both my coding and the themes generated with critical friends through peer debriefing was vital to ensure trustworthiness (Hammond and Wellington, 2020; Greene, 2014).

Nevertheless, the process of coding is inherently subjective and so whilst it was useful being able to discuss codes and themes with others to check for consistency in my approach, explain my reasoning and help compare my findings with existing research (Hartley, 2004), the coding process was unique to me as a researcher. As can be seen in the explanation in the next chapter (in Section 4.2 The Data Analysis Process), Reflexive Thematic Analysis was therefore a cyclical process of constant reflection to generate the final themes, enabling them to be defined and named to determine the essence of each theme and the aspects of the data captured (Braun and Clarke, 2006) before producing a report of my findings.

3.7 Qualitative Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Whilst it is important to conduct high quality research that demonstrates integrity and trustworthiness, the subjective nature of qualitative studies means that quantitative evaluative measures of quality, such as reliability and validity, lack relevance and can be challenging to apply (Noble and Smith, 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered four alternative criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which were followed throughout the course of this research, alongside a fifth criterion of authenticity, which was added in their later work (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). The following sections consider each of these criteria in turn and demonstrate the steps that were taken to ensure the quality of the study.

Credibility

Credibility is an essential component of qualitative research, which aims to ensure the accuracy of the research findings (Patton, 2015) by establishing confidence that the findings correctly express the views of the specific participants and the context of the research (Johnson and Rasulova, 2017). Whilst comparable to the internal validity sought after in quantitative studies, credibility involves both conducting the study in a way that increases the plausibility of the findings, as well as demonstrating credibility to external readers (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

To increase credibility within this case study, I employed data triangulation by using multiple methods and participant groups to corroborate the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Through the use of interviews, questionnaires and focus groups, I obtained various sources of data which were triangulated to corroborate findings and ensure their credibility, as well as aid in producing a more comprehensive data set (Noble and Smith, 2015). Taking an inductive approach to coding was also a conscious decision to develop findings that emerged directly from the data, rather than being driven by literature, to further enhance credibility.

Additionally, I have tried to be transparent throughout the research process, both in terms of illustrating my research methods and data generation procedures within this chapter and through providing participants with this information so they are fully informed of all stages of my research.

Transferability

Transferability is a key aspect of ensuring the application and relevance of research findings beyond the specific context in which they were generated (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Comparable to generalisability or external validity in quantitative research, transferability is achieved through the use of thick description to enable the reader to judge whether the findings are applicable to their own setting (Johnson and Rasulova, 2017).

Whilst it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that sufficient detailed description is included to enable the reader to evaluate transferability (Baxter and Eyles, 1997), as case study research typically focuses on providing in-depth insights into specific and unique phenomena or

contexts with a small sample size (Creswell, 2014), it can be challenging to generalise meanings. Nevertheless, I have tried to be as explicit and detailed as possible in my discussions of the specific context in which my research was conducted. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling to select participants who are likely to provide rich and diverse perspectives increases the transferability of my findings (Creswell, 2014), as does conducting a comprehensive data analysis (Patton, 2015) using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Dependability

Comparable to the quantitative notion of reliability, dependability considers the degree to which research findings are consistent and replicable over time and across researchers (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), which enhances the confidence that can be placed in the findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Credibility and dependability are therefore closely linked, yet whilst credibility ensures an accurate representation of participants' experiences, dependability focuses more on the researcher as an instrument and the degree to which their interpretations are consistent (Baxter and Eyles, 1997).

Throughout the research, I have maintained an audit trail to document the process I have undertaken from the research design phase and data generation to the analysis and interpretation. This trail has been formalised within my writing to help increase the transparency and rigour of my research, making it easier for others to evaluate the dependability of my findings (Creswell, 2014).

To further enhance dependability, I also adopted methods previously discussed of triangulation and consistency checking with critical friends. Both methods help to corroborate research findings, reducing the risk of bias or error (Patton, 2015).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which research findings are shaped by the participants, rather than being influenced by researcher bias (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It is important that findings are wholly grounded in the data that has been generated and therefore reflect the views

and experiences of the participants of the study, rather than my preconceptions and biases as a researcher.

During the research process I have therefore tried to practise reflexivity by reflecting on my assumptions and biases to identify anything which may influence my findings and therefore take steps to mitigate them (Patton, 2015). I have kept a research journal throughout the entire research process to document my reflections and thoughts. This has helped to ensure transparency in both the development and implementation of the research, developing my understanding and familiarity with the data, maintaining accountability and addressing potential subjectivity and issues of bias (Bassot, 2020).

I have also used peer debriefing through the process, sharing my findings and interpretations with critical friends to allow for feedback and discussion (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This has helped me to think critically about the research, through identifying potential biases and inconsistencies within the data analysis, along with giving me the opportunity to consider alternative interpretations (Greene, 2014).

Authenticity

Unlike the four previous elements of establishing trustworthiness, authenticity is unique to qualitative research (Shannon and Hambacher, 2014) and refers to the extent that a study fairly and accurately shows a range of different experiences and realities from the participants who are being represented. There are five elements which should be considered when evaluating the authenticity of research: fairness, ontological authenticity; educative authenticity; catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

Fairness is thought to be the most important of the criteria and concerns the extent to which all stakeholder views have been considered within the research, even where they may prove contradictory (Johnson and Rasulova, 2017). Whilst qualitative research is value laden, fairness ensures that the research presents a balanced view by allowing all sides a voice. Within this

study, fairness was achieved through the use of multiple participant groups to allow for multiple perspectives on the transition process. Additionally, all interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim and, although I did make decisions on which data to incorporate into the analysis and discussion stages, I did not shy away from including contradictory viewpoints, understanding that whilst some children experienced a positive transition, this was not universal, and it would have been implausible to presume so.

The remaining authenticity measures assess changes in awareness of both the participants and the researcher, including becoming more informed of the issues generally as well as more understanding of the perspectives of others (Shannon and Hambacher, 2014). Through this, authenticity also considers whether the changes in awareness result in actions or decisions taking place and the extent to which individuals are therefore empowered to enact them (Johnson and Rasulova, 2017).

As a researcher, I have certainly become more informed about the transition process through hearing the varied experiences of the participants within this study and through practising reflexivity, I have sought to be aware of my potential influence on the research (Bukamal, 2022) to ensure that I am still presenting my participants' experiences authentically. In disseminating the research findings, I have also sought to increase understanding of the variety of experiences of transition and therefore suggest ways in which support can be implemented. Some of the recommendations of this study have already been employed by the case study school and it is my hope that this research reaches other preparatory schools and benefits their transition programmes.

3.8 Ethical Conduct

Throughout the entirety of any research process, it is vital to maintain an ethical approach (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). As an insider researcher, ethical considerations regarding my close

relationship to the setting of this study and the participants who took part have had to be carefully considered (Brooks, te Riele and Maguire, 2014). I therefore closely followed the British Educational Research Association's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018) from design, through execution, to dissemination of the study. At the time of planning and conducting this study, the 2018 guidelines were the most up to date, and therefore the ones adhered to and referenced throughout. Nevertheless, it is important to note that a fifth edition of BERA's ethical guidelines has been published (BERA, 2024). One of the key revisions is an emphasis on the responsibility for researchers to promote the right to participation, particularly for marginalised and vulnerable groups, and therefore the guidelines also now include assent for those legally unable to provide consent for participation in research (BERA, 2024), which I had already included within my research design due to the inclusion of child participants.

In addition to following the BERA guidelines, I applied for ethical approval from St Mary's University before any data generation commenced. Level 2 ethical approval was obtained, which included research involving participants under the age of 18. However, due to revisions to my methodology to incorporate more pupil voice, I needed to re-apply for ethical approval and reconsidered the ethical implications of my study which now included pupil focus groups. This was granted in December 2021 (Appendix 6), yet simply obtaining ethical approval is not sufficient in a research project. Ethical conduct needs to be guaranteed at all stages, not just the research design, and ethical considerations should be constantly revisited and re-examined during data generation and data analysis, ensuring that an 'ethic of respect' (BERA, 2018, p. 5) is applied throughout. It is also important to be aware that as ethical decisions are contextual by nature and not always predictable, they must be considered on a case-by-case basis, according to the contextual factors of the research (Head, 2020). The next section details the main ethical considerations which were taken into account throughout the research process, from the research design to data generation and analysis.

Researcher's Influence on the Research

As a qualitative researcher, it was important to acknowledge my positionality and its influence on how I conducted myself as a researcher (Basit, 2013), particularly as an insider researcher. Although I actively tried to minimise the effect my views, context and prior knowledge would undoubtedly have on the entire research process (Atkins and Wallace, 2012), I also had to acknowledge that I cannot separate myself entirely from the research. To mitigate this, I tried to maintain transparency throughout the research by clearly detailing my research design, explaining participant selection, and presenting the data generated alongside the methods used to analyse this evidence (Head, 2020).

There are further ethical implications due to my position as an insider researcher and my decision to conduct this study within my professional setting. It was necessary to practise reflexivity and examine my underlying assumptions because of my close relationship with the research context and participants (Burnard et al., 2018). Additionally, throughout the research design and data generation process, I was cautious of the power relationships between myself and the participants (Brooks, te Riele and Maguire, 2014; Greene, 2014). Although I acknowledge that I cannot be separated from my role as a researcher with regard to my decisions and interpretations throughout this research project, as an insider researcher holding a professional role within the case study school, it was important to try and limit my influence during interactions with participants through the use of open-ended questions in interviews and refraining from offering my own opinions in response to their answers.

Whilst I view my position as an insider researcher as an advantage, I was particularly conscious of my influence on the children during these discussions as they all knew me as their Head of Year, even though I did not necessarily teach them directly. I made sure to be transparent about the research process with all of the cohort so they were aware of the study I was undertaking and why some but not all of them would be invited to participate. I also took the time to be as open and honest as possible with the participating pupils and clearly explained that I would like them

to be the same with me in return, stressing that there were no 'correct' answers to any of my questions.

Furthermore, I needed to be conscious of my influence during the data analysis stage of the research, with the themes generated having been subjectively constructed through my interpretation of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2020). To mitigate this, I used peer debriefing to check for consistency and accuracy, thereby ensuring credibility and dependability of the research (Greene, 2014).

Informed Voluntary Consent and the Right to Withdraw

All participants were asked to provide written consent before any data were generated. This included supplementary consent from parents for all participants under the age of 18. Nevertheless, the children themselves were also asked for written assent to respect their autonomy in line with BERA's principle that 'children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity' (BERA, 2018, p. 15). Foregrounding children's voices was a key motivator for me in conducting this research as whilst transition may affect numerous stakeholders, ultimately it is the children themselves who face the greatest change to their microsystem following a school transition.

I chose to seek active, rather than passive, consent from the participants and their parents due to my position as an insider researcher conducting research in my own setting. Whilst studies have shown that requesting opt-in parental consent for research conducted in secondary schools can reduce response rates and increase selection bias due to under-representation of students from certain backgrounds (Bonell et al., 2023), the young age of the children involved in the study, alongside my position within the research school, led me to the conclusion that active consent was preferable to avoid any participants feeling obligated to take part and to ensure that any involvement was actively informed.

To ensure that consent from adult participants and parents was informed, an information sheet (Appendix 7) was provided explaining the purpose of the study, the level of involvement from participants, and how data would be used and stored. There was also a clear explanation of each participant's right to withdraw completely from the research, alongside contact details should there be any further questions. In addition to providing this in writing, before any interviews, I made sure to reiterate the key details of the study, how each participant's data would be used and reminded them of their right to withdraw from the research (Hammersley, 2021). I also explained that participants were able to refuse to answer any individual questions should they not feel comfortable doing so, or even stop the entire interview with there being no need for an explanation. Once verbal consent had been given, I then proceeded with the data generation.

Although parental consent was required for participants under the age of 18, I also needed to ensure that the children themselves wished to participate and understood what would be required of them. When distributing questionnaires and conducting focus groups, I made sure to explain verbally the details of the study in age-appropriate language and allowed time for any questions the children had, which seemed to help them feel at ease before participating. Even though the same children completed four questionnaires at different times throughout 2022, this verbal explanation and discussion to ensure understanding was provided each time and should any of the participants withdrawn their assent, this would have been upheld.

Due to my professional role, I was cautious that some participants may feel pressured to take part or believe there to be some advantage by doing so (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). I therefore was clear, both in writing and verbally, that involvement was entirely voluntary. I also made sure that the process of participant selection was transparent, explaining this in the information leaflets provided to potential participants and again verbally for the data generation methods which were more selective in their sampling. To further separate myself and any undue influence I may have had on the research, all information was sent out under university headed paper, rather than that

of the case study school. The parental consent for the pupil questionnaires was also given out by the Year 2 class teacher, rather than being asked for by me directly.

Harm Arising from Participation in Research

To minimise harm is one of the key principles of research ethics (BERA, 2018) and whilst this study had no invasive procedures, there was still the potential of negative psychological effects on participants following or even during data generation. Additionally, ethical issues are not always predictable (Head, 2020) and discussing a difficult transition could cause children and their parents emotional distress, depending on the circumstances which made it challenging. Nevertheless, these experiences are also beneficial to the study. Understanding both positive and negative experiences of transition is important to ensure that the research is representative, with the negative perspectives potentially helping to illustrate how wellbeing during the transition process could be supported more effectively. Even so, the wellbeing of each individual participant must be at the forefront of data generation and if any adverse effects which I was not able to deal with had become apparent during the data generation, I would have upheld the participant's right to withdraw and ensured they received any necessary support (Hammersley, 2021).

I was also cognisant that discussing how young children are feeling about an upcoming change could cause feelings of anxiety about the unknown. When this happened, I made sure to follow the school's pastoral and safeguarding guidance as appropriate, but I was also able to use my insider position to my advantage to help support the children. This is one of the reasons I wanted to personally administer the questionnaires, so I would be able to use my knowledge of the school they would be moving to and answer any questions they might have. Some of the questions I answered during these questionnaires included what time lunch was, which sports were played in games lessons and whether they would be able to continue with their musical instrument lessons at the new school. Whilst these might sound relatively trivial to an adult audience, the children felt them important enough to ask me at the time and so being able to give them an

answer there and then may have helped to alleviate a small concern they were experiencing. For example, I was able to reassure one boy who was worried about finding his way around the school and raise this with his tutor to ensure ongoing support was provided.

To further minimise harm arising from participating in this research, I wanted to also ensure I was safeguarding the wellbeing of participants by minimising demands on their time and level of involvement (BERA, 2018). As mentioned in Section 3.5, all the research instruments were designed to be simple and easy to follow, with each being arranged and conducted at the participants' convenience.

Privacy and Data Storage

All participants were assured both in writing and verbally that their personal information and comments made during the data generation would be kept confidential and that whilst my supervisory team and I would have access to the data, none of the results would include identifiable information (Hammersley, 2021). All names, including those of the case study school and the feeder pre-preparatory schools, were either changed or removed where possible, alongside any information which could identify individual people or places (Atkins and Wallace, 2012), such as the school motto, which was mentioned in an interview.

The interviews and focus groups had both auditory and visual recording to aid with transcription notes concerning body language and for ease of knowing who was speaking. These were digitally transcribed, and whilst the original files were kept for reference during the data analysis stage, they were then securely deleted. The data from the pupil questionnaires were digitally transcribed and the original paper copies were also securely destroyed. All electronic raw data from this research is currently stored on the university servers, whether it was used to inform the study or not, in line with the BERA (2018) guidelines.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has described the interpretivist case study methodology adopted for this study, justifying the various methods used to generate and analyse the data. To provide a more complete picture, different perspectives from a range of stakeholders were generated, including teachers, pupils and parents. The data were generated using a combination of semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and focus groups, during the data generation period of January to December 2022, which bridged the transition process for the children in the 2022-2023 Year 3 cohort at the case study school. These were collated alongside my own reflective research journal to ensure researcher reflexivity throughout the entire process.

All the data generation methods were qualitative in nature, and they were all analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). This analysis was initially conducted separately according to each participant group, before being considered as a data set in its entirety to more comprehensively address the research questions, comparing and contrasting the various perspectives and experiences of the participants. The analysis and findings which resulted from the data generation are detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the analytical process using data from the four research methods, teacher interviews, pupil questionnaires, pupil focus groups and parent interviews, and present the findings generated. By exploring the phenomena of transition through the perspectives of different participant groups, four main themes and several subthemes were generated whilst analysing the data using Braun and Clarke's (2019) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. These themes and the respective subthemes can be seen in Figure 4.1 below and it is under these four main themes that the data are presented. Comparable to my use of the phrase 'data generation', rather than 'data collection', I use the terms 'developed' and 'generated' to signify the active role I have played in constructing the themes, acknowledging my subjectivity and reflexivity in the analysis of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2020).

Preparation and Readiness for School	Familiarity	Shared Experience	Sense of Community and Belonging
•Old school preparation •Parental preparation •Children's anticipation of transition •Parents' feelings towards transition	•Knowing individuals already at the school •New school induction/visiting the school site •Comparison with previous school setting	•Starting together •Moving with peers •Parental relationships with other parents	•Children's relationship with teachers •Children's feelings towards new school •Parental relationship with new school •Relationships/links between schools •Friendships

Figure 4.1: The themes and sub-themes generated from the data analysis.

Before presenting the findings however, I shall first illustrate the data analysis process by describing the journey of how the themes from this research were generated. Taking each of the six stages of Braun and Clarke's (2019) Reflexive Thematic Analysis, I present a 'walkthrough' of the process of moving from coding to theme generation. I then present the findings of the study under each of the four themes, as listed above in Figure 4.1.

4.2 The Data Analysis Process

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. This resulted in four main themes being generated: Preparation and Readiness for School; Familiarity; Shared Experience; and Sense of Community and Belonging. However, these were not my original themes due to considerable and frequent revisions that occurred throughout the data analysis process as I became more familiar with the data and gained increased confidence in my coding ability. The final themes that are presented in this chapter were developed after the completion of the data generation process, yet it is still important to consider the influence of my earlier attempts at coding which contributed towards the final analysis. Therefore, whilst this explanation is recorded in a linear fashion, conducting the analysis was a cyclical process that involved frequently moving backwards and forwards between the phases.

Familiarisation with the data

The first stage of Reflexive Thematic Analysis is to become familiar with the data, which is more than just reading the textual data at a surface level. Instead, it encompasses developing a deeper understanding of the content of the data set, noticing what may be of relevance to the research questions, and actively and analytically considering what the data means.

To help immerse myself in the data, I chose to transcribe the interviews and focus groups myself, rather than outsourcing this task. By listening to the audio and watching the videos during the transcription process, I was able to make notes on speech intonations and body language used by the participants to gain a deeper understanding of what they were saying. In addition, I also made rough notes on first impressions as I read through the data, noting down anything I thought could potentially be interesting in relation to the research questions. For example, in the notes that can be seen in Appendix 8 regarding a parent interview, the concept of familiarity with the school environment as a benefit to supporting school transition is already coming across.

Additionally, relationships between parents seemed as though they could potentially be significant, having been mentioned multiple times in the interview.

Generating initial codes

Having familiarised myself with the data, I began to generate initial codes: organising the data in a meaningful and systematic way. I used NVivo 12 software to code the data, which involved highlighting sections of text that I deemed significant and either creating a new code or using one I had previously made. Although I did have some initial ideas for potential codes following the first stage of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis, as there were certain themes which occurred across various interviews with different participants, I decided not to use pre-set codes or a coding framework. Instead, I used an inductive coding approach to organise the data, using a combination of semantic and latent coding with the interview transcripts for the parental and teacher participants. I was keen to fully understand the experiences and perspectives of these participants, including those that may not have been explicit on the surface. For example, in Appendix 8, I made a note about how there appeared to be some tension when the parent was commenting about other parents not being prepared for their child's transition, which was cued by their hesitant speech and possible nervous laughter. When coding the pupil focus groups, however, I deemed latent coding to not be as necessary due to the age of the children and how their responses appeared more forthright. This could be seen in all of the focus groups, with children openly sharing things they were finding challenging in their new school.

I therefore played an active role in developing and modifying the codes generated throughout the coding process (Braun and Clarke, 2020) as I continued to increase my familiarity and understanding of the data. This included reflexively engaging with the data through continual comparisons to existing research (Cristancho, Watling and Lingard, 2021; Hartley, 2004). Furthermore, this phase was an iterative process as after I had coded all the transcripts for one participant group, I then went back and recoded the same set of transcripts, generating new codes and modifying existing ones to create more uniformity within the coding. In addition, I

cross-checked samples of my coding with two critical friends, providing them with a copy of a transcript from each of the participant groups so that we could compare and contrast our coding. I found this particularly useful where we differed in opinion, as having the opportunity to discuss our rationale behind our decisions helped to refine the coding and ensure the decisions made were purposeful.

The example in Appendix 9 illustrates a comparison between my initial attempt at coding with the final iteration. As can be seen, initially, my coding was very specific and almost too detailed to be able to view similarities across the data set. Within the more refined final version of coding, as shown in Appendix 10, some of the data were coded under more than one code due to overlapping themes, yet this enabled me to make sense of the data, comparing the various transcripts and organising the data in a more meaningful way.

Looking for themes

The next stage included examining the codes to search for themes. To do this, I looked at all of the codes that had been generated and considered similarities or patterns between them. Some of the codes fitted together into a theme quite naturally, such as 'Parental preparation' and 'Old school preparation' under the theme of 'Preparation and Readiness for School'. However, for a few of the codes, there was some overlap between the themes that they could potentially belong to. For example, 'Starting together', whilst organised under 'Shared Experience', could also have been categorised under the theme 'Sense of Community and Belonging'. However, I chose the former theme because whilst I felt that starting a new school alongside other pupils could potentially lead to children developing a sense of community in their new environment, I concluded that this would not necessarily always be the case and where it was, this sense of community would be partly because of that shared experience. I therefore spent time revising the codes and themes at this stage. This included continued discussion of my coding and theme generation with the critical friends mentioned previously to justify and consider the decisions I had made to ensure that I felt confident in my interpretations of the data.

Reviewing themes

Having identified numerous preliminary themes, I then reviewed and refined them to ensure that they made sense and were an accurate representation of the data. One of the beneficial features of NVivo is the ability to sort the entire data set according to the themes. This enabled me to read all the extracts that I had associated with each theme in isolation to consider whether the data did support the theme or if further revisions needed to be made, such as the creation of additional themes where I was potentially trying to include too much in one theme. The theme 'Shared Experience' was one of these newer themes, created as I felt the 'Sense of Community and Belonging' theme was becoming too wide ranging and not specific enough. Within this stage of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, I therefore removed some themes whilst creating others, with some of the new themes being combinations of previous themes.

Defining themes

The fifth stage of Reflexive Thematic Analysis is the final refinement of the themes that have been generated from the data and aims to identify and define what Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 92) refer to as the 'essence' of the theme. That is, the meaning behind each theme and how the various themes and subthemes interact and relate to one another, as illustrated in Figure 4.2.

It was through considering how the themes generated from the data were linked and recognising the overlap between them that I developed the conceptual model for supporting a successful transition, which is discussed in Section 5.4 of the next chapter.

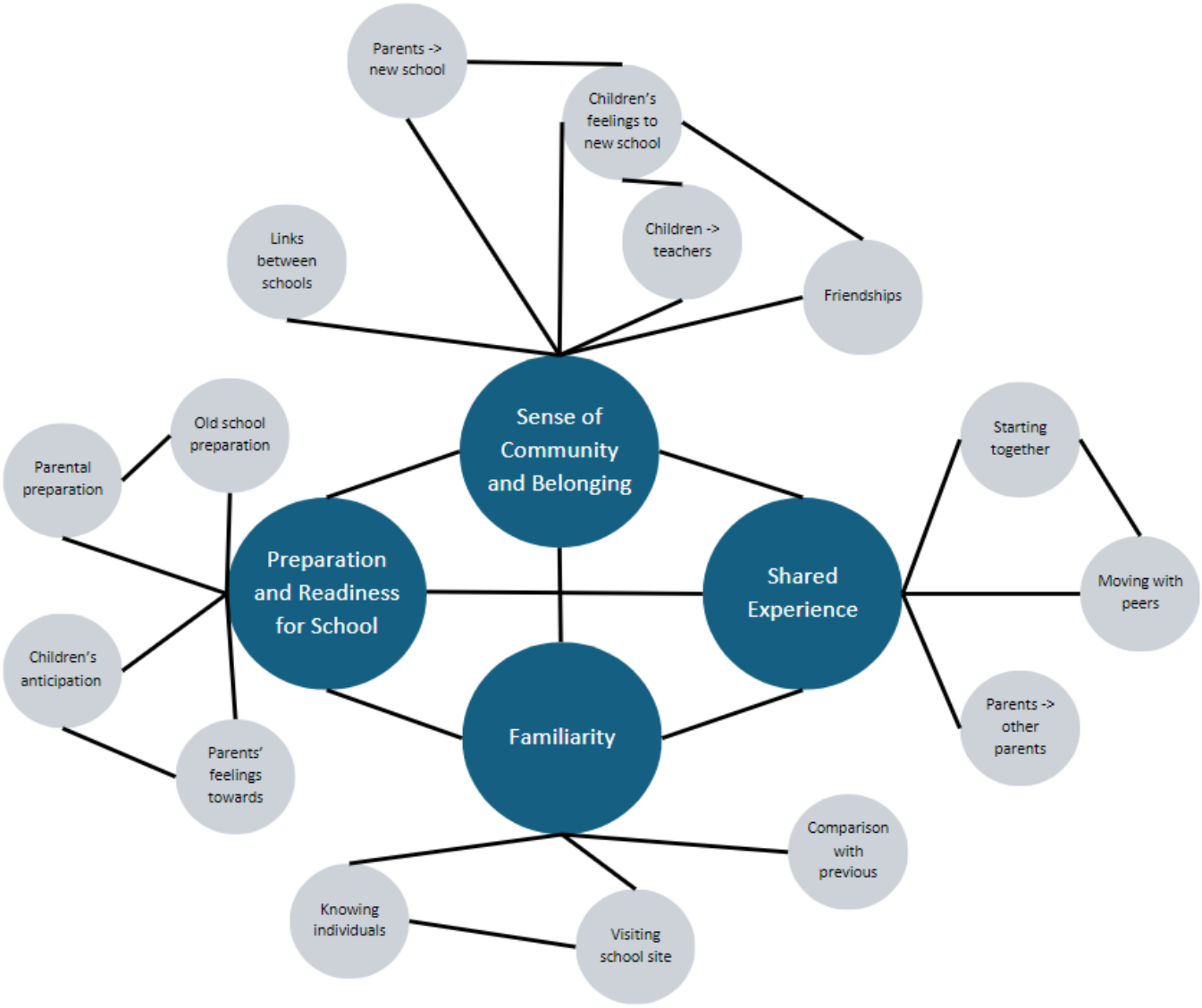

Figure 4.2: Thematic Map

Producing the report

For the final stage of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, a written report is produced. This write-up goes beyond merely describing the findings and instead makes an argument that answers the research questions. For the Reflexive Thematic Analysis conducted for this study, the report on the themes is detailed in Sections 4.3 to 4.6 and expanded upon in the discussion in Chapter Five.

This phase of Reflexive Thematic Analysis did not occur in a linear fashion. After producing the initial report, I returned to the earlier stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis as I was not entirely satisfied with the themes that had been generated and the subthemes I had attributed to each theme. Figure 4.3 compares the themes and the corresponding subthemes from the first 'cycle' of Reflexive Thematic Analysis alongside the final themes and corresponding subthemes.

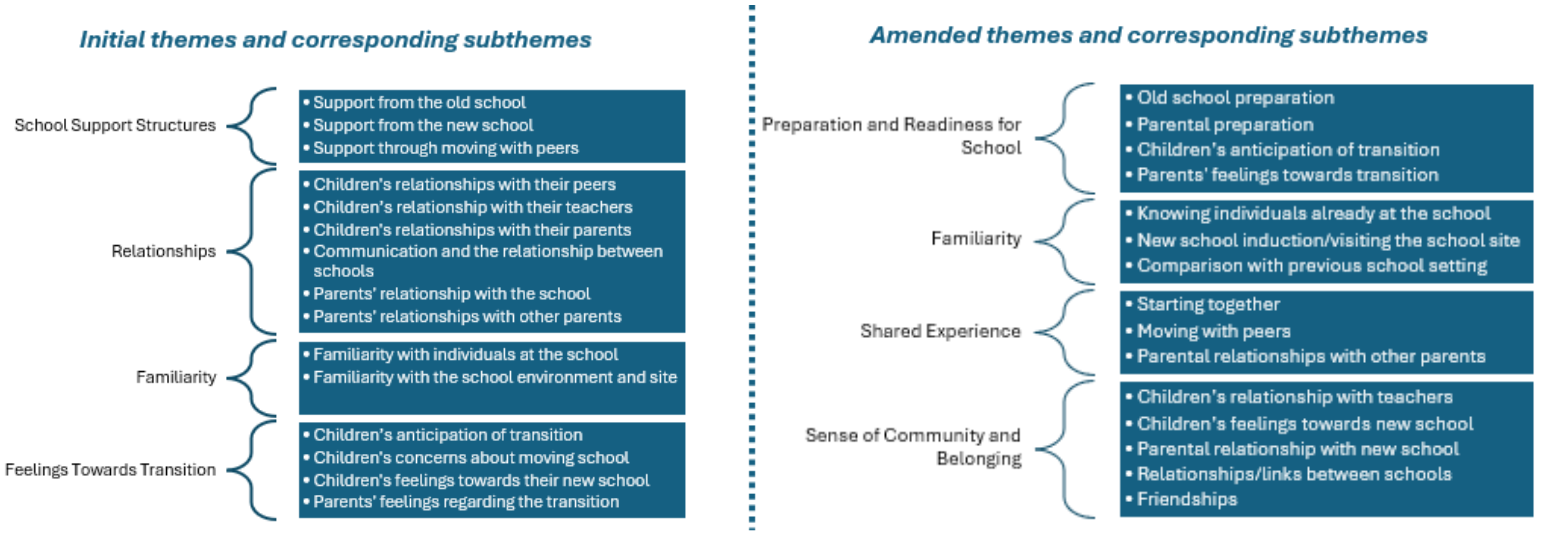

Figure 4.3: A comparison of the initial and amended themes from the first to the final cycles of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

As can be seen, whilst there is some similarity, overall, the themes and subthemes changed considerably throughout the data analysis process. In becoming more familiar and engaged with the data, I was able to continually revisit each of the stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), adjusting and improving the themes, which I believe provided greater insight into the analysis.

In the next section, I take each of the themes in turn and discuss them and the respective subthemes in relation to the research. Quotations from different participant voices within this data analysis have been demarcated to make it clear which participant group the data came from. The fonts and colours used are set out in Table 4.1.

Participant Group	Font and colour used
Children	*Comic Sans MS*
Parents	*Arial*
Teachers	***Times New Roman***

Table 4.1: The font style and colour used for the quotations from each participant group.

4.3 Theme 1: Preparation and Readiness for School

The idea of feeling prepared and ready for the transition to the new school occurred frequently across all the data sets. Pupils positively expressed their anticipation before starting, with *'I was excited'* (Child 8) being a common response when reflecting on how they had felt prior to the transition. This correlated with the pupil questionnaires, where four of the seven pupils in the first questionnaire expressed excitement and happiness regarding the move, increasing to six in the second. Parents also made comments that their son *'felt prepared'* (Parent 3) and was *'really ready'* (Parent 6) for the transition. This corresponds with data from teachers who explained how they ***'build that independence'*** (Teacher 3) to help children prepare, such as completing ***'an entire unit of work called moving on and changing… [to] try and look at those broader ideas of changes and funnel it down into something that they are going to go through'*** (Teacher 2).

The data showed that preparing children for the school transition and facilitating their readiness for the move took a variety of forms and involved interactions with numerous individuals in a child's microsystem, such as family members and school staff, with teachers explaining that they ***'talk about the next school quite a lot and we refer to going up to Year 3 throughout Year 2'*** (Teacher 1) and children adding that they also *'spoke to Mummy'* (Child 7) when they had concerns related to the transition. This correlated with the pupil questionnaires, where the children cited a range of people they could talk to if they had questions about their new school, including teachers, parents and people they knew, such as siblings or friends, already at the new school.

Overall, two main areas of preparation to enable readiness for school could be seen in the data: practical aspects, such as organisational skills, and more emotional factors, such as the child's anticipatory feelings towards the transition. Data from the teacher interviews in particular illustrated that preparing a child for an educational transition cannot simply be condensed into a check list of practical tasks which need to be completed or achieved in advance of the move. For

example, one teacher stressed the importance of ***'making sure that, you know, the children are supported emotionally with it [transition] because it's such a big thing'*** (Teacher 3). The data emphasised the importance of considering how the child feels regarding the upcoming change in their educational environment and whether they believe they have sufficiently developed skills and resources needed to effectively manage the transition, particularly because, as one teacher explained: ***'I think the worry is sometimes bigger than the actual transition itself'*** (Teacher 2).

As each participants' experience of the transition was unique, feelings of readiness towards moving schools varied within the data. Therefore, to explore this theme in more detail, I cover both practical and emotional factors of the concept of readiness for a school transition, including preparation undertaken both by the child's old school and by their parents at home, as well as considering the children's anticipation of the upcoming transition and the feelings that their parents have regarding their child moving to a new school.

4.3.1 Old school preparation

For the teachers interviewed, because the transition to preparatory school within the Greater London area is intrinsically linked to the Seven Plus examination process, ***'the autumn term and spring term [of Year 2] is very Seven Plus focused'*** (Teacher 3). When children are in Year 1, or even earlier, parents visit a variety of preparatory schools to determine which they would like to apply for. There is no limit to the number of schools they can apply to, although the majority require an entrance examination that they need to register for in advance. The Seven Plus process then takes place during the autumn and spring terms of Year 2, where children take separate entrance examinations for different schools. These examinations may also comprise interviews and activities for the potential new school to assess the pupils.

Preparation from the pre-preparatory schools is therefore two-fold, both in terms of ensuring the children are *'prepared academically'* (Parent 6) to the standard needed for individual schools,

and preparing the children emotionally, considering their age. At one of the pre-preparatory schools, to help achieve this balance within the preparation, the children have ***'additional support groups… helping them not just academically but also talking to them about how they're feeling'*** (Teacher 3), thereby tackling both practical and emotional factors of readiness for school.

Being able to support young children, who sometimes have only just turned six years old, with the emotional impact of these assessments is crucial, especially when, as noted by parents, the children *'are worked pretty hard for those entrance exams'* (Parent 6) and that the schools *'really pushed that through and worked them hard, particularly in the middle term'* (Parent 1). Therefore, schools also advise parents on how to approach conversations surrounding school admissions, using terminology such as ***'the school they'll be happiest at, not the only school they got into'*** (Teacher 2) and therefore avoiding the language of passing and failing, which could impact children's self-esteem and wellbeing.

Once future schools have been decided, the preparation becomes more focused on the impending move. All three teachers in the study explained that they had a cross-curricular approach to transition and that, whilst a lot of their conversations surrounding transition naturally fell to personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons, moving on and changes were also discussed more broadly within lessons across the curriculum.

> ***So in Year 2 in the summer term, the second half of the summer term we do an entire unit of work called moving on and changing. It's all based on the Jigsaw PSHE scheme, and it slowly works through. We incorporate it into our English as well and we look at changes in nature, changes with people growing up and we try and look at those broader ideas of changes and funnel it down into something that they are going to go through and then we deal with the transition of schools.*** (Teacher 2)

Although how the individual schools prepare children looks different from school to school, there is a recurring theme of helping the children to build independence, with social skills, such as

making and maintaining friendships, being taught alongside practical skills. One teacher explained that within PSHE lessons they teach ***'social skills… to play alongside a group and then to involve yourself in a conversation and we do all sorts of role playing'*** (Teacher 1) whilst another described how ***'in the summer term [we're] getting them ready, focusing on the independence… [and] organisation's definitely a key one, making sure they've got all the resources'*** (Teacher 3).

Although most of the preparation mentioned occurred in the summer term, the teachers stressed that they ***'refer to going up to Year 3 throughout Year 2'*** (Teacher 1) and that talking about the transition with a ***'constant dialogue'*** (Teacher 3) was key. In explaining how they deal with children's concerns in the lead-up to the transition, one of the teachers described the collaborative approach used at their school:

> ***We have in school something that's called a worry monster. We have that in every classroom so it's a consistent approach and they write their worries into the worry monster. A lot of them in Year 2 are all based on transition and if they put something into the worry monster, they get a one on one with a teacher or a teaching assistant and we'll go and sit in the library or up in our group room and we'll let them talk through what their issues are or what their worries are and then we deal with that on an individual basis and if more is needed to be put in place, we'll do that. We will always have discussions with parents as well if they put something in the worry monster.*** (Teacher 2)

This home-school approach was not unique to Teacher 2's school, with one of the other teacher participants also sending home a ***'transition letter to the parents of all the things that would happen to the children and for them to help with the transition'*** (Teacher 1). Many parents also commented positively on the preparation the schools undertook, with one parent saying that their son's last school *'prepared him well'* (Parent 1) and another explaining that their child's old school *'did a lot of work around transition and moving on and making them all feel comfortable'* (Parent 3).

Building independence and organisational skills in the lead-up to the transition appeared to be a focus of the pre-preparatory schools. For example, at Teacher 3's school, ***'for PE [physical education] they normally come in in their PE kit in the autumn and spring but by summer they come in in their school uniform and change'***. This was echoed by Parent 3 who explained that at their son's pre-prep, *'they really tried to step up in terms of the boys being more independent and taking ownership of their own belongings'* (Parent 3). Preparation therefore took many forms, also including transition booklets, where teachers ***'make little booklets and take pictures… of different classrooms at [school name] and the corridors and pictures of people who they might meet'*** (Teacher 1); setting ***'homework that is quite related to their new school… [where] they'll research their new school and they present to their class all the cool things they've found out'*** (Teacher 3); and providing the children with spaces to express their feelings regarding the transition. One parent also commented on how the old school prepared the children by doing *'the goodbyes and the end of school rituals so that it closes one chapter, ready for a new chapter'* (Parent 1), therefore enabling the children to have closure from their old school before beginning at the new.

However, not all the children were transitioning from a pre-preparatory environment. Therefore, for children such as Parent 5's son, who was moving from a primary school which continues to Year 6, no specific support structures were put in place by the old school: *'in terms of preparing them, no, nothing … that was ourselves at home and [new school's name] entirely and nothing else beyond that.'* (Parent 5). Nevertheless, Parent 5 reported that the transition experience was *'brilliant'* and that her son *'genuinely was very excited about moving'*, which she attributes to the new school being *'really supportive… [and] really positive'*.

4.3.2 Parental preparation

The role parents play throughout the transition process in supporting their children and their children's wellbeing was also apparent in the data. The impact of parental support was particularly key during the school summer holidays, when there was far less contact from either

the current or future school and no structured transition programmes or events. All of the parents interviewed expressed a desire to support their child, with many wanting additional help in doing so, such as additional structured events during the summer holidays or *'practical guidance for managing the transition at home'* (Parent 2). This suggests that parents would be open to receiving advice on ways they can help to prepare their child for the transition.

At this age in particular, parents play a fundamental role in helping to choose their child's new school and all of the parents indicated that they had been keen to support their child during the process, whether that was academically by providing *'any additional help that he needs to plug those gaps at the weekend'* (Parent 5) or emotionally, through letting him know that he could *'talk about it if things weren't quite going right'* (Parent 3). The child participants also indicated that they could speak to their parents should they need support and that *'parents could then ask a teacher to help'* (Child 14), suggesting positive relationships between the children and their parents.

Furthermore, parents are key at helping children of this age to maintain friendships with peers who have moved to different schools after Year 2 by helping to arrange playdates and enabling children to stay in contact. As one boy explained, not being at the same school as one of his friends anymore *'did make me a little sad at first but I still get to see him and we're having a playdate at the weekend so it's ok'* (Child 7). Parents encouraging old friendships to be maintained can help children to avoid experiencing further changes to their microsystem, which may occur with a loss of contact. This illustrates how parental support can take various forms and is not always necessarily directly linked to the new school transition.

4.3.3 Children's anticipation of transition

For many children, moving to a new school is a move to the unknown, and therefore a lot of the preparation from both their current and future schools seemed to concern explaining to the

children ***'what it might feel like to move on'*** (Teacher 1) and helping them to ***'see it more as an exciting move'*** (Teacher 2), rather than them being worried about the transition. An individual's approach to and subsequent feelings about a given event can be significantly impacted by their anticipation of it, and the teachers in this study reported favourably on transition programmes that managed to generate positive anticipation for the impending move. This included where schools took a ***'slightly more wellbeing point of view'*** (Teacher 2) to their transition programme, helping the children to be able to ***'imagine themselves being in that [class]room'*** (Teacher 1) and therefore ***'ease their nerves'*** (Teacher 2) about the transition.

Conversely, negative anticipation or simply *'fear of the unknown'* (Parent 3) can negatively impact an experience. This was the case for Parent 2 and Parent 3's son who, despite initially feeling positive about the transition, struggled with the lack of structure in the summer holidays between moving from his old school to the new.

> *[I]t was three months basically of his anticipation and I guess nervousness and fears just growing and growing and we literally watched him kind of disintegrate in front of our eyes. To the point where, you know, he was having meltdowns far worse than he's ever had because he had such big emotions going on he just kind of couldn't handle it anymore.* (Parent 3)

His parents attributed part of their son's behavioural changes to the length of the summer holidays resulting in a growing anxiety about moving to an unfamiliar environment where he did not know what to expect. Although he was moving with peers, there were still new relationships that would need to be built with children from other schools as well as new teachers.

However, *'as soon as the structure started happening again… you could see that shift starting to happen again'* (Parent 3) and although *'the first couple of weeks he was still a bit unsure… suddenly it just clicked, and he loved it again'* (Parent 2). Even though it took some time, *'about three weeks in, we were suddenly getting overwhelmingly positive responses, and he seemed*

to start finding his feet and getting more comfortable' (Parent 3). This demonstrates the significant impact that this child's anticipation of the transition had on both his and his parents' experience of moving schools.

Despite this, on the whole, participants reported a level of excitement surrounding moving schools. Comments such as *'I was quite excited about coming'* (Child 19), *'He was very excited, very, you know, like a puppy'* (Parent 1) and *'From day one he was excited'* (Parent 4) occurred at multiple intervals throughout the data set from children and parents alike. In fact, some parents were *'worried that it might be a disappointment'* (Parent 7) given how excited their child was, with one parent explaining that *'it's met his expectations excitement wise, which is quite an accomplishment given he was so excited so well done!'* (Parent 5). Whilst many of these comments are from parents, research by Fortuna (2014) found that parents were usually better at gauging their child's emotions than teachers and the data from the pupil questionnaires were increasingly positive regarding the pupils' feelings towards their new school.

Naturally, there were a variety of concerns that the children had surrounding the transition prior to starting at the new school. Whilst some of these concerns were unique to individuals, there were some recurring issues that multiple children were worried or anxious about in the lead-up to moving schools. These included the social aspect of school and *'having to make new friends'* (Child 21); the larger school environment and *'getting round the school'* (Child 10); and the difficulty of lessons in the new school, thinking they *'would be really hard'* (Child 20). Once again, many of these concerns could be attributed to a fear of the unknown, with Teacher 2 believing that ***'the worry is sometimes bigger than the transition itself'*** and that many of the concerns children have prior to the transition are short lived or do not actually materialise at all. This concurs with some of the comments made by the child participants in the focus groups such as *'I was worried about English because I thought it would be really hard but it's actually*

quite fun' (Child 13) and *'I was also quite worried about bullies… but there aren't any bullies'* (Child 4), illustrating that these children believe that some of their initial worries about the new school were unfounded.

4.3.4 Parents' feelings towards transition

The parental experience and perspective featured strongly in the data, indicating that it is not only children moving schools who are impacted by the transition. Parents also experience a disruption to their norm and are often faced with changes to their routines, due to factors such as differing school times or transport methods. As one parent explained:

> *I don't come to school, I don't drive and it's far away from our house so the amount of times that I'll manage to come to school in a term is going to be very few, which is really different from [old school's name] where I was dropping off and picking up at school every single day.* (Parent 3)

Amongst some parents, the lead-up to the transition had caused some anxiety, and in particular *'the social piece and the friendships was, is definitely, definitely a key focus, the most important thing, without exception'* (Parent 5). Friendships and the social aspect of school life were one of the most common parental concerns. As Parent 6 explained, *'of course they make friends… but at first, you're anxious that he's going to fit in and be friends with people and get to know everyone'*. This recognition of the social dynamics of school potentially being more of a parental concern was shared by Teacher 1, who explained that ***'When the parents say to me their child's really worried about being with that boy, I think, 'No they're not. You're worried about your child being with that boy.'… I don't think boys are that worried about making new friends.'***

Nevertheless, parental concerns that their child will not fit in and have difficulties socially within a new environment were common within the data. One parent's concerns surrounded the concept of the school being single sex, asking:

> *[H]ow is it going to be in a school full of boys when there is just the testosterone and nothing to kind of dilute this energy… Are boys' schools in general a good idea? Is this like, more boisterous in general?* (Parent 8)

These questions arose from there being many older boys in the school, which the parent felt changed the social dynamic considerably from what their son was used to. As a result, they had begun to question their choice about their son moving to his new school.

A further area of parental concern was whether they were adequately supporting their child throughout the transition. Teacher 2 believed that parents are ***'actually not that worried about the academic side, they're worried about the move of their child to a bigger school and trying to work out how to support that'***. This aligned with comments from parents who agreed that they *'often wonder if I'm doing all of the homework right with the logins'* (Parent 5), with one parent saying, *'That's the thing that panics us as parents I think, is the homework.'* (Parent 4). It would appear that parents are keen to support their children with aspects of their education such as homework, but there is a level of anxiety over whether they are helping or hindering with being able to log in to the correct systems when tasks or activities are set online. The only issue with homework mentioned by the child participants, however, was getting *'too much'* (Child 9) and the fact that having it *'every day is tricky because if you're busy or you're tired after school you still have to do it and that can sometimes be hard'* (Child 10). This sentiment was expressed in two of the focus groups and whilst one of the children did suggest that *'it would be better if we could wait and have a couple of days to do it [the homework]'* (Child 8), none of them commented on having or needing parental help or support in this area.

Nevertheless, the parental participants wanted to know how to best support their child and were concerned about how to go about doing so. As one parent explained: *'I think I was quite nervous about how I would support him, feeling so remote from everything'* (Parent 3). The idea of

remoteness from school was not uncommon with the distance between home and school in some cases being *'10 miles away. They're off, sort of, all day'* (Parent 6). This suggests that for some parents, the distance is more than just physical.

Parental feelings towards the transition, however, were impacted by their prior experiences and many of the parents compared their child's transition to a new school with their own childhood experiences of moving school. One parent praised the pastoral aspect of the transition programme, explaining that *'it wasn't like my experience where, you know, I think the first time I saw the school I went to was the day I was dropped off! Plus, it was a boarding school'* (Parent 4). Similarly, another parent commented: *'I didn't appreciate actually what a good age it is to make the change… It's so different because I went to a school in Ireland that started at 4 and ended at 18 so the UK system of changing a few times is quite different'* (Parent 5).

Comparisons were also made with earlier transitions their child had made, with one parent being *'very apprehensive about transitions'* (Parent 8) due to their child previously struggling with moving schools when in kindergarten and knowing that their child *'doesn't like change; he likes things that he knows'* (Parent 8). Similarly, Parent 3's son *'thrives on routine'* and as a result they were *'prepared for it being challenging'* (Parent 3), despite not necessarily anticipating the level of difficulty their son would face with the transition.

For parents who had children already at the case study school, comparisons were also made between the siblings' transitions, with all of these parents agreeing that the transition was *'Definitely much easier'* (Parent 1) with a second child. However, one of the teacher participants found that parents with siblings who had already moved schools played down the magnitude of how big a change school transition is, saying:

> ***I think from the parent perspective, often it's a case of, oh well your older sibling did it or other people have done it, you'll be fine. They just compare it to another transition thinking their child will be alright and you're like, no!*** (Teacher 3)

Whilst this is only one person's perspective, parents who had already experienced the transition with an older sibling, did perceive that children were *'very ready for the step'* (Parent 1) and *'very ready'* (Parent 7) for the transition. Additionally, these parents reported being less anxious about this transition, in comparison to that of their child's elder sibling. This could be explained by there being fewer new and unknown variables for them due to the enhanced familiarity they would have with the school setting.

> *I remember with [older brother's name], going on the bus the first day and thinking, 'Ooh!' But I don't think I had it with [child's name] because of him having [older brother's name] with him.* (Parent 7)

Nevertheless, as can be shown by the quotation above, having an older brother to look after a younger sibling and show them what to do in the new situations can also help to alleviate parental anxiety, taking away the unknown aspect of a new school. This also gives parents the reassurance that their younger son is not on his own and has an experienced role model alongside him, who understands what the day-to-day life in the school is like.

4.4 Theme 2: Familiarity

Within this study, children who had an increased familiarity with their new school appeared to find the transition easier and reported more positively on their experience of moving schools. As one parent explained about their son:

> *[H]e doesn't like change, he likes things that he knows, and you know, he likes his friends… I think it was really important that he had this continuity, several bits that were continuing.* (Parent 8)

Continuity, and through this familiarity, appeared to decrease the fear of the unknown experienced by some of the children by increasing their understanding of the new school environment and enabling them to feel more comfortable and confident in this setting, thereby

helping them adapt more quickly to the new context and relationships: *'he had a lot of it that was known and so he didn't feel that it was a big change'* (Parent 8).

The teachers responded very positively about events that schools put on to help increase children's familiarity with the school site and other individuals who would be at the school: ***'being able to go visit them [schools] before they go… that's the main thing'*** (Teacher 3). Parents agreed, with comments such as *'He was familiar with the surroundings and I think that is key'* (Parent 1) and *'he got familiar well early on with the school and some of the grounds… [because] of the days he spent there, he got very excited about going and it felt familiar'* (Parent 4).

Increased familiarity appeared to come from a variety of sources and was discussed broadly across the data sets. Within this theme, I consider the three main areas concerning increased familiarity that appear within the data, which are knowing individuals already at the school, including both pupils and teachers, increased awareness of the school site from previous visits, and similarities between the new school and their previous setting.

4.4.1 Knowing individuals already at the school

As in Section 4.3.4, parents felt that the transition was eased by their child having a sibling already at the school, with one commenting *'he felt quite familiar with it [the new school] already. I can't emphasise enough how much it helped having an older brother because he'd come home and talk about it'* (Parent 6). This was supported by the children, with one boy saying, *'I'm finding it very nice as my brother's here so I'm enjoying it a lot'* (Child 5). Similarly, all the pupils with siblings already at the school who completed the questionnaires mentioned in the pre-transition questionnaires that they were looking forward to seeing their brothers at school. In the post-transition questionnaires, they also all either commented that they were enjoying seeing their brothers or that he was someone they could go to if they had questions about their new school.

However, it was not only knowing others in the school directly that helped children to feel more comfortable about the transition but also knowing them indirectly. For example, one boy in the first pre-transition questionnaires listed the friends in his current school who had either a sibling attending or a parent working at the new school as someone he could speak to should he have questions. Similarly, all but one of the children named their Year 8 buddy in answer to this question in the second pre-transition questionnaire, despite not having met them yet and not even having had any contact with them.

Nevertheless, of all the support systems put in place by the new school, the buddy system was the most popular and favourable amongst research participants, with one parent believing it to be *'absolutely fundamental to [child] feeling comfortable and happy'* (Parent 3) and many parents commenting that their child *'talks about his buddy all the time'* (Parent 4). The relationship is initiated by the Year 8 boy sending a postcard to their Year 3 buddy during the summer holidays before the September of starting at the new school.

> *The idea of getting the note out of the blue from [buddy] was lovely. He talked about [buddy] non-stop all summer. We didn't even know [buddy]'s surname because I don't think [buddy]'s surname was at the bottom of the card! [Buddy] was discussed at length all summer. He was really excited about going in. I think it's a lovely idea and it certainly worked very well for [child].* (Parent 5)

This was equally well received by the children, with comments such as: *'I was excited because I knew that [buddy's name] would be my buddy'* (Child 9) and *'I like [buddy's name]. He's nice'* (Child 11). The buddy system enables all of the boys to have a familiar link to the new school when they start in September, regardless of whether they have a sibling at the school or have attended one of the pre-preps also owned by the trust and is viewed positively by the pupils: *'when you're in Year 8, you actually become the buddy and I'm looking forward to that!'* (Child 5).

For children who were at either of the two pre-preparatory schools owned by the same trust, they had the opportunity to meet both teachers and current students at the case study school throughout their previous years at school, with visits between the schools being common. Some of these were for general school events such as football festivals or World Book Day, whereas others were structured transition events, such as Year 3 teachers visiting to answer questions the children may have regarding their upcoming move. This event was useful for the children, with one commenting that *'It kind of helped when you came to my school and answered questions because then I knew who you were and recognised you when you were my teacher. I liked that I knew who you were a bit from before'* (Child 8). Being able to meet the children in an already familiar environment to them meant that they were able to feel safe and comfortable when talking about an upcoming change.

Children with older siblings in the school also appeared to benefit from already knowing many of the teachers, even if only by sight. As Parent 1 explained, *'Being there for drop offs and pickups is obviously helpful, you know, because [teacher name] might be walking down the street and [older brother] would recognise that that's [teacher name] so [child] would feel like he knows [teacher name] before he gets there.'* Whilst parents who collect their child in person are in the minority due to the school's transport system, siblings may also have the opportunity to meet teachers at sports fixtures and one parent cited the benefits of online learning in previous years enabling her younger son to recognise his older brother's teachers from him *'popping up and saying hi'* (Parent 7). Even having just seen teachers in passing or on a screen appeared to increase the children's sense of familiarity regarding their new school and meant that this aspect was not an entirely unknown entity.

4.4.2 Familiarity with the school site

Specific transition events such as open mornings or taster days are typical of school transition programmes, with open mornings usually 'selling' the school to parents and children alike,

whereas taster days occur once places have been decided upon and accepted. Nevertheless, taster days are still seen as an important way to advertise the school and build children's anticipation for their arrival in September by increasing their familiarity with the new environment.

> ***So often it's the taster days that are the most helpful… when they go, they meet people they're going to be with, or they go to the school, and they have fun. That's what sticks in their mind.*** (Teacher 1)

The idea of the taster day being fun and therefore appealing could be seen across various participants, regardless of their role within the transition, with teachers echoing the sentiment above, children recalling their favourite parts of the taster day and parents commenting on the excitement and anticipation in the build-up to the event and following the visit.

Being familiar with the school grounds appeared key to helping them feel comfortable at their new school, especially in a situation where *'it is a bigger school'* (Child 2). In the data, this included both having the familiarity of the school site from visits before the transition, and then also being able to navigate around the school and *'know which classroom I am going to'* (Child 4). The latter was particularly pertinent in the environment of the case study school as the children do not stay in one classroom throughout the day but move between rooms for their various lessons.

In terms of visits to the school site, once again, children who either had older siblings at the school or went to one of the two pre-preps in the same trust had the advantage of more opportunities to visit the school. For one of the Year 3 boys, *'because he's been there on pickups for his older brother, he knew exactly what was going to go on at the start of the day and end of the day'* (Parent 1) and siblings were also more likely to have visited the school site for events such as concerts, plays or sporting fixtures. The close links between the three schools within the

trust also enabled trips between the schools, such as visits from the pre-preps to make use of facilities such as the swimming pool.

Nevertheless, there were opportunities for all children to increase their familiarity with the school site, regardless of their previous school, with events such as open days and taster mornings helping to facilitate this. The teachers interviewed thought that visiting the school before the transition was particularly key but more than just visiting was going and having a positive experience there. As Teacher 1 explained:

> ***That's what sticks in their mind because if you go somewhere and you have the most amazing cake and they gave you coke instead of orange squash, that's what you'd remember as a 6 year old child and I think those, just the little touches, sort of, you know, 'We got to eat something we don't normally eat and that was really wowzers!' It just creates a positive memory, and I think it only takes that sort of one planted positive memory to spur them on and make them not worried about it.***

Being able to draw on a positive memory formed within the new school setting helps give the child a greater sense of belonging and enables them to see themselves at the school. This in turn can help the transition to feel less daunting as they are more likely to have an idea of what to expect at the new school and to associate the positive memory with the new environment.

One parent also mentioned the benefit that the school videos and virtual tours had in making both him and his son feel more comfortable and familiar with the new school environment. *'Watching those videos because again, it's like me doing a tour through the computer. You feel like you know it, even without physically being there. Yeah, that was really helpful'* (Parent 4). Familiarity with the new environment therefore seemed to contribute to both children and parents feeling more at ease regarding the transition.

4.4.3 Comparison with previous school setting

For the majority of the children in this study, the concerns they had regarding the new school could be attributed to factors they were unfamiliar with due to there being *'a lot of things that are different'* (Child 8) from their previous school setting and as a result having ***'elements of just not knowing what to expect'*** (Teacher 3).

Some of the concerns raised by the children surrounded the larger school environment, such as ***'there being bigger kids there, older kids… getting lost, that's normally a key worry'*** (Teacher 2). This was shown across the data sets, with one child explaining that he *'was mostly worried about getting round the school'* (Child 10) and one parent recalling her son saying *'I'm a little bit worried about changing classrooms'* (Parent 7) in the lead-up to the transition.

As previously discussed in Section 4.4.2, the idea of moving from classroom to classroom would also be entirely new to all of the children. In their previous settings, *'you just had to stay in one classroom'* (Child 17) and *'only left the classroom for assembly and PE and lunch'* (Child 22). During these times of moving from one area of the school to another at their previous schools, the children would have been fully supervised and moved as a group, which is a substantial difference from the more independent secondary-based model followed at their new school.

Lunch was another factor that many of the pupils discussed in terms of similarities and differences with their previous setting, with the new school enabling them to have *'a hot lunch every day'* (Child 10), rather than bringing in packed lunches or having parents choosing a meal in advance. Whilst some children gave positive comments that *'the lunches are nicer'* (Child 7) and *'it's better here because I can choose what I eat and I get to have pudding'* (Child 11), one child expressed decision fatigue over *'having all of the choices of things to put on*

my plate' (Child 4). Conversely, one of the parents commented that the changes in lunch arrangements were helping to make their child more independent:

> *[H]e's responsible for making sure that you know, he's not hungry in school and he did become, like in the first two weeks definitely, more independent which is nice. To the point that now, if he's hungry he will go and get himself cereal. He'll just sort it out, which is a nice change. He impressed us the other day when he was still hungry so he got himself some cereal and tidied up himself as well, so we were like, oh, this is good.* (Parent 8)

Although some of the differences between the children's new school setting and their old one may have been exciting for some of the children in the lead-up to the transition, they may have also caused anxiety for others. All of the teacher participants discussed common worries that pupils often have such as ***'getting lost… not making any friends… [and] being bullied'*** (Teacher 3). This corresponded with concerns raised by both parents and pupils, which can all be related to the unfamiliarity of the new setting. As a result, one of the teachers interviewed proposed the idea of the new school presenting a typical daily routine of what the children could expect when they moved school:

> ***I think a day in the life would be really helpful and not a day in the life that's trying to wow them, but a day in the life as in, you will actually have to do all of these things during the day. Without overwhelming them, but just so they sort of get an idea of what a daily timetable might look like.*** (Teacher 1)

Through this, the pupils transitioning would be able to compare their current school routine with the new school and therefore help to decrease the quantity of unknown and unfamiliar factors in the lead-up to the transition.

4.5 Theme 3: Shared Experience

Another theme which occurred strongly across the data was the idea of how the process of transition was a shared experience and did not occur in isolation for any one individual. All the children within the study had the shared experience of beginning at a new school in September 2022 and that *'everyone was new'* (Parent 5). Furthermore, some of these children had the additional shared experience of transitioning from the same previous school. Alongside the children, their parents and class teachers were also part of the transition and shared in the child's experience of moving schools to varying degrees. Additionally, parents had the shared experience with other parents who also had a child transitioning to a new school.

Across the data, the idea of transition being a shared experience seemed to be a comforting thought for many. Children who moved alongside peers appeared more confident regarding friendships, with one boy explaining, *'I knew some people from my old school, so I wasn't worried [about the transition]'* (Child 10) and others saying that *'six people were from my old school and so it kind of makes it easier'* (Child 3). Children transitioning with peers also provided parents with a support system as there was *'a network of parents we already knew from [old school's name]'* (Parent 8).

Although the different participants encountered varying degrees of shared experience with other individuals, all experienced some shared aspect of the transition. Within this theme, I begin by looking at the shared experience that all of the children, and through them their parents, had, that is, the idea of starting the new school together. I then consider the shared experiences of the children and parents separately, by looking at the respective subthemes of moving with peers and parental relationships with other parents.

4.5.1 Starting together

> *We really liked the fact that it started at Year 3 and that everyone was new, rather than going, even if you're going as a cohort of six or ten new boys into an existing cohort, that feels quite different.* (Parent 5)

All of the children who started Year 3 at the case study school in September 2022 were new to the school and therefore shared the experience of being the youngest year group at the school. Despite different levels of familiarity with the school, in terms of their exposure to the physical environment and individuals who were either already at the school or were joining it, all of the pupils were experiencing something new because *'everybody's going through the same transition'* (Parent 8) of starting the school in Year 3.

Whilst some of the children were moving with peers from their old school, the classes were mixed to avoid all the children from one school being together and to help facilitate making friends with other children they did not know.

> *He's in a class with three others from [old school's name]. Obviously, you broke them up so he did have to make new friends in his class and there's only one of his friends from [old school's name] who's in his football team so that's helpful because you don't just want him to be cliquey but branch out a little. He has some very, very close friends that he had from [old school's name], so you don't want to lose that friendship either of course as that's important.* (Parent 4)

Contact details of parents for children in the new classes were given out prior to the transition ***'so that children can get together and have play dates over the holidays so they can meet up with all their new buddies'*** (Teacher 1). One parent explained how they took advantage of this and *'swapped some numbers and then over the summer we arranged a few playdates and made like three or four friends'* (Parent 2). Nevertheless, some children who had not moved alongside anyone from their previous school still found that making friends was *'quite tricky because I'm not*

sure who to make friends with or they've already decided' (Child 1). However, one child commented on how they would introduce people in their class who had not moved with many or any peers to people they knew from their old school, explaining that *'people who are by themselves, I sometimes introduce them to my friends and then they can be friends with them too'* (Child 3). This suggests that he was aware of the potential difficulties of making friends when you only know a limited number of other pupils within the cohort.

The child participants also spoke about helping one another in the initial weeks of starting at the new school, explaining that *'We can help other people'* (Child 12) or that they *'could ask my friends'* (Child 2) if they did not know where their lesson was, for example, or that *'You can ask anyone and they will help you... like any of the Year 3s'* (Child 9) if they were unsure about something at their new school. Similarly, in the final pupil questionnaire, two of the participants cited *'friends'* or *'people in my class'* as individuals they could talk to if they had questions about their new school.

Despite this, some of the children still thought that more could be done prior to the transition to enable them to meet other new joiners before the start of term.

> *There should actually be more events and some different events. I would say that maybe all the new Year 3s could come to the school and there could be like lots of things to do and there'd be lots of Year 3s there and it would kind of be like trying to know more about you, like trying to get more friends day.* (Child 5)

4.5.2 Moving with peers

Whilst all starting at the school together provided a shared experience, having the additional shared past experience of a previous school appeared to make the transition easier: *'he had the*

advantage of coming with sort of 7, 8, 9 boys from his previous school' (Parent 6) as they knew more people and therefore had some level of familiarity in the new environment. Both parents and children reported that transitioning to a new school with other children they had previously been at school with helped children to feel less anxious about the move and more positive about friendships.

> *He came with fifteen of his friends so there was a good sense of continuity, so he wasn't arriving as a sole. You know, some people arrive and they're the only ones coming from their school and that obviously, you know, makes things a little more challenging.* (Parent 4)

Moving to new schools in groups appeared to be the norm within the pre-preps and to support with the transition, the Year 2 teachers explained how they would ***'sit them in table groups in summer two with children that they're going to go to school with'*** (Teacher 2) to help foster friendships and that they ***'pass up recommendations [to the new school] on who should be with who. Who would be ideal friends together'*** (Teacher 1).

Of the entire Year 3 cohort, 47 of the 57 pupils made the transition alongside at least one peer from their previous school (see Appendix 1) and it was evident from the data that the experience of moving to a new school was perceived differently depending on whether the child was making the transition alongside their current peers or changing schools independently. Children that had made the move without any of their peers from their old school were more likely to describe making friends as challenging: *'Making friends is hard'* (Child 11), whereas children who were transitioning within a peer group were more likely to have *'friends from [old school's name]'* (Child 6) and even when *'people who came here from my old school... they're not really my good good friends. Like, I am friends with them but they're not my best friends.'* (Child 12), this provided the children with some level of a familiar support network.

4.5.3 Parental relationships with other parents

The influence of relationships with other parents as a parental support structure was another prominent feature in the data, with all the parental participants referring to relationships they had with other parents. Knowing another parent who understood the school appeared to help increase familiarity with the school, even if the other parent did not have a child in the same class or even year group as their own. One parent cited one of the reasons they chose the school was because *'we know some people whose sons… they went'* (Parent 5) and another explaining how the school had been recommended:

> *I spoke to a parent whose elder son goes there and he said, the amazing thing about [school name] is that every single day the son's gone he just goes with such enthusiasm and he comes home so happy and it's an amazing school.* (Parent 4)

Parents also appreciated opportunities to meet other parents of children in their son's year group and class, such as *'the parents social evening… I think it's a brilliant thing to do'* (Parent 6) and *'the parents' briefing beforehand was brilliant'* (Parent 5). However, some parents felt that they *'still haven't fully integrated with the new parents in [child]'s class'* (Parent 7) and wanted more opportunities for networking in person with the parents of their son's peers.

Three of the parents interviewed had older children at the school and were *'happy to answer questions'* (Parent 7) or *'be a support for other who don't know'* (Parent 1) and the parents who were not in this position, expressed gratitude to those parents who had already helped and answered questions about the new school, providing much needed *'support networks for parents'* (Parent 8). One of the teacher participants also commented on the importance parents placed on these support networks, saying:

> ***[L]ast year I had people say to me on the gate, 'Oh we're really good friends and I know she's got her older son at [school name] so I really need those two to go together so that she can help me out.'*** (Teacher 1)

However, some parents expressed challenges they had faced with *'WhatsApp groups that just go nuts with messages'* (Parent 7), with parents feeling as though *'everyone was messaging every five seconds'* (Parent 4). Whilst parents did appreciate the benefits of technology and the fact that when their child had lost items at school or *'when you don't know what the prep [homework] is, there is definitely someone you can text'* (Parent 8), parents did express frustration with there being *'a lot of traffic of people who couldn't understand this and couldn't understand that'* (Parent 4). To help reduce the quantity of such messages, one of the parents who had an older child already at the school proposed that it would be *'super useful to have a parents' 'What to Expect' at [school's name]'* (Parent 1) as part of the parental information pack to share top tips regarding the transition and help to reduce the number of *'difficult messages [that] come on the WhatsApp group'* (Parent 1).

4.6 Theme 4: Sense of Community and Belonging

The majority of the children who participated in this study would have been moving from a school they had attended for three years and therefore both the children and their parents would be moving from that known school community to a new one. However, children who attended one of the two pre-preparatory schools that were part of the same trust as the research school would have already been part of the wider trust community. Having some level of access to the community prior to the transition enables the child and their family to begin to accumulate cultural capital, which may help to facilitate a smoother transition.

> ***We often refer to [school name] so they feel like they are part of the trust… it becomes a familiar term to them, so they feel like they know it, even if they don't.*** (Teacher 1)

Nevertheless, fostering a sense of belonging to the new school community appeared to be important to all parties across the data set. Parents commented on the school feeling *'welcoming'* (Parent 7) on open days and children expressed how certain transitions helped to promote positive anticipation: *'That's when I knew I would like the school'* (Child 5). Similarly, teachers commented on how the school ensured that there were ***'little gifts and little thoughts or whatever, kind of help them feel like already like they belong a little bit in that school'*** (Teacher 3), such as bags with the new school's logo which were given out on the taster morning.

As the school community encompasses both pupils, teachers and parents, I explore the relationships and links between these three groups within this theme. Additionally, because the school community where the research took place also encompasses two pre-preparatory schools, this theme will also consider links between children's old and new schools and how the strength of these school relationships influences the experience of school transition.

4.6.1 Children's relationship with teachers

All of the children who participated in either the pupil questionnaires or the focus groups had moved from an environment where they had one main class teacher, to a new school where they had multiple teachers for various subjects and lessons. Although some of the pupils were used to having specialist teachers for certain subjects, such as French, music and games, having so many different teachers for various subjects was a new experience for all of the child participants. The experience elicited broadly positive responses, with the children finding that it *'makes the day more interesting'* (Child 10) and prevents them from *'getting bored of one teacher'* (Child 11). There was a misconception amongst one of the focus groups that subject specialism meant that teachers could only teach that subject, rather than simply specialising in it, but overall, other than it being *'a bit tricky to remember all of their names'* (Child 22), the children seemed to enjoy having multiple teachers.

Positive relationships with teachers appeared to be important to the children in the study and there was broad agreement that they preferred teachers who were not strict, with one child explaining, *'I like it when we have nice teachers but I don't like it when we have the strict ones'* (Child 20). Similarly, one parent explained that her son had been *'slightly nervous about the prospect of strict teachers'* (Parent 1), although she believed that this was likely an imagined mythical anxiety that was the product of teasing from his older brother. Certainly, as Teacher 1 illustrates, concerns due to school rumours and hearsay are common occurrences:

> ***I find they they're concerned more about individual teachers that they have heard rumours about. And this is across all classes, and all schools, and all children will say, 'Somebody's older sister said that there's this English teacher who does this and I don't want to go there because what if I did that and the English teacher did that'. So it's the rumour mill, it's the spin that people put on their stories that puts them off the most.***

Again, this could be attributed to fear of the unknown and the fact that younger children are more likely to believe those who are older, and who they think are reputable sources. Nevertheless, all of the children participating in the research were able to name multiple teachers or other adults in the school that they would be able to talk to if they needed help, suggesting positive relationships between the children and staff at their new school.

4.6.2 Children's feelings towards new school

In general, feelings towards the new school from the child participants were positive, with comments such as: *'I have found starting at [new school's name] quite exciting'* (Child 9), *'it's really fun'* (Child 10) and *'I think it's better than my old school'* (Child 15) expressing general consensus from the child participants. Parents also agreed that their children were enjoying being at their new school:

> *He gets up in the morning, he loves putting his uniform on and there's no issue about him going to school and he's very happy going; he loves going and he's had a great day. He just seems very happy. So something must have gone right in the transition, I guess!* (Parent 4)

The enjoyment of putting his uniform on may be connected to the development of a sense of belonging and identity with the school community, and this positivity was shared by other parents who agreed that their child felt *'really comfortable, really welcome, really excited to go to school every day and I don't think every school gets that right by any means'* (Parent 6) and that importantly for them, *'the sense that we get from him is that he is happy'* (Parent 8). These comments from parents suggest that their children are speaking positively about their new school at home and that the parents are perceiving their child as being happy following the transition.

This interpretation by the parents correlates with the data from the children in the study, who spoke with enthusiasm about the different lessons, wider range of facilities and sporting opportunities at the new school, compared to their former setting. In particular, children reported positively on *'all of the extra things to do at break time, like going to the AWS [all weather surface] and to the adventure playground'* (Child 19).

Moving classrooms for lessons was seen as a positive part of their school experience for some, particularly after a few weeks following the transition, when the children felt more comfortable in finding their way around. As explained by two of the children:

> *This school is also bigger than my old school. It makes me feel more happy because you get to have more space to go and to go anywhere. I like that now that I know where everything is.* (Child 16)

I like switching classrooms in between lessons… what I like about it is like getting to walk around and be like an explorer and see where we're going next. (Child 15)

It is interesting that children in two separate focus groups used the idea of being an explorer and getting to *'explore more'* (Child 11) when explaining what they enjoyed about navigating their way around the school. This may suggest that being provided with the independence to find where their next classroom is gives some of the children a sense of adventure. Nevertheless, this aspect of school was still *'a little tricky'* (Child 8) and challenging for some, although the majority of children in the post-transition questionnaire which was administered closest to the transition had listed that moving between classrooms was challenging, and only one child mentioned it on the next questionnaire, which was completed three months later.

Despite this general agreement that the children knew their way around the school more confidently, and getting lost was less of an issue than it had been when they first started, there did appear to be some anxiety still surrounding finding their way around the school, with one boy concerned that he would *'sometimes forget where I'm meant to be going and then I get really worried that I'm going to get in trouble with the teacher because I'm late'* (Child 22) and others commenting on the *'big crowds'* (Child 2) and the corridors being *'not that big and you can get pushed and shoved by other boys in the school or one of your friends trying to catch up with you'* (Child 21). This anxiety could impact the children's feelings towards their new school and therefore influence their sense of belonging.

4.6.3 Parental relationship with new school

Due to the key role that parents play in choosing a preparatory school for their child, the parent and school relationship begins during the school selection process. One parent described the importance of the 'feel' of a school when visiting prospective schools:

> *[W]e were told when I went to a schools' fair, you need to kind of go to these schools and feel it and you will instinctively know if you see your son there or not. I think it's a very tactile thing, you just sense it, and I got that through the computer. There was one school where I was like, I'm not feeling this school at all. I can't explain it but there was something about it. Whereas at [new school's name], seeing the virtual tour I was like, this is amazing, I'm really feeling it and then when I actually came to it, it was exactly the same reaction I'd had before. There wasn't anything more or less than that. It had the same visceral sort of taking me in about the school.* (Parent 4)

This illustrates how the relationship between parents and the school begins with those first interactions and shows the importance of parents being able to visualise their child becoming a member of that particular school community. These first impressions are not solely limited to visiting a physical location either, but in this case, were also made from a virtual tour.

The relationship between parents and any new school is also significantly impacted by the quantity and quality of communication. When starting a new school, there are new systems and processes which need to be communicated to parents, with effective communication between the new school and parents being key so that both parties can work together for the benefit of the pupils (Coffey, 2013). Whilst the majority of parents thought that the school's communication had been *'pretty smooth'* (Parent 8), *'is really clear'* (Parent 1) and that *'they staggered it quite nicely'* (Parent 3), some of the parents admitted that the *'communication change has been quite hard'* (Parent 7). In particular, it was commented by Parent 1 that many of the parents within the year group were finding the new school challenging because it is *'the first time that parents need to take a step back'* in order to allow the school to encourage and foster independence in the children. Within the pre-preparatory setting, the children would have been picked up directly from the school by either a parent or carer and parents would be *'so used to seeing the teachers every day at pre-preps'* (Parent 1) and easily having informal conversations ***'on the gate'*** (Teacher 1). As

a result of this change, one of the parents felt that the new school seemed *'very far away and removed'* (Parent 3).

Nevertheless, most parents appeared to view their relationship with the school in a positive light, appreciating that while there is a lot of information to be disseminated, the school tried hard to ensure that parents were aware of what they needed to know. The school's encouragement of parental involvement throughout the transition process was also appreciated, with parent briefings and headteacher talks prior to the transition and invitations to attend sporting fixtures and new parent events following the move being praised. Parents also reported favourably on their relationship with their child's tutor, and whilst there were requests to speak to *'all of the teachers'* (Parent 7) in the first term, it was understood that this might not be manageable logistically.

4.6.4 Relationships/links between schools

According to the teacher participants, the quantity and quality of communication passed between schools during the transition process differed greatly depending on the relationships between the schools. As the teachers interviewed explain, ***'The schools that we have got stronger bonds with will phone up and we will hand over information as they ask'*** (Teacher 2); however ***'some schools are just getting the child in and will go from there, like, whatever we get on day one is what we get, type of thing'*** (Teacher 3). The level of contact between schools therefore varies, which directly impacts the information exchanged between schools concerning individual pupils, with the only legal requirement being the passing on of safeguarding concerns and child protection files (Department for Education, 2021).

It would appear from the data that stronger links between schools result in a greater sharing of information, which is usually of both an academic and pastoral nature. In terms of academic data, any support groups that children have participated in, and specifically if they need to continue with the intervention, are usually shared, alongside any additional learning needs.

Pastoral notes are also passed on, including if there are any behavioural needs the school should be aware of, which children work well together and those who would be better in different classes, and also if the child has had any specific concerns that they have voiced about moving schools. The teachers also mentioned the importance of including details about the child as a whole, such as ***'who's good at particular sports, particular talents, whether they play a musical instrument'*** (Teacher 1). All three of the teachers interviewed expressed their belief in the value of these handovers and that sharing this information made ***'transition easier… [because] they've got someone who can roughly know what's happened before'*** (Teacher 2). The same teacher also identified that parents liked ***'the idea of there being a consistent approach for their child'*** (Teacher 2), as by understanding a child's context, relationships between teachers and pupils can be built more quickly and efficiently.

4.6.5 Friendships

Following on from the discussion in the previous theme regarding going through the transition alongside peers, the relationships that children have with their peer group undoubtedly influence the transition experience. As previously mentioned, one of the biggest concerns among parents within the research group was friendships, whereas this was reported on with mixed responses by the children. Prior to the transition, some were *'excited… [about] making friends'* (Child 1; Child 2), whilst others were *'nervous'* (Child 3) or *'worried because of having to make friends'* (Child 21). One child was concerned that *'there might be some people who didn't want to be friends with me and I would be alone'* (Child 9) and there were also fears amongst children about being bullied and there being *'bigger boys'* (Child 5) at the new school. The teachers also raised friendships and bullying as common concerns among children moving schools, with children worried they ***'won't have any friends'*** (Teacher 2), particularly when it was to a larger environment with older, and therefore usually bigger, children.

Having the security of moving with other children they knew, however, appeared to help alleviate friendship concerns. For example, one child explained they were *'A bit worried because of having to make new friends but a bit excited because I was moving with some of my friends from my old school and then getting to make new friends'* (Child 14), whereas another commented *'For me, it was easy to find friends because I already had friends at this school from my old school'* (Child 10).

Whilst the majority of the children who participated in both the pupil questionnaires and the focus groups found making friends to be a positive experience, there were some comments concerning *'missing friends'* (Child 3; Child 6) from their old schools, which made them *'feel a bit sad'* (Child 21). This occurred mainly for children who had moved independently, or who had moved with peers they did not consider to be close friends.

4.7 Summary

Through exploring the perspectives of children alongside their parents and teachers, the four themes outlined in this chapter: preparation and readiness for school; familiarity; shared experience; and sense of community and belonging, all contribute to the phenomena of school transition across educational establishments. These are factors which can influence the experience for all the individuals involved within the transition process.

Both home and school play a role in helping children to prepare for the transition, with there being an equal focus needed on academics, practical skills and emotional readiness. Increasing familiarity with the new environment and other individuals within it can help to ease the transition, as can providing a support network through shared experiences during the lead-up to and throughout the transition period. Notably, these support networks were not just for children as the idea of parent relationships with other parents of children at the school also featured

prominently within the data. The idea of developing a sense of community within, and a feeling of belonging to, the new school environment was also key, with it appearing that developing an overarching cultural assimilation to the new school signified a successful transition.

Each of the themes should not be considered in isolation, however, as they overlap and can impact one another. For example, increased familiarity can influence children's anticipation of the transition and their feelings towards the new school, with the idea of having a shared experience with others during the process of transition also contributing to the sense of belonging and community in the new environment. How these themes relate to one another is explored in greater detail in the next chapter, where I position my analysis within the wider field of knowledge and set out a proposed conceptual model for facilitating a successful school transition.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the data generated from this case study in relation to the literature base and conceptual framework set out in Chapter Two, addressing the initial research question: How can the wellbeing of children be supported during school transition from KS1 to KS2 in the UK independent educational sector, where the transition occurs across educational settings? In doing so, it presents a conceptual model for supporting the process of a successful transition, as suggested by the research findings.

When considering school transitions, it is key to keep in mind that what on the surface may appear to be a single transition experienced by the child moving schools, is in fact a multi-faceted and multidimensional transition both for the child and other individuals within their microsystem (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016). Consequently, whilst this discussion predominantly focuses on the child's experience, the phenomena of school transition must be examined more broadly than solely from the child's perspective, acknowledging the wider impact that a transition has upon other individuals within the child's life and the resultant transitions which occur. In alignment with the conceptual framework that has been used to conduct this study, and as typical of case study research, this chapter will therefore draw upon the wider experiences of the transition process captured within the data of this research to provide an in-depth understanding and exploration of this phenomenon (Stake, 2006).

The discussion begins by returning to the conceptual framework and explores the multiple transitions which may occur when a child moves to a new school. Within the context of this study, I explore the variety of environmental, academic, social and emotional transitions which take place as part of a school transition, considering predominantly the child's experience but also acknowledging the co-occurring transitions that may be instigated for other individuals, and

which may impact the child transitioning. This will lead to a discussion of how a successful transition results in an identity shift for the individual undergoing the process, before culminating in the presentation of a conceptual model that details the process of supporting a school transition to help maintain and safeguard children's wellbeing during this time, thus aiding a smoother adjustment period. The conceptual model is underpinned by Walker and Avant's (2019) method of concept analysis, which provides a structured framework to clarify the concept of supporting wellbeing during school transitions.

5.2 Considering Transition to the Research School using the Conceptual Framework

This study has been guided using a conceptual framework that draws upon Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory and the applied PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), alongside Jindal-Snape's (2016) MMT theory. Through this conceptual framework, transitions are therefore viewed as being a disruption to an individual's position in their ecological environment, resulting in a ripple-like effect for the individual as they simultaneously experience multiple transitions in various contexts. Furthermore, the individual's transition can trigger corresponding and co-occurring transitions for other individuals, resulting in overlapping multi-layered transitions, akin to ripples on a body of water.

The move to a new school cannot be viewed as a singular transition and instead the various overlapping and interconnected systems impacting upon the transition need to be considered (Jindal-Snape, 2016). In the next section, I therefore consider the multiple and multi-layered transitions which occur because of a school transition. Although I predominantly focus on the child's experience of transition, each of the following sections addresses the resultant transitions which occur for other individuals and may impact on the child's overall experience of school transition.

5.2.1 Environmental Transitions

One of the most apparent transitions that occurs for children who are starting a new school is the environmental change of moving to a new physical school site (Mumford and Birchwood, 2021; Pratt and George, 2005). All the children within the research were moving to a different school environment with which they were unfamiliar, in comparison to their previous school. Both parents and children commented on the new school being bigger, with older and physically larger children in attendance. The response to this was mixed, with some children finding the prospect exciting, whereas others expressing concerns and challenges regarding the unknown environment.

Attending a different school site also resulted in the children experiencing a transition in their morning routines, with their journey to school having changed and the ramifications this may have on what time they get up in the morning and the length of the journey. For some children, this would also include a different method of travel entirely, as many were now taking one of the school minibuses or a coach. This transition may therefore also result in a transition for parents and families, who are having to amend their routines to accommodate their child's transport needs.

Alongside the new overall physical environment, different lessons are held in different classrooms, with some being subject specific, such as science labs, the design and technology (DT) workshop and the swimming pool. Many of the children pointed out that not staying in the same classroom was a significant difference at the new school compared to their old, especially when considered alongside the new expectation of independently navigating between classes. Whilst the literature suggests that becoming lost is a concern for children at a new school (Curson, Wilson-Smith and Holliman, 2019; Tobbell, 2003), and some of the children within this study did express anxiety surrounding this, overall, moving between classrooms independently was met with excitement and enthusiasm.

In addition to these changes, break and lunch times presented environmental transitions, with children having multiple options of where to go and how to spend their time. Furthermore, the lunch at the school was a hot meal with a high degree of choice from numerous food options. This was a greater transition for some of the children, especially those who previously had packed lunches in their old school, but as the children were expected to choose what they wanted to eat independently and take it to where they were sitting, there was some degree of change experienced by all.

5.2.2 Academic Transitions

Moving to a new school also results in various academic transitions for the children as they move from a Year 2 to a Year 3 curriculum. There was an evident level of excitement regarding some of the new lessons they were now able to access, particularly those where they were given a level of responsibility, such as using more advanced and specialised equipment in PE and DT lessons.

Interestingly, although research often cites one of the challenges of transitioning to a new school as being an increased level of academic challenge (Galton, Morrison and Pell, 2000; Mackenzie, McMaugh and O'Sullivan, 2012; Sirsch, 2003), this was not necessarily the case within this study. Although parents and children both reported apprehension regarding academics in the lead-up to moving schools, it appeared that this concern was unfounded for most, with one of the parents commenting on the level of difficulty actually decreasing from the high-pressured Seven Plus environment of their son's previous school.

Nevertheless, parents were conscious of the academic transition and the potential gaps their child had due to differing schooling backgrounds or from the disruption of school closures during COVID. As a result, many of the parents commented on being concerned about how to best support their child academically in partnership with the new school. This was particularly apparent for one of the parents of a child who had previously attended a state-maintained school,

which they found vastly different from the independent school structure and culture, and as a result were unsure of the academic expectations at given ages within this differing school system.

5.2.3 Social Transitions

The social transitions which occur as part of the move to a new school are some of the most pressing concerns of children, according to the literature (Bagnall, Skipper and Fox, 2020; Mackenzie, McMaugh and O'Sullivan, 2012). School transitions often result in significant changes to a child's friendship group as not all their former classmates will move to the same new school. The children within this study were aware of the potential challenges of forming new friendships, recognising that moving to a new school alongside peers from their former school made the transition easier. Several of the children also commented on missing their old friends who did not move alongside them to the same school.

In addition to the social changes of friendship groups, children are having to navigate other social dynamics because of the transition. For many of the children who had previously attended pre-preparatory schools, they were making the transition from being the oldest and most established year group at that school, to being the youngest and having to share the school environment with significantly older children, up to the age of 13. Corresponding with the literature (Evangelou et al., 2008; Mackenzie, McMaugh and O'Sullivan, 2012), both children and parents noted that this transition was made easier knowing other pupils at the school, which often occurred through having older siblings already at the school and through the commended buddy system that was in place for the new Year 3s.

Moving to a new school also resulted in children having to form relationships with numerous teachers and other members of staff simultaneously, due to being taught by subject specialists for each of their lessons. Each of these teachers is likely to have a different teaching style and expectations, which contrasts considerably with the structure of the children's former schools,

where they would have one class teacher who taught most of their lessons and possibly one teaching assistant, rather than interacting with up to nine different adults each day.

It is not only children who are having to form relationships with members of staff at the new school, but parents are also adapting to a new social environment, both formally with teachers and the school, and informally with other parents. Both teachers and parents within the research mentioned differences in communication between settings. Linking to the change in transport arrangements, many of the parents were previously used to being able to talk to their child's teacher at drop off or collection, whereas arrangements were different at the new school. As a result, email tends to be the most common form of communication, and they therefore have fewer in-person interactions with their child's teachers. Some of the parents did comment on this within the research, wanting more opportunities to build these relationships to understand how their children were getting on at school.

A further transition experienced by parents is the social environment and interactions with other parents at the school. Generally, parental relationships with other parents were commented on positively, with parents feeling as though the support network created was helpful in numerous ways, from parents with children already at the school being able to give advice, to parents being able to update each other on the day's homework. This is likely to have positively impacted the children's experience of transition, helping to ease anxiety through parental support. However, many of the parents also commented on experiencing challenges concerning the quantity of messages sent digitally between the parental cohort and feeling frustrated as a result. This suggests that transitions for parents during this time were not necessarily always smooth, which may impact their child's feelings towards moving school (Fortuna, 2014; Lucey and Reay, 2000).

5.2.4 Emotional Transitions

Alongside all of the environmental, academic and social transitions being undertaken by the child and other individuals as a result of moving schools, there are also emotional transitions that are

taking place (Bagnall, Skipper and Fox, 2020). Children and parents are moving away from the old school community they previously belonged to, which may be accompanied by a sense of loss or grief. This is a transition which impacts all stakeholders, as class teachers who have taught children for the majority of their time during the previous school year say goodbye to families and children with whom they undoubtedly would have formed relationships. Equally, parents and children are saying goodbye to the known school environment and community they may have belonged to for three years and alongside that, whilst friendships with other children and between parents may remain, they are unlikely to be the same if interactions become less frequent. In addition to this, parents may well be mourning the end of part of their child's childhood as they approach this milestone of moving to a bigger school (O'Toole, Hayes and Mhathúna, 2014; Zeedyk et al., 2003).

The considerable number of transitions that are occurring when moving to a new school are therefore likely to take an emotional toll, with children feeling a range of emotions as they move from the known to the unknown. This can be challenging for young children to navigate, particularly if they feel conflicting emotions, such as being excited about the new beginning yet nervous regarding the new and unknown setting at the same time. Similarly, other individuals within the child's life, such as parents, teachers and peers, may be feeling a mix of emotions that could impact how the child perceives and feels about the transition, potentially resulting in the child feeling as though they need to adapt their behaviour and change how they show or share their emotions due to the impact this may have on their parents. Managing these emotional aspects, alongside the various transitions that are occurring throughout the process of moving schools, is key to facilitating successful adaptation to the new environment and set of circumstances.

5.3 Determining a Transition as Successful

Transitions are initiated by change events, resulting in a disruption to the individual's norm, and an altered set of circumstances from which they need to adapt (Bridges, 2004; Kralik, Visentin and Van Loon, 2006; Sanders et al., 2005). Within the context of school transitions, the change event is the move from one school to another, which results in various stakeholders affected by the transition needing to acclimate to a new school. A transition is therefore not an isolated change event, but rather the period of change and adaptation to a new or unaccustomed set of circumstances (Bridges, 2004; Sanders et al., 2005).

In this study specifically, whilst it was the Year 2 children who were starting a new school in September 2022, this transition impacted a wider range of individuals and spanned a greater length of time than the first day of school in September. Parents, siblings, friends from the previous schools and teachers from both the children's old and new schools were all also undergoing transitions which both impacted and were influenced by the transition of the children moving schools. Moreover, for many of these stakeholders, the process started more than a year in advance of the change event, with preparation for the Seven Plus examinations, and continued up to and past the end of this study, as individuals continued to adapt to their new circumstances.

It is evident that a successful transition is desirable. This is particularly key considering the disruption and disorientation a change event can cause in an individual's roles, routines and relationships (Jindal-Snape and Rienties, 2016; Musamali, 2018). Change events, and the transitions that are generated because of them, can impact on an individual's engagement with their environment, including how they perceive themselves, the established patterns of behaviour they routinely engage in and their interpersonal connections with others.

As a result, transitions can result in individuals needing to reconstruct their identity and sense of self (Bridges, 2004; Musamali, 2018). This is due to the disruptions caused by the change event

rendering an individual's usual and familiar assumptions and behaviours ineffective, resulting in the need to challenge or adapt from the status quo (Bridges, 2004). For example, in this study, the pupils were moving from the known and familiar setting of their previous schools, where they were likely to have had an established identity within their school communities. Moreover, for the majority of the children who had been attending pre-preparatory schools, they would have been the eldest pupils. Moving schools, however, disrupts this norm as they transition to a new and unknown school environment, with different expectations, policies and procedures than what they are used to, alongside new teachers, peers and older students.

A successful transition should therefore result in navigating and adapting to these disruptions and ensure that the individual develops feelings of contentment with their new set of circumstances (Kralik, Visentin and Van Loon, 2006). Consequently, within the context of this research, a successful transition between educational establishments would involve the pupils making the move to the new school and adjusting positively to their new environment.

Viewing transition as a process (Jindal-Snape, 2010) means that the beginning of a transition is not defined as the change event itself but rather the preparation that is undertaken beforehand. The school transition within this study cannot solely be deemed as the first day of Year 3 for the research cohort. Instead, this is the change event, which will result in the disruption to the individual's norm and requires preparation in advance to allow the individual to acquire the tools and resources necessary to positively adjust to their new set of circumstances. Thus, a successful transition will result in the individual experiencing a shift in their identity once they have adapted effectively to their new environment.

I now examine each of the three aspects of the transition process, beginning with a discussion of how schools prepare children for the move to a new school, before considering how the change event results in a disruption to the norm of a child's educational environment. Finally, I explain

how successful school transitions cause a shift in the child's identity as they develop a sense of belonging at their new school.

5.3.1 Preparing for Change

Although sometimes transitions can occur suddenly and unexpectedly, the process of transition usually begins in advance of the change event. Within an educational context, this is typically the case, with applications for children to move to a new school generally occurring months in advance and therefore providing children, parents and schools with time for preparation. Within this research, this preparation period began when the children were in Year 2, with the majority of children and their parents finding out if they were being offered a place at the school towards the end of November 2021, some ten months before the actual transition.

Whilst it is important to consider an individual's unique circumstances during the transition process and therefore ensure that they receive the bespoke preparation and support they need to successfully navigate the transition, educational establishments commonly undertake a general transition programme to support students. There is considerable research (for example, Bharara, 2020; Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006; and Jindal-Snape et al., 2019a) regarding these programmes during the primary to secondary school transition and although, as noted by the teacher participants within this study, all schools approach their transition programme differently, there are some commonalities and shared practices.

Transition programmes are usually aimed mainly at the pupils who are moving school and often include a day spent at the new school where the future students are able to meet some of their new peers who are also moving to the school, alongside some of the staff who work there. Within this 'transition day' there are likely to be tours of the school, team-building activities with their new classmates and sometimes the opportunity to speak to current students about what it is like at the school (Hanewald, 2013). Furthermore, transition programmes may also include teachers

from the new schools visiting pupils in their current setting both to get to know or observe these individuals, as well as to provide an opportunity to answer any questions they may have.

The transition programme at the case study school included a transition morning, which almost all of the children participating in the research spoke positively of, where the pupils were able to experience four activities based on music, drama, art and games lessons. Some of the children, however, did express some anxiety following the transition morning, due to an unfortunate incident of one of the children breaking his arm, and one child explained that he had been worried that the four lessons they had experienced would be the only lessons at the new school. Nevertheless, on the whole, participants from all three of the participant groups were complimentary of the transition morning, which appeared to generate excitement and anticipation for the move, increasing the pupils' familiarity with the school environment and providing children with the opportunity to meet other pupils who would be making the transition alongside them.

Other transition events mentioned favourably within the research included a football tournament for new pupils and a 'buddy lunch' with each of the new Year 3's being able to meet their Year 8 buddy, who gave them a tour of the school. Some of the activities in the transition programme, however, were not available to all of the pupils moving to the case study school, as some of the transition events were additionally put on to support pupils who were currently at one of the two pre-preparatory schools within the same trust as the case study school. This included teachers from the case study school visiting those pre-preps and a question-and-answer session with current Year 3 pupils. Having more transition events available for children attending these pre-preparatory schools suggests that closer links between schools during the transition process result in a greater number of opportunities for children attending these schools to familiarise themselves with the new environment through visits. This can also be seen in the teacher interview data, where the teacher from the pre-preparatory school that is not part of the same

charitable trust as the case study school commented on how their Year 2 class visited and used the facilities of the preparatory school they are linked to.

The transition preparation which occurred as part of the research school's transition programme was not just limited to preparing the children for the move but also their parents. The parental preparation included both informative and social events to help build relationships between parents and the school, as well as amongst parents, therefore encouraging and fostering positive interactions within the child's mesosystem and exosystem. Such events therefore provided additional support for the child's transition, as well as supporting the simultaneous transition occurring for parents.

The informative events included providing parents with practical information and advice regarding the new school's policies and procedures, whereas the social events enabled the parents to network with others who were going through a similar experience with their own child. These opportunities to build relationships were received positively by the parental participants, who appreciated the opportunity to integrate themselves with the school community.

The literature suggests that the responsibility of preparing a child for a school transition should fall on both a child's current and future schools (van Rens et al., 2018; Waters, Lester and Cross, 2014; Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999). However, as illustrated within this research, preparation from a child's current school before the move may be dependent on the proportion of individuals who are transitioning to a new school. The teacher participants within this research discussed ways in which they helped their classes to prepare for the transition, yet it is important to highlight that all of these teachers were in pre-preparatory schools, where the entire cohort moves on at the end of Year 2. In contrast to this, one of the parents said that their child, who had previously attended a state-maintained primary school, received no support in preparation for changing schools from their previous school, which they presumed was due to the majority of the year group continuing at the same school for KS2.

Where the research indicated that children were prepared by their former school, this included both practical support, such as building organisational skills and independence, as well as more emotional support, such as having conversations about how the children were feeling regarding the transition. In particular, the teacher participants stressed that their curriculum catered specifically for the transition, which was also commented on favourably by parental participants, who felt that the pre-preparatory schools had prepared the children well.

Nevertheless, it would seem as though the support and preparation throughout the transition process was dependent on the educational establishment the child attended in Year 2. This illustrates the importance of contextual factors within this case study specifically and within school transitions generally. Furthermore, the level of support and preparation is likely to directly impact the amount of disruption the child faces when starting a new school. This disruption to the norm of a child's educational environment is discussed in more detail in the next section, explaining how this is triggered by the specific change event of beginning at the new school.

5.3.2 Disruption to the Norm

For a child transitioning to a new school, the resulting magnitude of disruption they face to their recognised and familiar experience of school will vary depending on a range of circumstances, including their preparation and readiness, familiarity, shared experience and sense of community and belonging, which are the themes generated within this study. Moreover, it is also key to consider specific contextual elements for each individual child. As all children are unique individuals, they will all experience transition differently, with some having more resilience to change than others due to a greater experience of previous life transitions (Holas and Huston, 2012) or simply due to facing less disruption to their norm during the given transition. Data from both the parent interviews and the pupil focus groups, for example, indicated that children with siblings found the move to a new school easier than some of their peers, which correlates with previous studies on the transition to secondary school (see Evangelou et al., 2008; Mackenzie,

McMaugh and O'Sullivan, 2012). For parents, having already been through the transition process made the move for their younger child less of an unknown, which may have also contributed to their child feeling as though there was less of a disruption following the move.

Furthermore, the child themselves must be considered within their context and background, particularly in the setting of this research, where the pupils making the transition come from varying educational settings and socioeconomic backgrounds. This can impact the amount of disruption they face through the differences between their previous and new educational environments. Whilst all of the child participants commented on differences between their old schools and the new, almost all of the pupils who transitioned from pre-preparatory schools moved alongside peers, whereas pupils who had previously attended state-maintained primary schools tended to move either alone or in a significantly smaller group. In addition to this, if these children were receiving lower levels of preparation from their former schools, as one of the parent participants mentioned, then the children are likely to experience a greater level of disruption due to a lack of readiness for the transition.

Nevertheless, although the level of disruption may vary from child to child, all children making the move to a new school will experience some disruption to their norm due to the change of school setting and the influence this has on the child and their development. A school transition across educational settings results in a new school environment for that child. Not only is this a new physical environment for the child to become familiar with in terms of where things are but there is also a level of new cognitive knowledge which the child is required to obtain, understanding the new rules and expectations of this environment. These new and possibly unknown routines have the potential to cause anxiety for the child who is moving schools, and this concurs with the data. Across all of the data, new features of the school, such as moving from classroom to classroom, were both listed as concerns for the children prior to the transition and as something that some still found challenging following the move to the new school. Both

parents and teachers also identified that the concerns children raised were almost solely regarding unknowns, whether that was regarding making new friends or lunch arrangements, with the adult participants perceiving children's anxieties to be as a result of not knowing what to expect and that children's continuing challenges were related to differences within the new setting.

Furthermore, the change caused by the school transition not only impacts the child's interactions with their immediate environment but there will also be further repercussions throughout their ecological environment caused by the resulting transitions experienced by others within their microsystem (Jindal-Snape, 2016). For example, a change of school setting may affect the individuals with whom they have regular direct contact with, such as teachers and peers. The child therefore may need to build new relationships with a variety of new individuals. With teachers, this again may encompass a level of cognitive understanding of differing expectations either compared to their previous teachers or between the multiple teachers they have in the new setting. Whilst the majority of pupil comments regarding new teachers were positive, the children did make comparisons between teachers, commenting on how strict they found different teachers. This suggests that various teachers had different expectations, rules and practices that the children were adjusting to.

Relationships with peers are also likely to alter following a transition, with children having to form new friendships or potentially navigate changes in the dynamics of pre-existing friendship groups, which has been shown to directly affect children's wellbeing during a school transition (Kiuru et al., 2020; Lester and Cross, 2014; Virtanen et al., 2019). Friendships were one of the most prominent concerns discussed by parental participants, either that they were concerned themselves about their child making friends, or that their child was worried about this. The teacher participants also identified friendships as one of the most common worries for children undertaking school transitions, which was the reason for a lot of the previous school preparation

involving social skills and friendships. Child participants, however, were more mixed on this subject, with many of the children expressing concern as well as excitement about the opportunity to expand their friendship group. Even so, all of the children did appreciate and understand that moving school would result in some level of change to their existing microsystem, having new peers within their class and year group.

Although some aspects of the child's microsystem will remain consistent, such as their parents and home environment, the transition which parents are experiencing as a result of the child moving schools may influence that child's mesosystem. This is due to the parents having to form either new or altered relationships with the new individuals or settings in the child's microsystem, the most prominent of these being with the child's new school. Although there may be pre-existing links between the child's parents and their new school, should the child have an older sibling already at the school for example, there is still likely to be a change in the dynamic of the relationship due to the changes in circumstances. Open communication between home and school is therefore key (Coffey, 2013; Hanewald, 2013; Morris et al., 2010), an aspect which was prominent in the teacher and parent interview data, with both participant groups recognising the importance of clear communication between home and school.

Whilst parents generally commented positively on their interactions with the new school and how they had found the communication, many commented on the volume of information that had been provided and the number of differences regarding how information was disseminated to parents, fearful that they might miss something or not understand it and therefore be unable to adequately support their child. This illustrates not only the impact of the home/school relationship on the child's transition but also on the parents' transition.

In addition to the parental relationship with the school influencing the transition, so too do parental relationships with other parents of children also moving to the new school. The findings indicate that these parental relationships provided both support and occasionally challenges,

which could therefore indirectly result in positive or negative effects on the child due to changes or potential tensions in the child's exosystem.

There is also the potential for disruption within the child's macrosystem, with the culture of the school that the child is moving to potentially being different to that of their previous school. This is particularly pertinent within the context of this study, where some of the children were moving from schools in the maintained sector to the independent sector. The culture of an independent preparatory school is likely to influence a child's beliefs and perceptions differently than that of a maintained primary school. Factors such as socioeconomic status and wealth may also be more apparent in such a setting where education is a paid for commodity. Although this aspect was not specifically studied within this research, it is a contextual element which should be considered.

Finally, all of these influences on the various ecological systems, along with the school transition itself, will influence the child's chronosystem. The accumulation of these potential disruptions may impact how the child perceives themselves and therefore result in a shift in their identity. A successful transition would aim for this shift to be a move to a sense of belonging within the new school environment following the child adapting to their new set of circumstances and feeling as though they were part of the school community, which is now examined.

5.3.3 A Shift in Identity

The need to adapt and adjust to the disruptions caused by the change event during the process of transition can result in a shift in an individual's identity following a challenge to their sense of self. In the context of school transitions, this may manifest as a change in the child's perception from their 'new' school to 'my' school, which corresponds with the sense of belonging and community that arises following successful adaptation to the new set of circumstances brought about by moving schools. From a parental perspective, this shift in a child's identity may be illustrated by a greater degree of independence or maturity, that is, the sense that their child is growing up and becoming more responsible, topics arising in the parental interviews.

Bridges (2004) argued that transitions provide opportunities for personal growth, learning and development. It is through experiencing transitions that individuals grow as they learn to adapt to the new and different situations and circumstances that they find themselves in. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained, disruptions in an individual's ecological systems can influence an individual's development, shaping their personality, behaviour and decisions. Whilst the term 'disruptions' may have negative connotations, this does not mean that the results of these disruptions are necessarily negative, with individuals likely to experience both positive and negative transitions throughout their lives.

It is, however, important to note the distinction between a successful transition and a positive transition, with one not necessarily implying the other. For a transition to be deemed successful, it is generally accepted that the individual will have adapted to the disruptions caused by the change event, yet this adaptation may have a positive or negative effect on the individual's wellbeing and their life generally. For example, although an individual may be able to successfully adapt to new circumstances following a bereavement of a loved one, this is not necessarily a positive transition for them. Nevertheless, this would still be something that the individual can learn from and may in time even find positives in an unfortunate situation.

One of the main challenges that individuals have with transitions is that the disruptions which they face are often perceived as losses. Whilst adapting to a new situation or set of circumstances can bring with it the excitement of opportunity, it also signifies an ending, causing the individual to leave behind the familiar and adjust to a new way of living. As a result, a child moving to a new school may be grieving the loss of their old school and the roles, routines and relationships they had established there (Bagnall, Skipper and Fox, 2020). This corresponds with findings from this study, as although the child participants mostly expressed positive feelings towards the new school following the move, they did mention things they missed about their old school environments, such as friends that did not transition alongside them. Parents also

commented on the importance of previous schools not only preparing children to begin a new school but also to say goodbye to the old and enable some level of closure on that chapter of their lives.

Transitions can therefore also result in the individual experiencing a range of negative feelings, such as anxiety, confusion and self-doubt, which can result in a loss of self-esteem as the individual struggles to apply their usual and familiar assumptions and behaviours to the new environment. For example, many of the children within the study listed things that they were still finding challenging in the new school, such as changing for PE and games or choosing food at lunchtimes. Almost all of the points raised as ongoing difficulties were new aspects that the children were still getting used to, as they had not had such experiences in their old schools. This lack of experience with the new circumstances meant that adapting and adjusting to them was more challenging and therefore took longer. Moreover, the data suggests that children who experienced less disruption to their overall norm adapted more quickly than their peers who faced a greater level of disruption. For example, transition appeared to be easier for those children who had increased familiarity through factors such as numerous visits prior to the start of Year 3 or through having siblings already at the school.

The literature suggests that a successful school transition is associated with positive attitudes and engagement surrounding school life generally and adapting to the new environment and routines (Evangelou et al., 2008; Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999; Rice et al., 2015). Reducing the level of disruption may therefore accelerate the period of adaptation needed for a child to adjust to their new circumstances, enabling them to feel settled and comfortable in the new environment. Through various positive interactions between the child, their new setting and individuals within that environment, a sense of belonging develops over time (El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022) and the child experiences an identity shift. They no longer see themselves as separate from the new situation or circumstances they find themselves in but develop feelings of

belonging and inclusion, resulting in them identifying as part of the school community. It is at this point, when the 'new' school becomes simply their school.

5.4 A Conceptual Model for Supporting the Process of a Successful School Transition

This section presents a conceptual model that corresponds with Walker and Avant's (2019) concept analysis framework. This method provides a structured approach to clarify and define complex and multifaceted concepts within educational research, through systematic identification of a concept's key components, characteristics and empirical manifestations (Bagnall et al., 2025). The method consists of eight sequential steps: (1) selecting a concept, (2) determining the aims of analysis, (3) identifying all uses of the concept, (4) determining its defining attributes, (5) constructing a model case, (6) identifying additional cases (such as borderline or contrary), (7) establishing antecedents and consequences, and finally, (8) identifying empirical referents (Walker and Avant, 2019).

Using the framework's first step, select a concept, this study focused on 'supporting wellbeing during school transition' as the core concept requiring clarification. Ultimately, the goal of a school transition is to facilitate successful adaptation to the new educational environment. Moreover, it is for the child to accept the new circumstances as part of their identity (Bridges, 2004; Musamali, 2018) through developing a sense of belonging to the new school community. Accelerating the speed at which a child reaches this stage of acceptance and adaptation is preferable because it is at this point that a child has sufficient resources and skills to cope with the challenges the new school environment brings, enabling them to reach a state of stable wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012). Hence the second step of Walker and Avant's (2019) framework, determine the purpose, was to define effective support strategies that safeguard wellbeing and promote positive transition outcomes. By preparing a child for a school transition and supporting

them throughout the process, their wellbeing can be safeguarded, helping them to successfully adapt to their new school.

The findings of this research suggest that children who face fewer disruptions to their norm during the transition period adapt more quickly to the new educational environment and thus experience the sense of belonging and identity shift sooner. Ensuring children are adequately prepared and supported in the lead-up to, and throughout, the school transition process can help to reduce the magnitude of the disruption to the norm. Data from the literature and data generation stage of this research illuminated various interpretations of 'support' and 'wellbeing' in the school transition context, corresponding with Walker and Avant's (2019) step 3, identify all uses of the concept. These included emotional safety, social inclusion, academic readiness and logistical preparation.

By ensuring that children have sufficient resources and skills to cope with the numerous changes they are facing during this time, the disruption can be minimised and the adaptation process expedited. This guided the identification of core attributes in step 4: Preparation and Readiness, Familiarity and Shared Experience. These attributes consistently appeared in participant data and the literature and together form the foundational components of the conceptual model.

The model, visually represented in Figure 5.1, emerged by mapping these defining attributes as three intersecting elements, where their overlap promotes a sense of belonging—a key indicator of successful transition and wellbeing.

Figure 5.1: A conceptual model for supporting the process of a successful school transition

The three outer circles illustrate the first three themes generated from the data: preparation and readiness; familiarity; and shared experience. These three aspects all contribute towards a child, or their parents, developing that sense of community and belonging that indicates successful adaptation to the new environment and are illustrated in this diagram by the central intersection. In depicting the three sections as equal, Figure 5.1 illustrates step 5 of Walker and Avant's (2019) framework: a model case. This would be a child who attends multiple transition events, knows peers in the new school, and is emotionally supported by family and teachers.

However, the amount of each type of support received will not necessarily be the same for every individual undertaking a school transition. As is evident within the data, different children receive varying levels of support corresponding to their circumstances and/or needs. Therefore, it is likely that a more realistic Venn diagram of an individual's support during a school transition may look more akin to Figure 5.2, where the proportions of the various types of support are unequal.

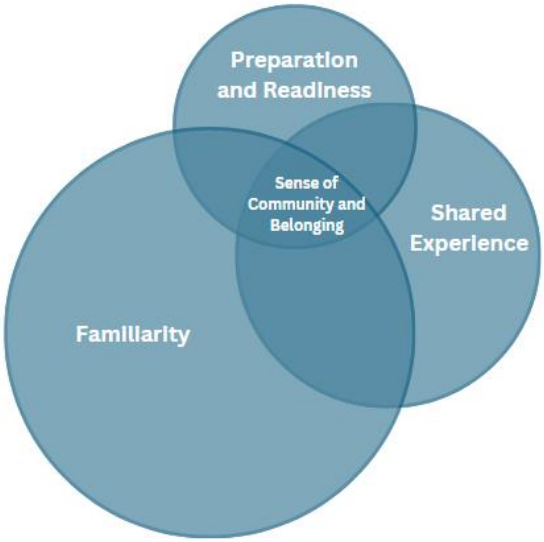

Figure 5.2: A theoretical example of support received by an individual during the process of a school transition

Despite the differences in size between the three sections, there is still an intersection, representing that although an individual will receive differing amounts of support for each of these aspects, they can still develop a sense of community and belonging within the new school environment. This corresponds to step 6 and the identification of borderline and contrary cases. The former features a child with strong academic preparation but limited emotional support, leading to mixed feelings of adjustment, whereas the latter involves a child who receives little preparation, has no familiar peers and experiences isolation and anxiety.

Step 7, antecedents and consequences, is reflected in the model through the recognition that antecedents such as pre-transition support, home-school communication and sibling presence influence transition outcomes. Consequences include identity shift, emotional adjustment and levels of school engagement. This leads to the final step, empirical referents, which is addressed through indicators such as children's verbal reports of school belonging, parent-teacher observations of behavioural adjustment and engagement with peer groups and classroom activities.

The levels of each type of support identified in the model that are received and indeed required will vary between individuals due to developmental and environmental factors illustrated by the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Within this study, for example, the experience of transition was very different for pupils who were moving from one of the linked pre-preparatory

schools compared to those who were moving from a state-maintained school, due to the environmental contexts of the former being more similar and those children receiving a greater level of preparation from their former school.

Nevertheless, for an individual to effectively adapt to their new set of circumstances and therefore successfully transition to a new school environment, some level of support is required within each of these three areas. Each of these aspects will now be explored further in relation to the findings of this research and drawing upon the conceptual framework and literature discussed in Chapter Two, before examining how they collectively contribute towards the development of a sense of community and belonging that is necessary for a successful transition.

5.4.1 Preparation and Readiness

Transitions between educational establishments which occur at the end of a school year are unlikely to be unexpected. Instead, it is usual for there to be a period of time during which preparation can occur to help ensure children making the transition are ready for the change in school environment. Within this study, much of the structured preparation that occurred in the lead-up to the transition was initiated by the pre-preparatory schools, with all three participant groups commenting on the preparation that had happened. This preparation encompassed both organisational and socio-emotional factors. Organisational factors incorporate the more practical skills children may need to develop in preparation for the transition, such as acquiring sufficient academic knowledge for their next stage of education, alongside practical considerations like being able to pack their school bag or change for PE lessons. Socio-emotional factors, however, ensure children have the required social skills and emotional resilience to succeed within the new social environment they are entering.

The teachers felt that the preparation they provided was robust and well-rounded, with parental participants agreeing that the pre-preparatory schools had prepared the children well. Whilst the child participants did not explicitly provide their opinions of the quality of the preparation by their

previous schools, they did comment on how staff members had helped to support them and activities they had done prior to the transition.

Parents also play a key role in supporting their child's preparation and readiness for the school transition (Kiuru et al., 2020; Virtanen et al., 2019). Many of the parents interviewed in this study explained how their child had shared concerns in the lead-up to moving schools, which correlated with data from the pupil focus groups, where children explained that they spoke to their parents regarding worries they experienced. The teachers also detailed ways in which parents supported the transition, such as arranging play dates. Additionally, for the children who were moving from state-maintained primary schools to the research school, parents were the main source of pre-transition preparation and therefore played a prominent role in supporting their child in developing their readiness for the transition.

Traditionally, the responsibility for successful educational transitions has been seen to lie entirely with the child and their readiness for the impending change of school (Kingston and Price, 2012). However, viewing transition through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, children are not seen as isolated individuals but rather as part of a wider social world of interconnected systems. As a result, a child's readiness for an educational transition is directly impacted by other individuals within the child's microsystem and mesosystem, as well as indirectly through their exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.

Transition, therefore, cannot be seen as an individual process, nor can its success be viewed as being solely dependent on the child and their readiness for the transition. Instead, a successful transition relies on a wider range of direct and indirect factors, relying on numerous individuals adapting and changing their roles and identities. This is as a result of an individual transition impacting other individuals within the microsystem and causing them to experience multiple and simultaneous transitions which are all interlinked (Jindal-Snape, 2016).

Therefore, even for children who potentially did not appear to receive direct support from their former school in the lead-up to the transition, their readiness for the transition was influenced by a wider network of individuals and factors, both directly and indirectly. This aspect of supporting a successful transition process is therefore potentially the easiest to influence through external factors. Schools and parents can implement a range of strategies to help prepare children for the move to a new school and ensure their readiness. This may include supporting them to develop practical skills such as tying ties or shoelaces, reading school timetables or packing their own bag. It may also include helping the child with emotional and social elements, such as discussing how they are feeling regarding the forthcoming transition or teaching explicit social skills to help them navigate friendships.

Within the data, various participants mentioned a variety of strategies that were employed to provide support throughout the transition process. Teachers spoke mainly about helping children within group settings to build independence and develop social skills, yet whilst the pre-preparatory schools focused on supporting and preparing the children for transition, preparation from other areas was less consistent. Although parents were keen to help their child develop skills to increase their readiness for school, they did not necessarily know how and therefore tended to focus more on supporting their children emotionally as issues arose, as well as helping with practical and logistical issues. Many of the parental participants explicitly suggested that they would have found it helpful if the schools provided guidance on strategies that they could implement to support their child in the lead-up to the transition. Parents felt that this would have helped ensure their children had the necessary skills to ensure they were prepared and ready for the move.

5.4.2 Familiarity

Although during the interviews for this research, discussions with parent and teacher participants concentrated on the transition support they were able to provide children, the preparation that

was emphasised the most amongst the child participants concerned the events put on by their new school, such as the transition morning and the buddy lunch. Whilst still types of preparation for the upcoming transition, these events were aimed at increasing the children's familiarity with the impending changes to their microsystem, including navigating the physical environment, getting to know other individuals within the new setting and becoming aware of the rules, routines and expectations of the school.

Increasing the level of familiarity helps individuals to adapt to their new set of circumstances more quickly as it results in a smaller disruption to their norm and therefore fewer entirely new experiences and factors for them to get used to following the move to the new environment. This was evident within the study, with all the participants commenting favourably on the various ways that the children were able to increase their familiarity either with the school site itself or by getting to know other individuals that would be at the school when the children joined.

The data indicates that opportunities to increase exposure to the new school environment, either by visiting the physical school site or even watching the online video tour of the school, were beneficial. Both parents and children noted that these experiences helped them to feel more at ease in the new environment and gain an understanding of the physical layout of the school. This was particularly helpful due to almost all the children coming from much smaller educational settings, where the need to independently navigate their way around would have been considerably less, if at all.

Children who already knew individuals at the school appeared to find the transition easier. This was commented on across all the data sets and concurs with the literature, which found that children who transition to a school where an older sibling or relative already attends generally experience less anxiety about the move and are less likely to hold negative perceptions about the new school because of their increased familiarity (Evangelou et al., 2008; Mackenzie, McMaugh and O'Sullivan, 2012). Having a sibling already at the school meant that both children and their

parents were more familiar with the educational environment generally, including knowing some of the teachers and understanding the routines and expectations of the school through previous exposure to the culture of the school.

Familiarity can also be increased through the similarities between environments and minimising disruption to a child's microsystem. Almost all the concerns children expressed either within the data directly or those which parents and teachers reported could be attributed to differences between their previous school and the new one. Increasing familiarity is a way to reduce these anxieties and fears of the unknown new environment, through making children feel more comfortable and reducing the unknown element.

Additionally, familiarity can also be increased indirectly, through other stakeholders sharing information about students with the child's new school. This can be facilitated through parent and school relationships or links between the child's current and future school. Within the research, the pre-preparatory teachers spoke about the types of information they would share with a child's new school, including both academic data and pastoral notes. However, they did acknowledge that this information sharing was highly dependent on the links between schools. Nevertheless, the teachers believed that sharing data and, most importantly, discussing the individual children holistically was greatly beneficial in ensuring consistency for the children as well as helping to develop relationships between children and their new teachers.

5.4.3 Shared Experience

Moving and then adapting to a new and different environment can be challenging and anxiety-inducing for pupils (Bagnall, Skipper and Fox, 2020); however, the literature demonstrates that children who are moving with their peers find educational transitions easier (Evangelou et al., 2008; Martínez et al., 2011; Vaz et al., 2015; Waters, Lester and Cross, 2014), with children feeling less anxiety regarding friendships in particular. This correlates with the findings of this research,

where children who transitioned alongside peers from their previous school were less likely to report challenges concerning friendships.

Children sharing the experience of transition with others from their previous school are likely to experience less disruption to their microsystem due to fewer changes within their immediate interactions; although the physical environment of the school will have changed, not all of the individuals within the school aspect of their microsystem will. Within this research, parents commented on the benefits of knowing other children who were also moving schools and how this provided a sense of continuity, thereby making the transition easier. Similarly, children often commented that they already had friends from their old school and were therefore not concerned about friendships.

However, even for children who are moving independently of their former peers, they still have the shared experience of beginning at a new school alongside the rest of their cohort. Parental participants in particular seemed to like that all of the children were new and experiencing the transition together. This shared experience also appeared to generate a sense of camaraderie between the pupils, who spoke about helping one another if they were unsure about something, such as where their next lesson was or how to get to a particular location. Similarly, parents commented on the support networks that they were able to build with other parents to ease both the transition that they were facing, as well as that of their child.

5.4.4 Sense of Community and Belonging

A successful transition results in the individual experiencing a shift in their identity and moving from perceiving the new educational environment as their 'new school' to simply being their school. It is at this point that the individual experiences a sense of belonging within the community of the new environment and has therefore transitioned successfully. Viewing transition using the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), this sense of belonging is the result of the interactions between a child and their new school environment, alongside the child's

personal characteristics and stage of development, the school's ecological systems and the associated interactions both within and between the systems (El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022). As the amount and nature of support for the transition that is both required and indeed received will vary for each individual child, developing a sense of belonging at school will occur at different rates. Therefore, a successful transition may take longer for some children.

Whilst the three factors previously mentioned all contribute towards achieving a sense of community and belonging within the new school environment, school climate, that is, the 'quality and character of school life' (Cohen, 2009, p. 100), can also play a significant role in facilitating and potentially accelerating these feelings. Factors such as having an effective learning environment, strong student and teacher relationships, feeling safe at school, access to extracurricular activities, positive peer interactions and parental involvement all contribute towards school climate (El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022). Many of these individual factors overlap with those which promote a successful transition and are therefore interlinked with the model presented in Figure 5.1. For example, ensuring that children are prepared and ready for the transition can help them to access the new academic and social environment they find themselves in. Additionally, increasing their familiarity can help them to feel safe at school by minimising the 'unknown' element of the new environment, and shared experiences can help support their interactions and relationships with teachers and peers.

The importance of developing a sense of belonging to the new school community was evident across all participant groups. Teachers and parents recognised the value of children feeling comfortable and happy in their new school setting, with the child participants generally commenting positively regarding their feelings towards school and interactions with various individuals in the new school environment.

Transition events at the school for both children and parents appeared to enhance the feeling of becoming part of the new school's community, giving both groups the opportunity to foster

positive interactions with other individuals in the school microsystem. For example, children were able to get to know their new peers, staff at the school and their Year 8 buddies, whilst parents had the ability to build relationships with school staff, other new parents and the wider parental community. Enabling both children and their parents to feel as though they belonged to the school community appeared to make the transition easier for all involved, resulting in a successful transition not just for the child moving schools, but also supporting successful interlinked transitions.

5.5 Summary

School transition needs to be perceived as an ongoing and dynamic process of adaptation, which spans both before and after the change event (Jindal-Snape, 2010). Preparation for the transition should therefore begin some months in advance, occurring in various areas of a child's microsystem, and continue throughout the transition process, until the child has successfully adapted to their new circumstances. This ongoing support is key to facilitating adjustment to the new school environment, with a successful transition being one in which the individual experiences a shift in their identity and adopts a feeling of belonging within their new school environment.

This chapter has proposed that there are three key areas of support which a child needs to experience in order to achieve a successful school transition. The first includes specific preparation to ensure the child undergoing transition has the necessary skills and resources to manage the impending disruption to their norm which occurs because of the change event, and indeed sometimes in anticipation of said event. In addition, and alongside, the child needs to develop increased familiarity with their new circumstances and the changes that are occurring within their microsystem, both in terms of the environment and other individuals they interact with. The importance of these interactions with others demonstrates that a school transition is not an individual journey but instead should be viewed as a social process which relies on shared

experiences with a variety of individuals undergoing similar transitions either alongside or because of the child moving schools. It is the accumulation of these three areas of support which help to develop a sense of belonging and community within the new school environment, thereby denoting a successful transition.

The next and final chapter comprises the conclusion of this research. It considers the main and subsidiary research questions and provides recommendations emanating from the findings of this study.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This thesis has explored how the wellbeing of children can best be supported during school transition from KS1 to KS2, looking at the specific context of transitions across settings in the UK independent educational sector. During the data analysis stage of this case study research, four main themes were generated: preparation and readiness; familiarity; shared experience; and sense of community and belonging. It is from these themes that I have developed a conceptual model for facilitating a successful school transition, which was discussed in the previous chapter and is illustrated below in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: A conceptual model for supporting the process of a successful school transition

This conceptual model considers the various aspects of support an individual requires to enable them to successfully transition to a new school environment. The three areas of preparation and readiness, familiarity and shared experience all contribute towards the child experiencing a shift in their identity, viewing themselves as part of the new school community. This corresponds with a change in their mindset regarding their relationship with school and an acceptance of the new circumstances, that is, the shift from perceiving the educational environment they have transitioned to as being 'my new school' to simply being 'my school'. It is this shift in identity and

acceptance of the new circumstances which signifies that a transition has been successful (Bridges, 2004; Musamali, 2018).

In this chapter, and by using the above conceptual model, I address the main and subsidiary research questions through a summary of my findings and thereby illustrate the contribution to knowledge this research provides. I then reflect on the limitations of this study before setting out recommendations for educational practice, my own professional practice and potential further research.

6.2 Summary of Findings

In order to summarise my findings in relation to the main research question, I first reflect on each of the subsidiary questions, which contribute to addressing the main research question:

How might children's wellbeing be best supported across Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 transitions to UK independent schools?

In considering each of the research questions in turn, I explore the extent to which both the main and subsidiary questions have been addressed and illustrate where the evidence for each claim can be found within the findings.

6.2.1 How do the two different educational establishments support children who are transitioning between them from KS1 to KS2?

Within the proposed model for supporting a successful school transition, educational establishments play a key part in facilitating all three of the areas of support. This concurs with the literature, in which it is generally agreed that both schools involved in an educational transition are responsible for supporting pupils during this time (van Rens et al., 2018; Waters, Lester and Cross, 2014). Prior to the actual move, both schools are directly and indirectly influential in supporting the transition. Whilst the change event results in this responsibility

shifting predominantly to the child's new school, as the research has shown, links and relationships between schools can indirectly impact a child developing a sense of community and belonging in their new school.

Preparation and readiness for the transition tends to be supported more by the child's current school in the lead-up to the move (Waters, Lester and Cross, 2014). However, this research found that support for the transition to the case study school was more apparent from pre-preparatory schools than from maintained schools (see Section 4.3.1 Old school preparation). Whilst this may be explained by to the increased numbers of children making the KS1 to KS2 transition in a pre-preparatory school when compared to a maintained primary school, research has shown that more positive experiences of transition are had by children who have been better prepared by their old school (Jindal-Snape and Cantali, 2019). It could therefore be argued that children moving from a maintained setting would benefit from additional support from their new school to compensate for this disparity, especially when receiving more help from a future school has been shown to be an indicator of a more positive experience of transition (Evangelou et al., 2008).

The support provided by pre-preparatory schools in anticipation of the school transition included organisational factors, such as building independence and ensuring academic expectations are met, and socio-emotional factors, such as allowing the children a space to share and discuss concerns. The support provided by the case study school on the other hand, dealt more with logistical aspects and increasing familiarity with the school environment (see 4.4.2 Familiarity with the school site), corresponding with Jindal-Snape and Miller's (2008) findings.

Transition events and support structures put in place by schools for their new cohorts to increase familiarity are arguably some of the most obvious and visible ways to help support pupils' transitions and therefore help facilitate the second aspect of the proposed model for a successful transition. The support structures referred to in this study are broadly comparable to those found in the literature, such as enabling children to visit the new school site and experience the new

environment (Evangelou et al., 2008; Sirsch, 2003) through taster days and the Year 8 buddy event, both of which were mentioned favourably by participants in this research. Such events enabled the new pupils to meet other members of the school community, including teachers and current pupils alongside other new joiners, thereby also facilitating shared experiences, which help to contribute to developing a sense of community and belonging.

In addition to providing these opportunities for pupils, communication between the child's pre- and post-transition schools can also impact upon two of the three areas of support. The information passed on from a child's former school can help to determine if additional preparation is required for that child and helps the new school to increase their familiarity of the child and their needs.

However, within this study, the type of pupil information exchanged between schools varied from school to school both in terms of quantity and the range of different types of information (see Section 4.6.4 Relationships/links between schools). Communication appeared to be dependent either on the links and relationships between schools or the specific needs of the children transitioning. The pre-preparatory teachers who were interviewed explained that generally, the onus was on the future schools to make contact and request more detailed information, otherwise they would only share safeguarding or child protection files, as set out in 'Keeping children safe in education' (Department for Education, 2024), or Education, Health and Care plans if applicable.

Where schools did enquire about their new students, the pre-preparatory schools provided both academic and pastoral information. The academic data communicated mainly focused on English and mathematics, including whether they had participated in any intervention groups and if this needed to be continued. Pastoral information, however, was provided with greater detail and the pre-preparatory teachers appeared to place greater importance on discussing such matters with future schools. This may be because the pre-preparatory teachers were aware that

many schools retest children in the beginning weeks of September or to compensate for how many children respond differently in examination situations compared to how they usually present in the classroom. Nevertheless, the pastoral information passed between schools is more holistic in nature than the academic nature, including a child's hobbies and interests, their friendship groups, any behavioural needs and how they are feeling about the upcoming transition. Despite only sharing such information with schools they already had close links with and who requested it, all the teachers who were interviewed as part of this research agreed that communicating pastoral details had a positive impact on the transition experience.

6.2.2 To what extent and in what ways do parents support their child's transition between schools?

Within the data, it appeared that the main type of support parents provided their child with during the transition period was of an emotional and social nature. This support started right at the beginning of the transition period, helping the children to prepare for the move to a new school (see Section 4.3.2 Parental preparation) and continued beyond starting Year 3 in September, with parents providing ongoing support to their children as they adjusted to the new school environment, routines and expectations.

During the period of the summer holidays especially, parents and family members are likely to be the most accessible, if not only, source of support for children facing transition. However, despite this, the participants of this study were generally able to give more concrete examples of the preparation provided in advance of the transition that had been facilitated by the schools. This may be because many of the ways in which parents provided support for the transition was not distinguishable from that which they usually give their child daily as part of parenting. Interestingly, however, the parents involved in the research explicitly conveyed that they wanted to help their child either academically or socially within the new school setting (see Section 4.3.4

Parents' feelings towards transition) and were concerned that they were not providing adequate support.

Nevertheless, the children involved in the research did identify that they could talk to their parents if something was concerning them regarding the transition and this was acknowledged consistently within all the pupil questionnaires, both before and after moving to the new school, and within the pupil focus groups. Parental participants also commented on children discussing their worries and anxieties in the lead-up to the transition, which mainly included fears regarding getting lost around the school when moving between lessons and concerns about friendships. Whilst parents were most likely only able to provide emotional support and advice regarding the former, in terms of the latter, both children and teachers within the study commented on how parents supported them to make new friendships and sustain old ones through their relationships with other parents and the ability to arrange playdates outside of school.

6.2.3 How are parents supported during their child's transition?

In addition to supporting the pupils through the transition process, schools also provided support for parents during this time (see Section 4.6.3 Parental relationship with new school). For pre-preparatory schools this included guidance in advance of choosing a new school for their child, along with more bespoke informal support for parents depending on the needs of their child and for them as parents. The case study school, however, had more general support for parents, including opportunities to attend some transition events that were specifically designed for parents, rather than their children, such as informational meetings regarding logistical matters about the school and social events to help them make connections with other new parents. The information morning run by the case study school in advance of the transition also gave parents the opportunity to share contact details with the other parents in their child's new class. This resulted in parents being able to volunteer as a Class Representative and WhatsApp groups being formed, enabling parents to act as a support for one another. These all helped parental

preparation and readiness for the transition, alongside increasing the parents' familiarity with the new school and developing shared experiences alongside other parents to foster a sense of belonging within the new school community.

Whilst support structures and events aimed at parents may not directly benefit pupils who are transitioning, supporting parents can indirectly help with the child's transition due to the impact that a child's microsystem and mesosystem has on their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and therefore on their experience of transition. For example, alleviating parental anxiety through the school building strong relationships with parents can help them view the transition in a more positive light, which in turn can directly influence how they talk about the transition to their child. It is also key to consider the transition parents themselves are undertaking and therefore how the four stages of support can be applied to them. Providing logistical information during an on-site event at the new school, for example, can help parents to prepare, as well as increase their familiarity with the new school and meet other new parents, thus providing them with opportunities for shared experiences to help develop a sense of community.

Within the parent interviews, those who had previously experienced the transition with their child's older sibling explained that they were able to give advice to other parents, which parents interviewed who did not have previous experience of the transition greatly appreciated, further developing the sense of community and belonging amongst parents.

However, some of the parents commented that they felt quite detached from their child's new school. This was due to both the physical distance between their home and the new school, compared to the distance of their child's old school, and due to the differences in the school's communication style. These two factors do appear to be interlinked, with many of the parents having been used to dropping off their child at school every day and therefore being able to talk to their child's teacher informally on the gate. Within the case study school, however, many of the children take the school transport and so their parents may only have daily contact with their

child's bus driver, rather than their teacher. Even for parents who do take their child to school, due to their child having multiple teachers for different subjects, they may not necessarily see a particular teacher that they may wish to talk to. This potentially points to some parents having not yet experienced the identity shift that comes from developing a sense of community and belonging within the new school environment.

6.2.4 How do children's feelings about the school transition change and how does this impact on their wellbeing through the transition?

Generally, the children within the research cohort seemed excited about moving schools and this positivity appeared to be reflected in their feelings towards the new school following the transition (see Sections 4.3.3 Children's anticipation of transition and 4.6.2 Children's feelings towards new school). This was evident both in the pupil questionnaires prior to the transition and in comments made during the focus groups once the pupils had started in Year 3.

Parental participants also reported mostly positive feelings on their children's behalf. Whilst this may not necessarily be a wholly accurate representation of how their children felt regarding the transition as it is how the parents perceived their child was feeling, it could be argued that parents are more accurately able to gauge this. Parents are more likely to have a close relationship with their children and see them at home, which is typically a more relaxed setting, where children are more likely to voice any concerns that they have.

Of the concerns reported, the majority seemed fairly short lived, with both parental and pupil participants reporting that worries and issues children had experienced in the lead-up to the transition or at the very start of the term had been resolved by the time of the respective pupil focus group or parent interview. This could be as a result of the child beginning to better adjust to the new environment, as many of the concerns had been due to unknown entities regarding

the new school, which may have been lessened as the child increased their readiness for the move and their familiarity with the new environment.

Indeed, many of the concerns and responses the children provided at given times during the pupil questionnaires or focus groups seemed very 'in the moment', depending on things that had been recently discussed or explained to them. For example, the week before the second pupil questionnaire was distributed, the pupils transitioning to the case study school were told about having Year 8 buddies. It is therefore likely that this influenced the responses of the second pupil questionnaire, where almost all of the pupils participating named their buddy as someone they could go to for help if they needed support in their new school, particularly as none of these children had previously mentioned their buddy in the first pupil questionnaire.

Nevertheless, overall, the pupils responded positively about their new school, suggesting that they were experiencing a sense of community and feelings of belonging to the new school environment. From their comments, it appeared as though they had accepted their new circumstances, therefore implying that the school transition had been successful.

6.2.5 How might children's wellbeing be best supported across Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 transitions to UK independent schools?

Preparation and Readiness for School	Familiarity	Shared Experience	Sense of Community and Belonging
•Old school preparation •Parental preparation •Children's anticipation of transition •Parents' feelings towards transition	•Knowing individuals already at the school •New school induction/visiting the school site •Comparison with previous school setting	•Starting together •Moving with peers •Parental relationships with other parents	•Children's relationship with teachers •Children's feelings towards new school •Parental relationship with new school •Relationships/links between schools •Friendships

Figure 6.2: The themes and sub-themes emerging from the research

The four main themes generated from the data (see Figure 6.2) all feed into answering the main research question, looking at how the wellbeing of children can be supported during school transitions. These themes illustrate that supporting children during a school transition is an ongoing process which should involve multiple stakeholders and both the child's old and new schools, so they are able to receive adequate support in all three of these areas in order to develop the sense of community and belonging that indicates a successful school transition.

Whilst levels of readiness for the school transition will vary from child to child and their unique circumstances, it is important to offer children support in the lead-up to the transition. This support may take place in their school or at home, and the preparation can take different forms, such as helping children to learn and develop practical skills of organisation or supporting children emotionally with the imminent change to their microsystem.

A child's readiness for the school transition can be enhanced by building their familiarity with the new school setting. Familiarity can encompass a range of aspects, such as increased knowledge of the school site, having some prior level of relationship with individuals at the school, or even being able to notice similarities with their previous school setting. Increased familiarity with the new school environment along with the new routines and expectations has been shown to ease transitions (Evangelou et al., 2008; Sirsch, 2003), and this was also evident amongst the participants in this study, with children appearing more confident where they were more familiar with the new school and parents reporting a more positive transition where this was the case.

This familiarity and preparation can also be strengthened through having a shared experience of transition. The literature indicates that children moving to a new school with peers from their previous educational establishment are more likely to experience the transition positively (Evangelou et al., 2008; Tsuzuki, 2012). This was echoed in the research findings, with children moving alongside peers reporting fewer concerns regarding friendships, and both parents and children commenting that making the transition with friends from their previous school made the

change easier. Additionally, the shared experience of beginning at a new school with others in the same situation, regardless of whether they knew each other prior to the transition, appeared to make the transition easier for both children and their parents.

It is from this shared experience and familiarity with the new environment that a sense of community is fostered, with the preparation they have received also helping to result in feelings of belonging to the new school environment and the wider school community. Developing this sense of belonging would appear to indicate that the individual has accepted their new set of circumstances and thereby experienced an identity shift (Bridges, 2004). Within the research, this was illustrated by both pupils and parents commenting positively on the school environment, both regarding the transition in retrospect and how they currently felt about the school when responding. Both of these participant groups also referred to ongoing support that was available to them as part of the school community, with parents identifying the school and other parents as support structures, and pupils discussing the ongoing help they receive from peers, teachers and parents.

6.3 Reflection on Limitations

As with all research, the findings of this study should be considered alongside its limitations (Creswell, 2014). Whilst the research was designed and conducted with every effort to minimise limitations and ensure trustworthiness, several challenges arose, which are now discussed.

One of the main challenges faced was due to my position as an insider researcher. Although from the outset, I have highlighted the subjectivity and potential influence caused by my professional role in the research school and sought to minimise this through practising reflexivity, it is important to acknowledge the potential of researcher bias impacting the trustworthiness and integrity of the study.

Whilst all qualitative research is susceptible to the Hawthorne effect, where individuals modify their behaviour due to their awareness of being observed (McCambridge, Witton and Elbourne, 2014), my role as an insider researcher conducting this study in my professional setting meant that I needed to be cautious that participants were not adapting or changing their answers as a result of my position as Head of Year 3 in the research school (Brooks, te Riele and Maguire, 2014). Although I took steps to mitigate the influence that I may have unconsciously wielded over the participants by explaining that anything they said would be anonymised and confidential, providing there was no safeguarding issue, and emphasising that I was truly interested in their honest opinions and actual experiences, there is still the possibility that some of the responses were not fully reflective of the participants' views and experiences.

Furthermore, insider researchers may face challenges in maintaining objectivity due to their close involvement and emotional attachment to the community, which could potentially lead to bias in data interpretation or the overlooking of perspectives and experiences that fall outside of the researcher's own experiences within the community. To mitigate this, I discussed my findings and interpretations with critical friends and asked them to provide feedback throughout the research process (Hammond and Wellington, 2020; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). One critical friend in particular was extremely helpful in providing a more neutral perspective throughout the research process as the qualitative research they conduct and are familiar with is in psychology, rather than education. Their familiarity with research in a separate field enabled them to share a different perspective on conducting research and provide suggestions regarding interview techniques and rapport building.

Despite the challenges faced as an insider researcher, being part of the community under study allows a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of the context, culture and social dynamics of the research setting. This enabled easier access to the participants, with my insider status potentially leading to better trust and rapport due to pre-established relationships, which may

have facilitated access to more in-depth information than would have been gained otherwise and a richer interpretation of the data. Despite this, the use of opt-in consent and the requirement for parental consent may have negatively impacted the response rates and resulted in the under-representation of certain pupils (Bonell et al., 2023). Furthermore, even with the insider status, the original research design of the study had to be adapted.

Initially, adaptations were made due to a low response rate for the pupil questionnaires. Having only obtained consent for seven pupils, I amended the research design to include pupil focus groups with the aim of increasing pupil voice within the research. I planned for the focus groups to occur following the pupils' transition to Year 3 due to the benefit my insider status afforded me with access to participants, which also meant that participation was not limited to children who had previously been in one of the two pre-preparatory schools in the same trust as the research school. However, this did mean that the longitudinal aspect within the pupil voice was reduced to the seven respondents of the pupil surveys.

The longitudinal nature of the study was further impacted due to unforeseen changes in gatekeeper access. Consequently, it was possible only to conduct one interview at one time point with parental participants and this needed to occur after their child had already moved to the new school, rather than one before and one after. This resulted in parents commenting on both their and their child's anticipatory feelings towards transition in retrospect, which could have been influenced by the actual experience of the transition, whether positive or negative.

6.4 Contribution to Knowledge

Another challenge encountered in the course of this research was the limited availability of literature specifically addressing school transitions at the age of 7, particularly within the UK independent sector. Most UK-based research in this area has historically focused on the transition from state-maintained primary to state-maintained secondary school at age 11

(Mumford and Birchwood, 2021). Even within broader international contexts, studies on school transitions typically centre on children between the ages of 10 and 14 (Evans, Borriello and Field, 2018). Consequently, this study provides an original and significant contribution to this under-researched area by exploring the transition from KS1 to KS2 within the independent sector. The inclusion of children's voices, alongside those of educators and parents, enhances this contribution by offering a more holistic and grounded understanding of the lived experience of transition at this age and within this specific educational context. Triangulating these perspectives aligns with best practices in qualitative research, as it enriches the data and strengthens the credibility and dependability of the findings (Suter, 2012).

A central outcome of this research is the development of a conceptual model for supporting a successful school transition. Presented in Section 5.4, the model is both child-focused and evidence-informed, offering a structured, practical framework that identifies the key areas of support required to facilitate a successful move to a new educational environment. The model focuses on three core, interrelated components – Preparation and Readiness, Familiarity and Shared Experience – which collectively enable children to develop a sense of community and belonging within their new school. In doing so, it directly addresses the psychosocial and environmental dimensions of wellbeing, as conceptualised in current literature on school climate and student adjustment (Cohen, 2009; El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022).

The conceptual model was developed through a rigorous process underpinned by Walker and Avant's (2019) eight-step method of concept analysis, offering a systematic and theory-driven approach to clarifying the phenomenon of school transition support. This methodological framework enabled greater conceptual clarity and coherence to a complex and multifaceted area within educational research (Bagnall et al., 2025). This process involved identifying defining attributes, antecedents, consequences, and empirical referents, while constructing model, borderline, and contrary cases (Walker and Avant, 2019) to delineate clearly what constitutes a

well-supported transition versus one that is less effective or absent altogether. The model was further informed by a synthesis of empirical findings from the study's qualitative data and by key theoretical frameworks, specifically Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Bioecological Systems Theory and Jindal-Snape's (2016) MMT Theory. These theoretical foundations reflect the understanding that school transitions are multifaceted and dynamic events that reverberate across a child's ecological environment and are not experienced in isolation.

In contrast to much of the current literature, which often lacks conceptual coherence and philosophical transparency (Hannah et al., 2023), this study explicitly aligns its conceptualisation of school transition with its philosophical stance and methodological approach. This alignment is articulated through the conceptual framework in Section 2.3 and the methodological decisions discussed in Section 3.2. This clarity enhances the theoretical robustness of the model and addresses the concern raised by Hannah et al. (2023), who found that 91% of studies in the field do not articulate their philosophical positioning. The subsidiary research questions outlined in Section 2.7 further illustrate this coherence by capturing both the micro-level experiences of individual children and the broader systemic influences shaping their transitions. In doing so, the study not only generates new knowledge but also offers a replicable example of rigorous and transparent research practice.

In terms of empirical contribution, in Chapter Four, the study presents original qualitative data drawn from children, parents and educators undergoing the KS1 to KS2 transition within the independent sector. This data includes both anticipatory and retrospective perspectives, offering a longitudinal view that is seldom present in transition research involving younger children (Jindal-Snape et al, 2019a). Notably, the study gives meaningful attention to children's voices, incorporating focus group discussions and reflective dialogues that illuminate the emotional, social and practical challenges associated with transition. These narratives played a critical role in shaping and validating the conceptual model, as they consistently highlighted the importance

of preparation, familiarity and shared experience in facilitating a smooth and emotionally secure transition. Emphasising student voice in educational research is crucial, as it provides insights into learners' experiences and promotes more responsive educational practices (Lundy, 2007).

The analytical framework developed in the study also offers practical relevance for educators and school leaders. In particular, the visual representation of the conceptual model – a Venn diagram mapping the three key domains of support (see Figure 6.1) – serves as a diagnostic tool that can be used to assess the comprehensiveness of transition provision in different school contexts. This tool has already demonstrated practical utility; the case study school has begun implementing several principles from the model to improve its transition programme, including enhancements to emotional and logistical preparation, as well as creating more opportunities for shared experiences between incoming and current pupils. Such collaborative practices between educational settings are recognised as effective strategies for supporting students during transitions (El Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022).

Moreover, by providing a fully articulated framework that includes not only the defining characteristics of effective transition support but also their antecedents, consequences and potential indicators, the model offers a foundation for further research. It allows for the operationalisation of key constructs in future studies and the potential development of psychometric instruments to evaluate and refine transition interventions. As demonstrated in the development of the Education Well-Being Scale for elementary school students (Chen, 2021), such instruments can play a critical role in systematically measuring complex constructs within child development and educational contexts. This level of conceptual and methodological clarity provides both researchers and practitioners with a roadmap for designing, implementing and assessing school transition programmes that are tailored to the developmental needs of young children.

In summary, this study offers a significant contribution to the conceptual, analytical, empirical and practical understanding of school transitions in an under-researched age group and educational context. By foregrounding the child's perspective, applying a rigorous methodological framework and developing a theoretically informed and practically applicable model, this research not only addresses existing gaps in the literature but also lays the groundwork for future inquiry and practice aimed at supporting children's wellbeing through educational transitions.

6.5 Recommendations

Ensuring that children are supported throughout an educational transition is paramount to achieving a successful move between schools. From the findings of this research, a conceptual model for facilitating a successful school transition has been developed and it is directly from this model that the following recommendations are made:

- Preparation in the lead-up to the transition is essential, regardless of the child's former educational background.
- Schools should provide multiple opportunities for children to increase their familiarity with the new setting, alongside ensuring that they are familiar with the needs of the pupils making the transition.
- Schools and parents should work together to facilitate the development of shared experiences.
- Alongside these three areas of support, schools should actively promote a sense of community and belonging that is inclusive towards new pupils and their parents.

I now address each of the recommendations in more detail, exploring how children's wellbeing can be best supported during school transition.

Preparation and Readiness for School

The findings of this research indicate that all pupils should be provided with support in advance of a transition between schools, regardless of the setting they are moving from. This preparation should consider both organisational and socio-emotional needs and may look different for each individual child. Ideally, the onus of this support should be on both schools and not just the one that the child is transitioning to, particularly because of the familiarity children will have with their current school and the increased likelihood that they will have built positive relationships with the staff there. However, to ensure that children are receiving the support they need prior to changing schools, parents should be provided with guidance on how they can support the transition at home.

Familiarity

Increased familiarity with the new school appeared to ease children's concerns prior to the transition. Therefore, schools should aim to provide numerous opportunities for children and their parents to visit the physical school site, where they would be able to become more familiar with the layout of the school and get to know other individuals at the school, such as current staff members or other new joiners, as well as enable them to become more accustomed to the new school's rules, routines and expectations.

In addition to the pupils and their parents having the opportunity to increase their familiarity with the new school, the school itself should also focus on ensuring that they are familiar with their new pupils and their needs. Schools should ensure they gather pupil information for all of the children who are transitioning, not just those who are moving from schools that they already have good links and relationships with. This information should be of both an academic and pastoral nature.

Shared Experience

Throughout the transition process, schools should be cognisant that some children will not be moving alongside peers from their previous school setting and therefore are lacking in the shared

experiences that many of the other pupils have available to them by default. Both these children and their parents may need more support from the new school as a result, so the school should provide additional opportunities to develop shared experiences, which could contribute to supporting children's preparation and readiness for the transition, alongside increasing their familiarity. For example, additional activities or events could be held at the new school site for new joiners who are not moving as part of a large peer group or for those that have been identified as likely to find the transition challenging.

Sense of Community and Belonging

To aid with feelings of acceptance for the new circumstances following the school transitions, schools should actively foster a positive school climate. This will help to generate a welcoming environment for both new pupils and their parents, helping them to develop a sense of belonging to the new school community. This links to the prior recommendation of shared experiences by helping the individuals undergoing the transition to feel that they have a supportive network of others who are either going through the transition alongside them or that they have previously undergone a similar transition. Feeling as though they are a part of the new school community is an indication that the transition has been successful, with this sense of belonging being synonymous with the individual having adjusted and adapted effectively to their new environment.

6.6 Implications for my Professional Practice

Since completing the research aspect of this thesis, I have changed professional roles and am no longer working in the case study school. Despite this, I still retain close links with my former workplace, with whom I have shared my research, including being presented with the opportunity to return and disseminate the findings to the current Year 3 teaching team to help them in formulating their transition programme for the 2024-2025 cohort.

The school that I am now working in is significantly different from the context of this research, in that it is a special needs academy free school, catering for pupils from the ages of 4 to 19. Nevertheless, the findings of this research have had implications on my individual professional practice within the context of where I now work.

Due to the special needs provision within my new setting, the majority of the students have transitioned from previous educational establishments. Their transitions have not necessarily occurred alongside their peers, with there being entry points across a variety of year groups and the classes themselves not always being grouped by age. Whilst there is a secondary provision and so some of the children transitioned at the end of Year 6, very few have moved alongside peers from their old school. Supporting a successful transition, whilst desirable in all education settings, is potentially of even greater importance within this setting, due to the vulnerable nature of the children.

I have therefore been using my knowledge of school transitions to help design and implement a robust transition programme to support pupils moving to the school. Based on the conceptual model for supporting successful school transitions, the programme uses many of the recommendations from this research to ensure that the pupils and their families are effectively prepared for moving schools, including having numerous opportunities to increase their familiarity with the school environment, including the site, staff and pupils, and to encounter a range of shared experiences. The school ethos and climate focus on fostering a positive sense of community and belonging, helping to ensure that children and their families are supported throughout the transition and beyond.

6.7 Suggestions for Further Research

This study has highlighted that transitioning between educational establishments for the beginning of KS2 is of no less significance in the lives of children and the individuals within their

microsystem than a transition from primary to secondary school, and it is therefore of equal importance for support structures to be in place, regardless of the age at transition. Whilst international research suggests that school transition at a younger age is more challenging (Bagnall, Fox and Skipper, 2021; Holas and Huston, 2012), this does not appear to be the case in this study, where the majority of participants reported a positive experience of moving schools.

Although the findings of this study could be in agreement with research by Arens et al. (2013), which found a negative correlation between the age of children transitioning schools and their self-esteem, the researchers attributed this to environmental effects, rather than age. Also, the youngest age of children within the aforementioned study was nine years old (Arens et al., 2013), rather than seven as in this research. It is therefore difficult to draw conclusions in relation to the impact of age on school transition. Research across a wider range of schools with transition at various ages would therefore be beneficial to enable a greater level of comparison between a child's age and their experience of the level of challenge of a school transition.

A longitudinal comparative narrative analysis examining school transitions in the UK across varying age groups could provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of transitions within diverse educational contexts. This study could employ the conceptual framework developed in the present research and undertake data collection from all participants both prior to and following the transition event, thereby recognizing the ongoing and dynamic nature of transitions (Jindal-Snape, 2010). Such an approach would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the school transition phenomenon and its effects on multiple stakeholders. Furthermore, comparative analysis across different age cohorts could address the current gaps in the literature and clarify the inconclusive findings identified in previous studies (Donaldson, Moore, and Hawkins, 2022; Jindal-Snape et al., 2020).

Furthermore, I contend that further research specifically within the area of school transitions from KS1 to KS2 would be beneficial to broaden the body of knowledge, particularly in relation to

looking at different settings, such as the maintained sector, or even looking specifically at children who are transitioning between the maintained and independent sectors at this age. This research has already indicated that there are fewer support structures in place where children are moving schools independently and the majority of these children were moving from the maintained sector. Further and more specific research may be able to shed light on whether this is a general trend and investigate the potential for additional support structures to be implemented.

Employing a comparative case study methodology would enable a direct comparison of transitions from KS1 to KS2 across various sectors and school types, such as primary, infant, or pre-preparatory schools compared to primary, junior, or preparatory schools. This approach would utilize the conceptual model developed in this study as a framework for examining existing and potential support structures both within and between these educational settings. By contextualizing the transition phenomenon within these diverse educational environments, case study research can provide a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the varied transitional experiences (Remenyi et al., 2002; Crowe et al., 2011). Furthermore, incorporating multiple sources of evidence and data would strengthen the depth and validity of the findings, facilitating a more nuanced analysis of the support mechanisms and contextual factors that influence pupils' transitional experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This research also implies that the shared experience of transition between parents helps ease the transition they are experiencing regarding their child moving schools. Current literature surrounding school transition naturally focuses on the child's experience and where the parental perspective is used, it tends to concern support given by parents (for example, see Bharara, 2020; Hanewald, 2013). Further research would be required to determine if and how the easing of the parental transition impacts upon the child's experience, and whether this could be an additional factor in ensuring a smooth transition between schools. From this study alone, a conclusion

cannot be made on whether this factor is unique to school transitions of younger children or would also apply to the primary to secondary transition.

The previously mentioned longitudinal comparative narrative analysis examining school transitions in the UK across different ages could also provide valuable insights into the influence of parental experiences on the transition process, and whether this impact varies according to the child's age at the time of transition. Such research would build upon existing studies that associate enhanced parental support with successful school transitions (Waters, Lester, and Cross, 2014), as well as with reduced anxiety (Duchesne et al., 2009) and improved wellbeing (Kiuru et al., 2020; Virtanen et al., 2019).

6.8 Summary

This concluding chapter has summarised the findings of the research by providing answers to the research question and subsidiary questions of this study. Using the four main themes generated from the data and the resulting conceptual model for supporting a successful school transition, it can be seen that the wellbeing of children during school transition across educational settings to KS2 in the UK independent educational sector can be supported by:

- Ensuring all children receive preparation in the lead-up to the transition, regardless of their educational background.
- Providing numerous opportunities to increase familiarity, both for the children with their new school and for the new school with the children.
- Facilitating the development of shared experiences.
- Promoting and developing a sense of community and belonging within the new school.

This case study research has examined the experiences of pupils, teachers and parents during the process of transition. It is important to consider multiple perspectives because transitions

are not experienced in isolation but rather are multiple and interlinked for both the pupil who is making the transition to a new school and other individuals within their microsystem (Jindal-Snape, 2016).

Whilst this research, as a case study, is context dependent, its findings suggest that school transition at this age shares some of the challenges of the more common transition from primary to secondary school, such as pupil concerns regarding friendships and finding their way around a new environment. However, the younger age of the children potentially accentuates these issues due to younger children being more likely to have fewer experiences of prior transitions and the likelihood that they are not as socially and emotionally developed as their older peers who are making a school transition at the age of 11. The younger age of the children within this study also presents a more prominent role for parents during the transition process, although this could also be amplified due to the nature of the research setting as an independent school, with parents more likely to be involved as a result of the financial investment they are making in their child's education.

My conclusion is that regardless of age and educational background, children making a school transition will require support to ensure that the move is successful. A successful transition requires the individual to experience a shift in their identity through the development of feelings of belonging to the new community and acceptance of their new circumstances. To support children through the process of school transition and therefore ensure they adapt successfully, parents and schools should work together to ensure the children are adequately prepared, are familiar with their new environment and have shared experiences in order to develop a sense of community and belonging.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Previous School Information

School	Type of School	Number of Children Transitioning
School A	Independent Part of the same trust Feeder School	13
School B	Independent Part of the same trust Feeder School	13
School C	Independent Feeder School	10
School D	Independent Feeder School	6
School E	State-maintained	3
School F	Independent	2
School G	State-maintained	1
School H	State-maintained	1
School I	State-maintained	1
School J	State-maintained	1
School K	State-maintained	1
School L	State-maintained	1
School M	Independent	1
School N	Independent	1
School O	International	1
School P	International	1

A breakdown of the research cohort's previous schools, detailing the type of school alongside the number of children making the transition from each.

Appendix 2 – Teacher Interview Questions

Initial teacher interview questions

1. In your school, how do you prepare the children for transition at this age?

2. What do you think the schools they will be joining do well in terms of preparing the children for this transition?

3. Do you think there is anything more the schools could be doing?

Revised teacher interview questions

1. In your school, how do you prepare the children for transition at this age?
    a. How do you support individual children's wellbeing?
    b. How are parents involved in the transition process?
2. What kind of information do you pass on about each child to their next school?
    a. What sort of pastoral needs are communicated?
3. What do you think the schools they will be joining do well in terms of preparing the children for this transition?
    a. How do the schools support the children's wellbeing?
4. Do you think there is anything more the schools could be doing?

Appendix 3 – Consent Forms

Adult consent form

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Name of Participant: _____

Title of the project: **How can we support the wellbeing of children during transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2?**

Main investigator and contact details: **Danielle Barclay** **email: 123012@live.smuc.ac.uk**

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.

3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.

4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.

5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant (print).....

Signed..... Date.....

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: _____

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Child consent form – questionnaires

My name is Miss Barclay and I am collecting some information to be used in a project.

I would like to ask you to complete four short questionnaires about moving to your new school. The questionnaires will be spaced out between March (while you're still at this school) and December (when you're at your new school) and they won't take very long to fill in.

It is up to you if you would like to take part. If you do, then please fill in the form below.

I would like to answer questions for Miss Barclay's project.

Please write your name _____

Please return this form to your teacher as soon as possible

Child consent form – focus groups

Miss Barclay is collecting some more information for her project about changing schools.

She would like you to take part in a short discussion with three other boys to talk about what it was like starting at a new school. You will be recorded but no one else needs to know what you said. Miss Barclay will make sure any names are changed.

It is up to you if you would like to take part. If you do, then please fill in the form below.

I would like to take part in the discussion for Miss Barclay's project.

Please write your name _____

Please return this form to Miss Barclay as soon as possible

Parent/Guardian consent Form

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Name of Participant: _____

Title of the project: **How can we support the wellbeing of children during transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2?**

Main investigator and contact details: **Danielle Barclay** **email: 123012@live.smuc.ac.uk**

1. I agree to my child taking part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which is attached to this form. I understand what my child's role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw my child from the research at any time, for any reason and without prejudice.
3. I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I and my child provides will be safeguarded.
4. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I and my child have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of parent (print).....

Signed..... Date.....

If you wish to withdraw your child from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: _____

I WISH TO WITHDRAW MY CHILD FROM THIS STUDY

Name of Participant: _____

Name of Parent _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 4 – Pupil Questionnaires

Pre-transition Questionnaire

Moving to your new school

1. What are you looking forward to about your new school?

2. What do you think will be the most difficult thing about your new school?

3. How do you feel about starting your new school?

4. Why do you feel like this?

5. Who can you talk to if you have questions about your new school?

Post-transition Questionnaire

Moving to your new school

1. What are you most enjoying about your new school?

2. What has been the most difficult thing about your new school?

3. How do you feel about being at your new school?

4. Why do you feel like this?

5. Who can you talk to if you have questions about your new school?

Appendix 5 – Parent/Carer Interview Prompts

1. How has the experience of the transition process been for you and your child?

2. How have you and your child been prepared and supported for this transition?

    a. How have the schools supported your child's wellbeing during this time?

    b. Was there anything that the school did which was particularly helpful?

3. How do you think transition could be developed and/or improved now that you and your child have been through the process?

Appendix 6 – Ethical Approval

St Mary's University Twickenham London

15 December 2021

Dear Danielle

I am writing to confirm that your application for ethical approval of your research enquiry has been approved at Level 2.

Researcher's name:
Danielle Barclay

Regnum
123012

Title of project:
How can we support the wellbeing of children during transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2?

Supervisor
Dr Mark Price

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

M Mihovilović

Dr Mary Mihovilović
Institute of Education Ethics Sub-Committee Representative

St Mary's University, Waldegrave Road, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, London TW1 4SX
Switchboard 020 8240 4000, Fax 020 8240 4255, www.stmarys.ac.uk

Appendix 7 – Participant Information Sheets

Teacher Participants

Participant Information Sheet

Section A: The Research Project

How can we support the wellbeing of children during transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2?

This research aims to explore a range of perspectives of those involved in the transition process from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, when moving between schools. By involving teachers, pupils and parents, the study will seek to understand how to best prepare and support the wellbeing of children during this period of transition.

This unfunded research project is being undertaken as part of my doctoral studies. The results will be used within my doctoral thesis and a summary of findings will be made available to all participants.

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

You have been invited to take part because of your professional knowledge and experience regarding the transition process at this age group. Participation is entirely voluntary and will consist of one interview of approximately 30-40 minutes. Any information provided will be anonymised and a transcription of the interview will be kept on a secure server which will only be viewed by my supervisory team and me. You have the right to withdraw from the project up to six months after the interview. This deadline is in place to allow for the data to be removed from final drafts of my doctoral thesis. If you do choose to withdraw, simply complete the withdrawal slip on the attached consent form and return it via email.

If you have any further questions or would like more information, please contact me at 123012@live.stmarys.ac.uk.

PLEASE RETAIN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

Parents/Carers of Child Participants for Questionnaires

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Participant Information Sheet

Section A: The Research Project

How can we support the wellbeing of children during transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2?

This research aims to explore a range of perspectives of those involved in the transition process from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, when moving between schools. By involving teachers, pupils and parents, the study will seek to understand how to best prepare and support the wellbeing of children during this period of transition.

This unfunded research project is being undertaken as part of my doctoral studies. The results will be used within my doctoral thesis and a summary of findings will be made available to all participants.

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

Your child has been invited to take part because they are currently preparing to undertake this transition. Participation is entirely voluntary and will consist of four questionnaires at regular intervals over a nine-month period. Each questionnaire should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Any information provided will be anonymised and kept securely, only being viewed by my supervisory team and me. The only exception to this will be if a safeguarding concern emerges from their response, which will be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead at your child's school. You have the right to withdraw your child from the project up to four months after the final questionnaire is answered in December 2022. This deadline is in place to allow for the data to be removed from final drafts of my doctoral thesis. If you do choose to withdraw, simply complete the withdrawal slip on the attached consent form and return it via email.

If you have any further questions or would like more information, please contact me at 123012@live.stmarys.ac.uk.

PLEASE RETAIN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

Parents/Carers of Child Participants for Focus Groups

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Participant Information Sheet

Section A: The Research Project

How can we support the wellbeing of children during transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2?

This research aims to explore a range of perspectives of those involved in the transition process from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, when moving between schools. By involving teachers, pupils and parents, the study will seek to understand how to best prepare and support the wellbeing of children during this period of transition.

This unfunded research project is being undertaken as part of my doctoral studies. The results will be used within my doctoral thesis and a summary of findings will be made available to all participants.

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

Your child has been invited to take part because they have recently undergone this transition. Participation is entirely voluntary and will consist of a discussion within a focus group of four children. Each focus group will last approximately 15-20 minutes. Any information provided will be anonymised and a transcription of the focus group will be kept on a secure server which will only be viewed by my supervisory team and me. You have the right to withdraw from the project up to four months after the focus group. This deadline is in place to allow for the data to be removed from final drafts of my doctoral thesis. If you do choose to withdraw, simply complete the withdrawal slip on the attached consent form and return it via email.

If you have any further questions or would like more information, please contact me at 123012@live.stmarys.ac.uk.

PLEASE RETAIN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

Parent/Carer Participants

St Mary's University Twickenham London

Participant Information Sheet

Section A: The Research Project

How can we support the wellbeing of children during transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2?

This research aims to explore a range of perspectives of those involved in the transition process from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, when moving between schools. By involving teachers, pupils and parents, the study will seek to understand how to best prepare and support the wellbeing of children during this period of transition.

This unfunded research project is being undertaken as part of my doctoral studies. The results will be used within my doctoral thesis and a summary of findings will be made available to all participants.

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

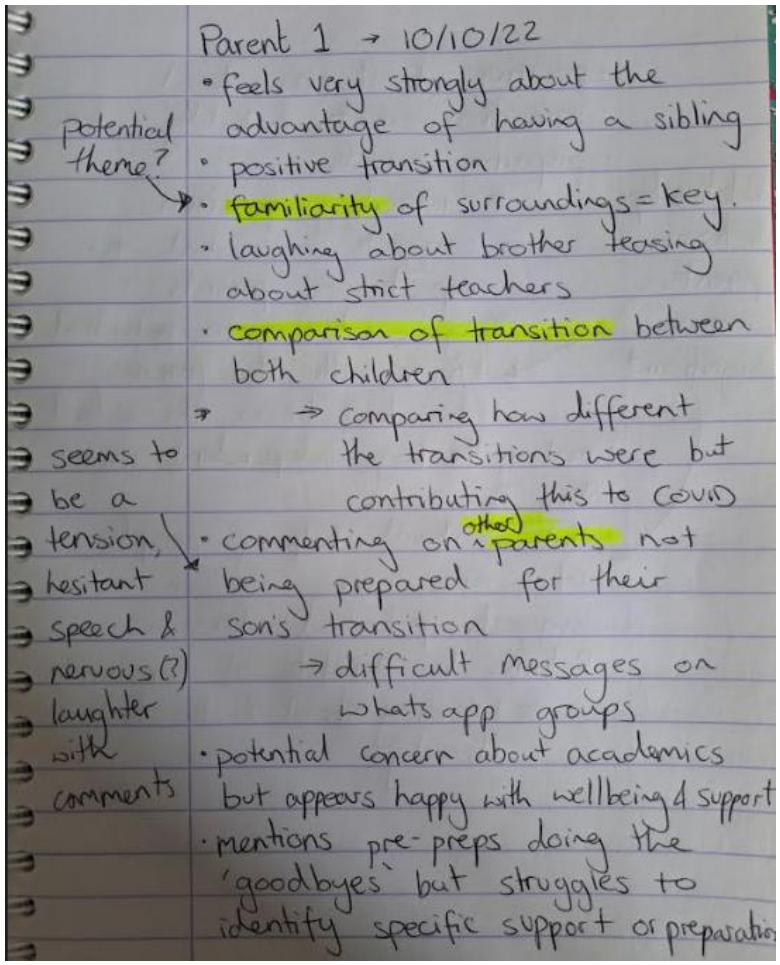
You have been invited to take part because your child is currently preparing to undertake this transition. Participation is entirely voluntary and will consist of one interview of approximately 30-40 minutes. Any information provided will be anonymised and a transcription of the interview will be kept on a secure server which will only be viewed by my supervisory team and me. You have the right to withdraw from the project up to six months after the interview. This deadline is in place to allow for the data to be removed from final drafts of my doctoral thesis. If you do choose to withdraw, simply complete the withdrawal slip on the attached consent form and return it via email.

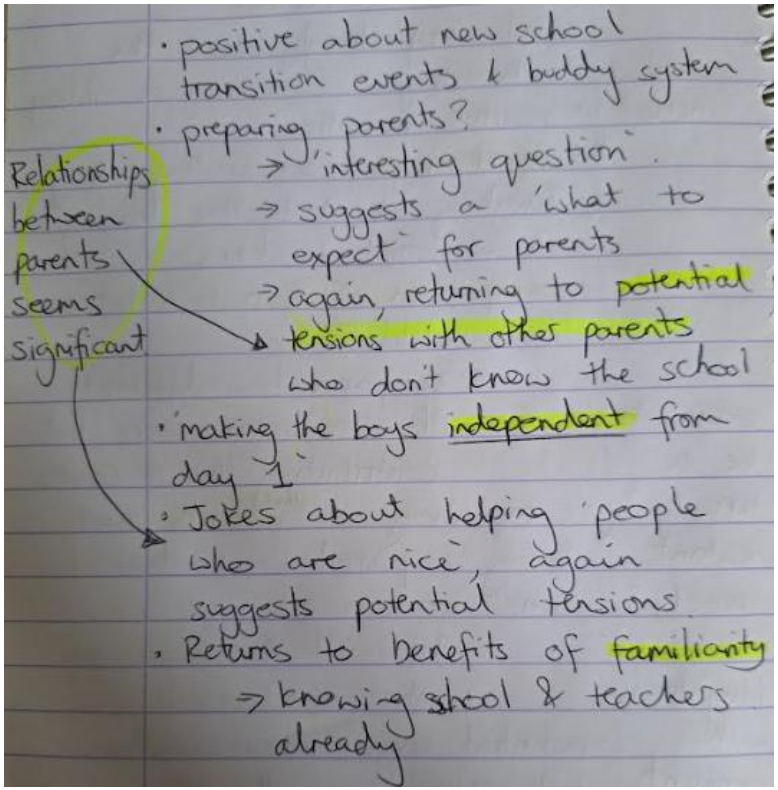
If you have any further questions or would like more information, please contact me at 123012@live.stmarys.ac.uk.

PLEASE RETAIN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP TOGETHER WITH A COPY OF YOUR CONSENT FORM

Appendix 8 – Interview Notes

An example of notes made during Phase 1 of Thematic Analysis





Appendix 9 – Initial Attempts of Coding Example

Parent 1 – 10/10/22

Interviewer:	So thinking about the transition period overall and the experience, I'm going to start with talking about how [child's name] experienced it and how you think it was for him. How did he seem at home in the lead up to and about the transition?
Parent 1:	Ok... um... so [child's name]... I do like feel we're a bit of an outlier maybe because he's a sibling of a boy who's already there so I definitely feel as though he had an advantage from that perspective. He was very excited, very, you know, like a puppy, very ready to go and, in some ways, very ready for the step, well in many ways very ready for the step and has been for some time: needing the challenge, needing the bigger space, needing the bigger environment generally. So he was absolutely fine. He was familiar with the surroundings and I think that is key. So because he's been there on pickups for his older brother, he knew exactly what was going to go on at the start of the day and end of the day. We've swum there for years so he'd been around the buildings, and I think probably less this time because of COVID a little bit but the trips up that he has done from the pre-prep to the big school were hugely helpful. So for him the transition was very easy, almost seamless. Also, he knew a lot of children because he was moving with a lot of his friends from the pre-prep. I know also that you guys had done some teachers going down to his class. I know yourself, [teacher name] also, did some trips there so again very, very helpful to see a familiar face, to know what's going on. Again, because he'd been there on pickups, he knew [headteacher's name] (laughs) because he'd seen her outside so he kind of walked in like he already owned the place to be honest but um... yeah (laughs).
Interviewer:	Was there anything at all that he was concerned about or worried about?
Parent 1::	Um... Not really, um... only from, you know, his brother had teased him a little bit and told him that there was strict teachers (laughs) and so he was er.. he was slightly nervous about the prospect of strict teachers but not in a big way, just, you know, really excited to start, excited to make new friends and very ready to go but then he's the kind of child that's there already and ready for the next challenge. Had you done this with [older brother's name], I think we would have had a very different conversation.
Interviewer:	Ok. So was the transition as you expected it for him?
Parent 1:	Yeah. 100%. I didn't expect him to have any issues whatsoever. Again, we talked about the familiarity, the fact that his brother is there, the fact that he knew teachers, he knew what to do, where to go and who he could call on if he had any issues so for him it was as expected.
Interviewer:	So for you as a parent, this was obviously second time round. How was that experience for you? Was it easier this time because you knew how things worked?
Parent 1:	Oh yeah. Definitely much easier although in some ways this was our first time because with [older brother] we joined in COVID so we were very remote in that

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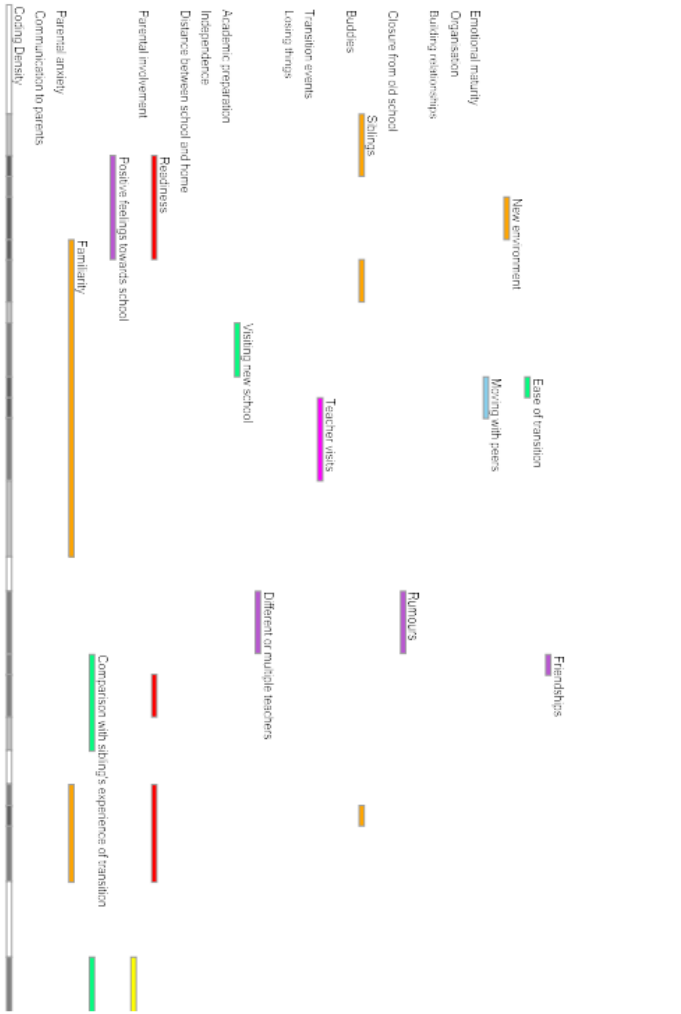

Appendix 10 – Finalised Coding Example

Parent 1 – 10/10/22

Interviewer:	So thinking about the transition period overall and the experience, I'm going to start with talking about how [child's name] experienced it and how you think it was for him. How did he seem at home in the lead up to and about the transition?
Parent 1:	Ok... um... so [child's name]... I do like feel we're a bit of an outlier maybe because he's a sibling of a boy who's already there so I definitely feel as though he had an advantage from that perspective. He was very excited, very, you know, like a puppy, very ready to go and, in some ways, very ready for the step, well in many ways very ready for the step and has been for some time: needing the challenge, needing the bigger space, needing the bigger environment generally. So he was absolutely fine. He was familiar with the surroundings and I think that is key. So because he's been there on pickups for his older brother, he knew exactly what was going to go on at the start of day and end of the day. We've swum there for years so he'd been around the buildings, and I think probably less this time because of COVID a little bit but the trips up that he has done from the pre-prep to the big school were hugely helpful. So for him the transition was very easy, almost seamless. Also he knew a lot of children because he was moving with a lot of his friends from the pre-prep. I know also that you guys had done some teachers going down to his class. I know yourself, [teacher name] also, did some trips there so again very, very helpful to see a familiar face, to know what's going on. Again, because he'd been there on pickups, he knew [headteacher's name] (laughs) because he'd seen her outside so he kind of walked in like he already owned the place to be honest but um... yeah (laughs).
Interviewer:	Was there anything that he was concerned about or worried about?
Parent 1:	Um... Not really, um... only from, you know, his brother had teased him a little bit and told him that there was strict teachers (laughs) and so he was er.. he was slightly nervous about the prospect of strict teachers but not in a big way, just, you know, really excited to start, excited to make new friends and very ready to go but then he's the kind of child that's there already and ready for the next challenge. Had you done this with [older brother's name], I think we would have had a very different conversation.
Interviewer:	So was the transition as you expected it for him?
Parent 1:	Yeah. 100%. I didn't expect him to have any issues whatsoever. Again, we talked about the familiarity, the fact that his brother is there, the fact that he knew teachers, he knew what to do, where to go and who he could call on if he had any issues so for him it was as expected.
Interviewer:	So for you as a parent, this was obviously second time round. How was that experience for you? Was it different this time round?
Parent 1:	Oh yeah. Definitely much easier although in some ways this was our first time because with [older brother's name] we joined in COVID so we were very remote in that first term so this second time we're immediately present, which is good, although, you know, the Queen's untimely passing did stop us from coming in that

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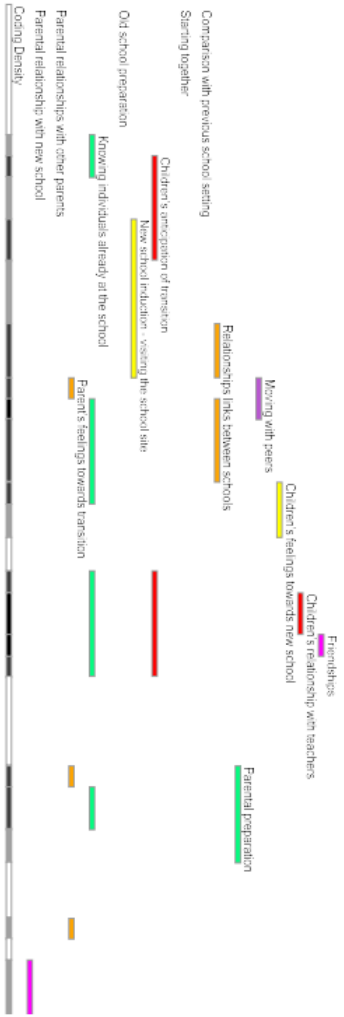

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