

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

Identifying the educational and social needs of children with specific speech and language difficulties on entry to secondary school<sup>1</sup>

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## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

### Abstract

Movement from KS2 to KS3 creates a number of challenges for pupils. For children with additional learning needs the change of academic pace, social contacts and, typically, school may pose additional problems. This change may be particularly problematic for children with specific speech and language difficulties (SSLD). This study examines the ways in which parents, pupils and teachers appraise this transition prior to secondary transfer (Year 6) and during the first year of secondary school (Yr7) for a cohort of children with a history of specific language impairment. The use of comparison groups provides the opportunity to discriminate between factors related to a) change of school b) special educational needs generally and c) language difficulties specifically.

Children with SSLD were initially identified in Year 3 (N=69), with the majority of pupils in mainstream settings. In Year 6 (mean age 10; 3) children were assessed on a range of language literacy and cognitive measures and the views of their parents' and teachers' about needs, curriculum differentiation and support established. Teachers were also asked to consider the difficulties that the children might experience on entry to secondary school. During Year 7 data were collected from form tutors, SENCOs and secondary subject specialists. Perceptions of need are compared with level of need as evidenced by standardised assessments. A critical analysis of the ways in which these children's needs are addressed in the secondary school system is provided and the paper outlines current strengths and gaps in provision.

## **Background**

Most children transfer between schools at least once during their school career. These transition points are challenging, bringing new educational demands, different social systems and new environments. The changes in these contextual factors affect virtually all children in some way (Anderson, Jacobs, Schram & Splittberger, 2000). A major transition in the English education system is the move from primary to secondary school; a move which entails a range of significant organisational, educational and social changes. The impact of these changes may be particularly marked for children with language and communication difficulties (SSLD)<sup>1</sup>.

Children with SSLD experience problems with the acquisition and processing of oral language skills. The commonly used criterion to identify children with SSLD is that their language problems cannot be explained in terms of other cognitive, neurological or perceptual deficits. Problems are characterised by a protracted rate of language development as well as particular difficulties with subcomponents of the language system (Bishop, 1997; Leonard, 1998). For these children negotiating new surroundings, interacting with new teachers and peers may place additional demands on reduced levels of communicative competence. Secondary schools are likely to be challenged by the extent of their needs, which extend to literacy (Catts, Fey, Tomblin, & Zhang, 2002; Clarke-Klein & Hodson, 1995; Dockrell, Lindsay, Connelly & Mackie, 2007; Stothard, Snowling, Bishop, Chipchase, & Kaplan, 1998), numeracy (Cowan, Donlan, Newton, & Lloyd, 2005) and social emotional and behavioural difficulties (Beitchman, Wilson, Brownlie, Inglis, & Lancee, 1996; Fujiki, Brinton & Clarke, 2002; Lindsay, Dockrell, & Strand, in press). In this paper we consider the nature of these children's needs on transfer to secondary schools and the ways in which they impact on the secondary schools, their parents and the young people themselves. We draw on evidence from both

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

standardised assessments and teachers', parents' and pupils' views to examine these issues.

Feelings of apprehension about the move to secondary schools are common place among pupils (Galton & Willcocks, 1983; Measor & Woods, 1984; Zeedyk et al, 2003) although many look forward to the move and most claim to enjoy it (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005). Dips or hiatuses in pupil performance are common as they move from school to school (Reyes, Gillock, Kobus & Sanchez, 2000; Suffolk, 1997) with 40 per cent of pupils reported to lose motivation and make no progress in the year after transfer to secondary school (Galton, Gray, & Rudduck, 1999; Hargreaves & Galton, 2001). Schools have improved in their ability to smooth the transfer and make it less stressful but discontinuities in teaching methods and demands on learning appear to have been largely neglected (Hargreaves & Galton, 2001). These discontinuities include students changing from having predominantly one teacher to having many teachers, often marked by a different style of teaching and different demands on independence. Additional difficulties may occur in authorities where primary school children have a wider variety of secondary school choices. This makes liaison between the many primaries and secondary schools much more difficult. Failure to negotiate transfer successfully has been linked to both low academic achievement and prior problem behaviour (Anderson et al., 2000). Thus children with special educational needs (SEN) may be particularly vulnerable and this transfer may be exacerbated by a change in the structure of support systems and exposure to a wider range of contexts where needs may not be well specified and met. The fact that there is little access to speech and language therapy support in the UK secondary school settings (Lindsay, Dockrell, Mackie & Letchford, 2005) may place additional pressures on children with language difficulties

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

### *Aims*

The move from primary to secondary school is a significant one for young people it is tinged with anxiety and uncertainty. A significant minority of pupils fail to successfully negotiate the transfer to secondary school. To date little systematic attention has been paid to the impact of the needs of children with SSLD as they enter secondary schools. These children may bring additional challenges; they are likely to lose access to specialist language support and their combined difficulties with language, literacy and, often, behaviour require a complex response from the schools they enter. Given the range of difficulties reported to be experienced by children with language difficulties we sought to identify how their experiences differed from those of other children with SEN. Thus in Year 6 we matched each child with SSLD with a peer who was experiencing a non-language related SEN. We also identified a child in the same class who was not experiencing any difficulties by asking teachers to identify a typically developing child. This provides the opportunity of disaggregating contextual factors, such as school and locality, from the problems experienced by the cohorts with SEN. These comparison groups provide the basis to distinguish factors specific to SSLD, those that are general to children with SEN and those that reflect transfer issues for all children.

### **Methods**

#### *Participants*

##### *SSLD Cohort*

Sixty-nine children (17 girls and 52 boys), who had been identified in Year 3 as having a SSLD when they were of a mean age of 8;3 (range 7;6 – 8;10), were traced in their year prior to transfer to secondary school (Year 6; mean age of 10;8 range 10;2-

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

11;4). At age 8 all children were on their school's special educational needs register, and 54% had a statement of special educational needs under the UK Education Act 1996.

Initial identification of participants was completed following a survey of educational provision in two local authorities (LAs) in the UK. Professionals (speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and special educational needs coordinators, SENCOs) were asked to identify children who had a discrepancy between their level of functioning in the area of speech and language and that which would be expected given the child's functioning in other areas, and who were experiencing significant language based learning needs. A total of 133 were identified (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2000) from which a subsample from each LA was derived. Children with any additional complicating factors which would preclude the diagnosis of SSLD were excluded. In addition, children of the same age in the three UK special schools for children with SSLD were included in the study (N = 10).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

In Year 3 the children had substantially delayed development on a number of language measures as shown in Table 1. To validate the identification of these children as those with SSLD a series of repeated measures t- tests confirmed that vocabulary scores, grammar scores, narrative production and phonology scores were all significantly below measures of nonverbal ability (BAS naming vocabulary  $t = -2.06, = .04, d = .29$ ; BPVS  $t = -3.91, p < .0005, d = .47$ ; Understanding grammar TROG  $t = -6.22, p < .0005, d = .42$ ; Narrative Bus Story information  $t = -5.74, p < .0005, d = .75$  and phonological awareness PhAB  $t = -2.08, p = .04, d = .27$ ). To investigate further the pattern of language performance at this point a factor analysis was computed on the language measures. The analysis generated a single factor solution that accounted for

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

55% of the variance, with receptive and expressive vocabulary, receptive grammar and narrative loading at or above .75 on the factor. Thus in Year 3 the children fell within the category of children with specific language difficulties with problems evident in both expressive and receptive language.

All children were contacted in the year prior to transfer to secondary school (Year 6) but two families with male children did not want to participate in the interview and assessment phase of the project. Information was available about school placement and national curriculum tests for all children.

### *Comparison groups*

Two matched peers were identified from the same class as the children with SSLD for children in the mainstream sample: a matched typically developing peer at an average level for reading, maths and science (TDgroup N=42) and a matched child who had special needs in terms of general learning difficulties but not speech and language needs and was on the same stage of the Code of Practice (SENGroup N=32).

### ***Procedure***

#### *Year 6 – Pre transfer*

In the spring of Year 6 the teachers and SENCOs completed an interview schedule for each child. In addition the children and parents of all three cohorts were approached to participate in an interview. All three cohorts completed standardised assessments of reading decoding and numeracy. In addition the SSLD cohort completed a battery of language measures to assess the extent of their language problems at this point in time (see measures section).

#### *Year 7 – Post transfer*

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

In the Spring of Year 7 all three cohorts completed a series of standardised tests examining reading decoding, reading comprehension, spelling and writing. (see measures section). Questionnaires were completed by form tutors, subject specialists and, for the SSLD and SEN cohorts, by the SENCO. In addition the children and parents were interviewed. Only responses to questions pertaining to transfer to secondary school are reported in this paper

### *Measures*

#### *Standardised assessments*

Tests with high reported measures of reliability and validity were identified to assess language and attainments (see Dockrell, Lindsay, Connelly & Mackie, 2007)...

#### *Nonverbal ability.*

British Abilities Scales II (BAS II) Matrices subtest (Elliot, Murray, & Pearson, 1997). Children are presented with a set of patterns where one pattern is incomplete. There is a choice of six responses and children are required to point to the missing piece.

#### *Vocabulary.*

British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS; Dunn, Dunn, Whetton, & Burley, 1997): Children are shown four line drawings and asked to choose the one that best illustrates a word spoken by the assessor.

#### *British Abilities Scales II (BAS II) Naming subtest (Elliot et al., 1997).*

Children are shown a series of familiar items and asked to name them.

#### *Grammar.*

Test of Reception of Grammar (TROG; Bishop, 1983). A multiple-choice test designed to assess understanding of grammatical constructions. Children are shown



Transfer from primary school to secondary school

four pictures and the assessor reads a sentence. The child is required to select a picture that matches the sentence.

CELF<sup>UK</sup> (Peers et al., 1999) – recalling sentences and listening to paragraphs.

In the recalling sentences task children are asked to imitate orally presented sentences.

*Expressive Narrative.*

Bus Story: Information Score (Renfrew, 1997). The assessor tells the child a short story about a naughty bus. The narrative is supported by pictures. The child is asked to retell the story as accurately as possible using the pictures as cues.

*Phonological Awareness.*

Phonological Assessment Battery (PhAB; Frederickson, Frith, & Reason, 1997) rhyme and alliteration measures: For the rhyme test children choose two words that rhyme out of a choice of three (one irrelevant word and two that rhyme). The alliteration test is similar with the exception that the chosen words have the same beginning sound.

Fluency measures. The fluency test involves children generating as many words as they can in each of the following areas: semantic, e.g., food and animals; alliteration, e.g., words beginning with ‘m’ and ‘b’; and rhyme, e.g., words that sound like ‘ whip’ and ‘more’.

*Reading.*

BAS II Word Reading Scale. This scale assesses recognition and oral reading of single words.

*Spelling.*

British Abilities Scales II (BAS II); Spelling Scale: This scale provides a number of phonetically regular and irregular words to assess the child’s ability to

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

produce correct spellings. Each item is first presented in isolation, then within the context of a sentence, and finally in isolation.

*Numeracy.*

British Abilities Scales II (BAS II); Basic Number Skills. The scale assesses the child's ability to compute basic calculations – addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

*Written Language.*

The Wechsler Objective Language Dimensions (WOLD): writing expression (Rust, 1996). The child is asked to write a letter outlining his or her ideal house. Children are allowed 15 minutes to complete the task. This free writing task addresses the development of ideas and organization, as well as punctuation and use of capitals.

*Standard attainment test data (SATS)*

Data for all children was provided from the Department for Education and Skills using unique pupil identification numbers. Data were available on levels obtained or whether the child was absent or not entered for the relevant assessment.

*Interviews*

Form teacher and SENCO questionnaires were designed to assess the children's current strengths and needs and the level of additional support received in school. The questionnaires tapped: a) teacher's perceptions of the children's difficulty during transfer, b) the amount and type of parental contact, c) curriculum differentiation, d) the amount and type of support the children received, e) the strengths and needs of the children. Child interviews tapped the children's view of school and in Year 6 their views on the prospective transfer. Separate coding frames were devised for each set of

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

participants by choosing a random subset of interviews. All interviews were then coded using the coding frame and inter rater reliability of .92 was established for a subset of 10 interviews from each set of participants.

## **Results**

The results are presented in four sections: educational needs and concerns about the move to secondary school, patterns of movement at transfer and preparedness of the mainstream secondary schools, educational and social needs in Year 7 and differences in predicted need and provision between primary and secondary school for the SSLD cohort. .

### ***Year 6 - Educational needs and concerns about the move to secondary school***

The majority of the SSLD cohort had completed their KS2 education in mainstream school 44 (64%) with 5 (7%) attending a special unit/resource in the mainstream setting and the remainder of the sample in special schools (18 special language, 2 moderate learning difficulties). Sixty per cent had a statement of special educational needs with a further 16% on stage 3 or 4 of the 1994 Code of Practice. Forty-six per cent were currently receiving speech and language therapy, 24% were under review and 26% had been discharged. Table 2 provides details of the children's performance on standardized measures of language. Despite the children's non-verbal performance being within the average range, scores on all other measures in Year 6 were significantly below the average and differed significantly from the children's non-verbal results (Dockrell et al., 2007).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

*Comparison between the cohorts*

Measures were available for all participants for reading, numeracy and standard attainment tasks (SATs). As Table 3 shows the typical cohort performed within the average range on measures of reading and numeracy whereas both the SSLD cohort and the SEN cohort performed at a lower level. Differences between SSLD and typical cohorts were large and statistically significant for measures of reading ( $t = -9.57$ ,  $df = 107$ ,  $p < .0005$ ,  $d = -1.92$ ) and numeracy ( $t = -7.94$ ,  $df = 07$ ,  $p < .0005$ ,  $d = -1.93$ ) but there were no significant differences between the SSLD and SEN cohorts (reading  $t = 0.14$ ,  $df = 96$ , ns; numeracy  $t = -0.22$ ,  $df = 97$ , ns).

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

These difficulties in language, literacy and numeracy were reflected in the children's achievements in their KS2 SATs as shown in Table 4 with each cohort's modal score highlighted. The TDgroup performed as per national norms with the majority achieving level 4 or above. Children with SSLD performed particularly poorly in English with the majority of pupils performing below expected levels. In addition to performing below national targets on English and Maths a significant number of both the SSLD and SEN cohort were not entered for the assessments.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

*Teachers', parents' and pupils' views of transfer in year 6*

Parents from all three cohorts reported that a secondary school had been identified for their child and levels of satisfaction with the choice were high (SSLD 82%;

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

TD 97%; SEN 84%). The child's reported involvement in the decision differed across the cohorts ( $X^2=6.86$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.05$ ) with fewer parents in the two special needs cohorts reporting involving their child (SSLD 62%; TD 87%; SEN 58%). A significant number of parents were concerned about the move (SSLD 62%; TD 42%; SEN 68%) but this did not differ statistically across cohorts. Parents also reported that many children were concerned about the move but again this did not differ statistically across the cohorts (SSLD 33%; TD 55%; SEN 37%). There was no significant difference between the levels of concerned parents and the parents' judgements of their children's views in the TDgroup whereas for both the SSLD and SEN cohorts parents reported more concern about the move from their perspective than from their child's (SSLD  $X^2=7.52$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.01$ ; SEN  $X^2=3.80$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

The children raised a number of worries or concerns during their interviews. These included issues of bullying (SSLD 26%; TD 42%; SEN 19%), harder work (SSLD 22%; TD 15%; SEN 9%) and the new environment (SSLD 13%; TD 13%; SEN 13%) but there were no significant differences between the cohorts. Virtually all pupils (SSLD 80%; TD 85%; SEN 84%) were looking forward to aspects of the school transfer including new friends (21%), new lessons (22%) and new teachers (9%). Again there were no statistically significant differences across the cohorts.

The high level of educational need for the SSLD cohort, as evidenced by their standardised assessments and SATs results, was mirrored in the teachers' concerns about the child's ability to cope with the secondary school context for those intending to move to a mainstream provision at the time of interview (N=48): 69% were predicted to have academic difficulties, 56% problems with social interaction, 48% problems with self esteem, and 66% problems with the new environment.

### ***The move to secondary school for children with SSLD***

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

As Figure 1 shows the children in the SSLD sample experienced significant changes in their educational pattern, with an increase in the numbers of children moving into special provision with other children being held back a year. The subsequent analyses focus on those children who transferred from mainstream primary schools to mainstream secondary schools.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

The children went to a range of different secondary schools. To establish how prepared the schools were to meet the needs of children with special needs we asked about the generic support provided by the school. All schools provided evidence of meeting a range of educational need. SENCOs reported special provision dedicated to children with literacy (90%) and numeracy (62%) difficulties. In addition schools also provided additional teaching support (89%), additional Learning Support Assistant time (87%) and specialist IT provision (43%) when required. All schools reported providing at least two additional forms of support and many schools were providing much more. Thus the schools provided evidence of a range of support systems to meet special needs and were familiar with the needs of diverse learners.

### *Educational and social needs in Year 7 for the three cohorts*

We compared the pupils' scores on reading from Year 6 to Year 7. There was no change in the children's reading scores over time ( $F(1, 115) = 1.02, ns$ ) nor was there an interaction by cohort ( $F(2, 115) = 2.10, ns$ ). However as Figure 2 shows the three cohorts differed in their performance on measures of spelling ( $F(2, 116) = 53.76, p < .0005$ ), reading accuracy ( $F(2, 116) = 56.29, p < .0005$ ), reading comprehension ( $F(2, 116) = 62.08, p < .0005$ ) and writing ( $F(2, 116) = 68.41, p < .0005$ ). In all cases the SSLD and

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

SEN cohorts performed significantly lower than the TDgroup ( $p < .0005$ ) but the SSLD and SEN cohort did not differ significantly from each other.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Subject teachers' perceptions of the pupils' performance and needs were examined. The maximum number of questionnaires completed by the subject specialist teachers varied across subjects. The maxima were 35 for the children with SSLD, 24 for TDgroup and 23 for the SENgroup. Sufficient data for analysis were collected from 8 different subjects: Mathematics, English, Science, History, Geography, Modern Foreign Languages, PE and ICT. In general both the children in the SSLD and SEN cohorts were reported to be performing significantly worse than TDgroup (Maths, English, Science, Geography and Modern foreign languages). Moreover this profile of differential progress held across teachers' reports of both written and project work. A more detailed analysis was carried out of the responses from the Maths, English and Science teachers, as these are core curricular areas and subjects where the largest response rates were achieved.

There were high and statistically significant correlations between teachers' ratings of progress and the children's scores on the standardised measures of literacy and numeracy. Step-wise linear regressions indicated that Z scores on the Year 7 spelling assessment accounted for 21% of the variance in the English teachers' progress ratings ( $F(1, 74) = 20.84, p < .001$ ), while Year 6 numeracy and cohort accounted for 30% of the variance in Maths ( $F(1, 74) = 19.84, p < .001$ ) and Numeracy Z scores accounted for 17% of the variance in science ( $F(1, 66) = 14.34, p < .001$ ). For all three academic subjects the children with SSLD and the SENgroup were reported to be experiencing

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

problems with the curriculum (Maths  $X^2=19.63$ ,  $p<.001$ ; English  $X^2=8.04$ ,  $p<.01$ ; Science  $X^2=16.43$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and the children's needs were having a significant impact on classroom practice (Maths  $X^2=33.63$ ,  $p<.001$ ; English  $X^2=18.19$   $p<.001$ ; Science  $X^2=22.74$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Teachers felt that there was a greater necessity to differentiate the curriculum for the SSLD and the SEN cohorts than the TD cohort (Maths  $X^2=15.45$ ,  $p<.001$ ; English  $X^2=33.67$ ,  $p<.001$ ; Science  $X^2=14.89$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Scores for numeracy, reading, writing and spelling were all significantly lower for groups where differentiation occurred. Differentiation typically involved providing 'easier work', providing different objectives or use of different strategies. Little use was made of specialist materials, computers or special programmes. The teachers reported that the children's difficulties in class were around communication (Maths 31%; English 31%; Science 28%), literacy (Maths 31%; English 36%; Science 19%) and concentration (Maths 35%; English 19%; Science 34%) but there were very few reported concerns about behaviour, self-esteem or social difficulties.

#### *Parents and pupil's views about transfer*

Interviews were completed with 47 pupils in the SSLD cohort, 41 in the TD cohort and 32 in the SEN cohort in Year 7. Many of the children reported enjoying having different teachers (SSLD 74%; TD 100%; SEN 78%) and changing classrooms (SSLD 85%; TD 90%; SEN 84%). However, both the SSLD cohort and the SEN cohort were aware of their difficulties. The SSLD and the SEN cohorts were more likely to report getting lost ( $X^2=9.71$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.008$ ) forgetting things for lessons ( $X^2=5.9$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.05$ ) and not liking having several teachers ( $X^2=6.9$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.03$ ) than the TD group. Although increased levels of friendships were high for all children both the SSLD and SEN cohort reported this less frequently than the TD cohort ( $X^2=11.99$   $df=2$ ,  $p=.02$ ). In



Transfer from primary school to secondary school

in addition the SSLD and the SEN cohorts were significantly more likely to report problems with writing ( $X^2=6.5$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.04$ ) and reading ( $X^2=12.25$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p=.002$ ) than the TD cohort but not Maths ( $X^2=3.5$ , ns).

Parents of all the children in TD cohort reported that their children had found the transfer to secondary straightforward whereas parents of the SSLD and SEN cohorts reported that their children had found the move difficult (SSLD 55%; SEN 31%).

Similarly all the parents of the TD cohort reported that their children were coping with the academic work whereas parents of the SSLD and SEN cohorts reported that their children were experiencing difficulties with the curriculum (SSLD 56%; SEN 58%).

In addition higher rates of bullying were reported, but only for the SSLD cohort (SSLD 40%; TD 23%; SEN 4%). Parents rated children's self esteem on a five point scale from very low (0) to very high (4). Both the SSLD and SEN cohort were reported to have significantly lower self esteem than the typical cohort (SSLD= 1.9, SEN=2 TD = 3;  $F(2, 104) = 9.586$ ,  $p<.0005$ ).

***Differences in predicted need and provision between primary and secondary school for the children with SSLD***

In Year 6 levels of support were significantly related to all language measures and non-verbal ability while in Year 7 provision of support was only related to measures of non-verbal ability. Curriculum differentiation in Year 6 was related to the children's expressive language levels whereas in Year 7 non-verbal ability and receptive language yielded significant relationships.

Form teachers reported that the children were experiencing significant difficulties with the transfer (53%). In addition specific problems were noted with social life (36%), self esteem (35%) and coping with different teachers (25%). For the majority

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

of children (43/50) SENCOs felt it was necessary to differentiate the curriculum to meet the young people's educational needs. Typically this was in terms of using different teaching strategies (95%) and the provision of extra support time (96%). There was a general consensus that the children's educational needs were being met – except in the case of speech and language where 17% reported that children were not having their needs met.

The responses of Year 6 and Year 7 teachers were compared to examine the congruence between their views. Teachers in Year 6 were more likely to predict that children would have academic difficulties ( $X^2 = 6.23$ ,  $df = 1$   $p < .05$ ), social difficulties ( $X^2 = 9.0$ ,  $df = 1$   $p < .01$ ), self esteem problems ( $X^2 = 7.36$ ,  $df = 1$   $p < .01$ ) difficulties adapting to a new school ( $X^2 = 10.29$ ,  $df = 1$   $p < .01$ ) and difficulties in changing classrooms ( $X^2 = 14.0$ ,  $df = 1$   $p < .001$ ) than was reported by the teachers in Year 7.

Neither whether support was provided nor type of support (in class or withdrawal) varied across the two years. In contrast in Year 7 children were significantly more likely to have support for the whole day (54% v. 37%). There were no differences in the children who had the whole curriculum differentiated across the two years ( $X^2 = 0.137$ ,  $df = 1$   $ns$ ). Nor did differentiation strategies differ between Year 6 and Year 7 in terms of easier work ( $X^2 = 0.005$ ,  $df = 1$   $ns$ ), use of specialist materials ( $X^2 = 0.112$ ,  $df = 1$   $ns$ ), use of computer time ( $X^2 = 0.172$ ,  $df = 1$   $ns$ ) or use of special programmes ( $X^2 = .974$ ,  $df = 1$   $ns$ ). However SENCOs in secondary schools were statistically significantly more likely to say that they used different teaching strategies ( $X^2 = 8.92$ ,  $df = 1$   $p < .01$ ) and no Year 6 SENCO reported setting different objectives as a teaching strategy.

## Discussion

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

Previous research has suggested that transfer from primary to secondary school can be difficult for children and their parents. The current study extends our understanding of the process by examining the transfer period for children with special educational needs – specifically those related to language and communication. The focus was on the move to mainstream secondary settings; to examine the interaction between child and school settings children with SSLD were matched in Year 6 with a typically developing (average) peer and another peer with special educational needs not involving language difficulties.

A secondary school had been identified for all the pupils in the current study in Year 6; at that point there was a high level of satisfaction in the chosen school. Nonetheless the anticipation of transfer from primary to secondary school raised concerns for many children and their parents. By the Spring of Year 7 parents of the typically developing children were reporting an easy transition and their children were enjoying the new challenges of the secondary system. Their initial worries had dissipated. In contrast both the children with SSLD and the children with other SENs were facing challenges. Parents were reporting that their children had found the move difficult, had lower levels of self-esteem and difficulties with the curriculum and the organisation of the school. The pupils also reported difficulties. Although many were enjoying the new environment and reported increased levels of friendship, as a group, they were finding some of the practicalities and the academic level difficult to manage.

Teachers in Year 6 had high levels of concern about both the SSLD and SEN cohorts managing in secondary. These concerns appear justified for academic but not social dimensions. Year 7 teachers were not concerned about behaviour problems and the young people were included in the social settings; however there were significant difficulties with academic subjects. Subject specialists were finding the impact on their

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

classes significant, despite the high levels of support offered to many of the pupils. In contrast SENCOs felt the children's needs were being met, except the speech and language needs of the SSLD cohort.

The main focus of the teachers' concerns and a primary focus of the parents' concerns for the SSLD and SEN cohorts was the curriculum. Significantly, few concerns were raised about the pupils' behaviour in Year 7. The extent of the literacy and numeracy difficulties evidenced by both the SSLD cohort and SEN cohort was challenging the teachers. Although SENCOs felt these needs were being addressed there was little evidence of systematic instructional approaches to ameliorate these problems; for many children poor basic skills were serving as a barrier to accessing the curriculum.

Parents' perspectives on their children deepened our understanding of the young people's difficulties and the impact these were having. While transition was never reported as a problem for the TDcohort for both the SSLD and SEN cohorts parents' reported that there had been problems at transfer. Moreover two terms later problems still remained with the curriculum, organisational issues and lower levels of self-esteem.

The similarities in the patterns of problems reported for the two special cohorts raises important questions about the flexibility and capacity of the schools to address the children's needs. There was little evidence of group specific problems, barring the lack of speech and language support, suggesting the problems the schools and children were experiencing were generic to children with additional learning needs (see Norwich & Lewis, 2001). Teachers relied on changing objectives and providing 'easier work'. While such approaches have face validity they are vague and lacking in rigorous evaluation. Indeed there was evidence, as reported previously, that extending the time to do work was a pedagogical strategy such that the slower pupils were finishing off tasks started in class for homework (Galton et al., 2000). A more systematic examination of the fine

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

gained (evidence based) strategies put into place to meet the children's requirements is required.

Transfer to secondary school is reported to challenge some young people. The current study has indicated that this move is particularly problematic for children with SSLD and those with additional learning needs. The parents, teachers and the children themselves report greater problems with the transfer than occur for typically developing children from the same primary classes going to the same schools. When additional support is required greater liaison between pupils and schools is an essential first step. It is simply not satisfactory to dismiss the work and knowledge acquired in the primary school years (Galton et al, 1999). The parents of the two special cohorts were both aware of their children's needs pre-transfer and sensitive to the school demands in Year 7. Parents can serve as an informed ally to support their children's development and the schools' effective practices.

Establishing the ways in which speech and language difficulties impact on educational progress and educational provision is an essential first step in developing evidence based practice for these young people. The children in Year 7 were at risk. They were struggling academically, showing evidence of low self-esteem and at risk of bullying. Strategic interventions at this point may serve to minimise the likelihood of disengagement and low attainments.

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

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# Transfer from primary school to secondary school

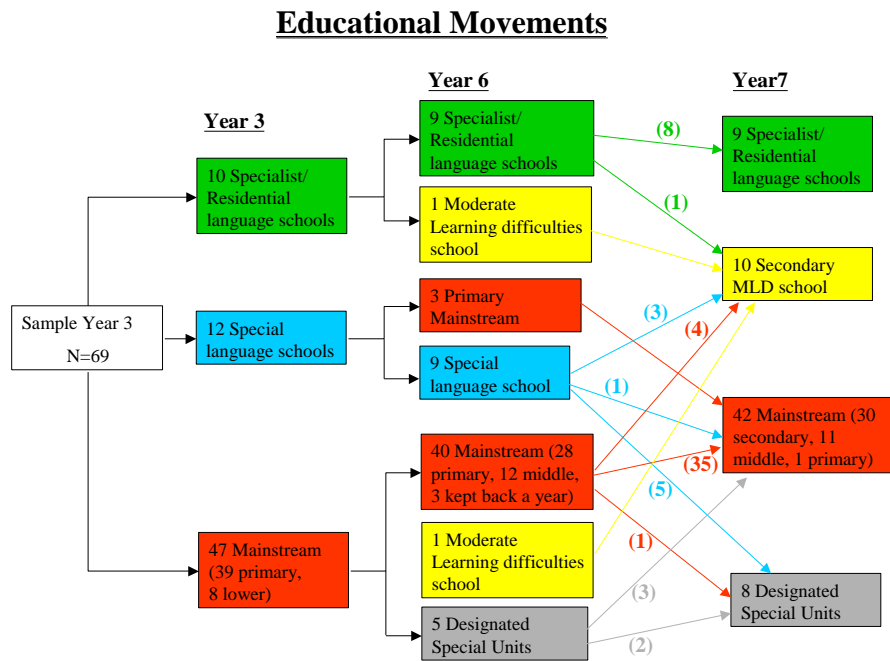


Figure 1 Educational Movements of children with Specific Speech and Language between ages 8 to 11

# Transfer from primary school to secondary school

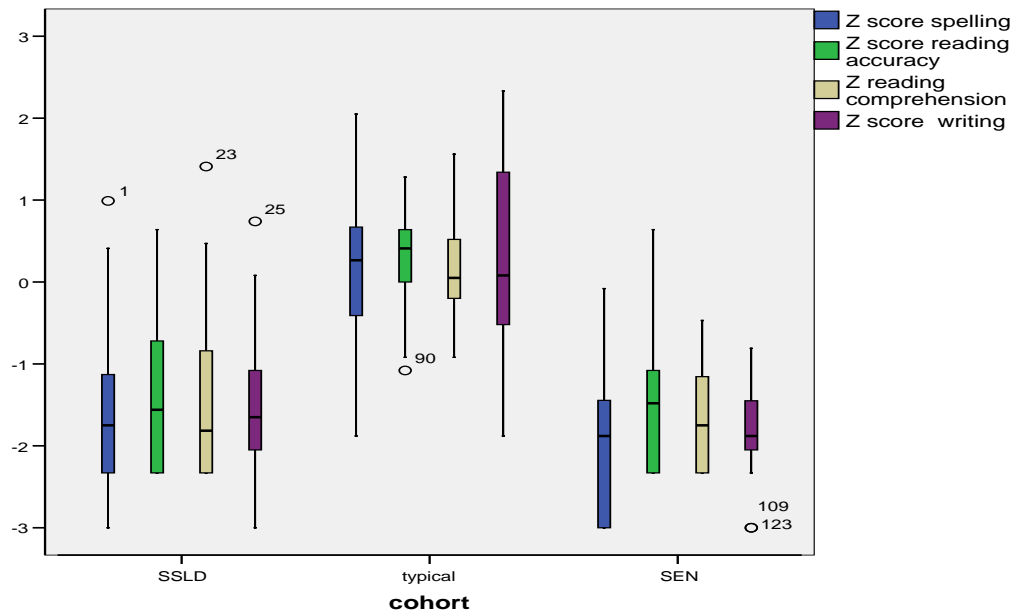


Figure 2 Box plots for standardised assessments in Year 7 for the three cohorts (Z scores)

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

Table 1. Language and non-verbal ability at 8 years (Z scores).

Assessment	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Vocabulary: receptive (BAS)	68	-1.12	.62
Vocabulary: expressive (BAS)	68	-1.03	.93
Understanding: grammar (TROG)	68	-1.45	.94
Narrative production (Bus Story)	68	-1.55	1.16
Sentence length (Bus Story)	64	-.60	.88
Phonology (PHaB)	68	-.97	.68
Non-verbal ability (BAS)	68	-.77	.87

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

Table 2 Means and SDs for Year 6 (Time 2) measures for children (N = 67)

Time 2 measures	Assessment	Mean Z score	SD
Nonverbal ability	Nonverbal cognitive ability (BAS Matrices)	-.54	.95
Language Measures	BPVS	-1.20	.71
	TROG	-1.22	1.00
	Listening to paragraphs (CELF)	-1.30	.74
	Recalling sentences (CELF)	-1.76	.74
	Word definitions (BAS)	-1.43	.88
Phonology	PhAB	-0.92	.72
	Non-word repetition	-1.97	.97

Transfer from primary school to secondary school

Table 3 Means and SDs for three cohorts for reading and numeracy in Year 6 (Z scores)

		SSLD	Typical	SEN
Reading	Mean	-1.4	.17	-1.43
	SD	.88	.75	.74
Numeracy	Mean	-1.16	.24	-1.21
	SD	1.0	.70	.82

## Transfer from primary school to secondary school

Table 4 Percentage of children in each cohort for Key Stage 2 SATS

Key stage 2	Cohort	Absent	Not entered	Below level	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
English	SSLD	1.7	10	45	1.7	28.3	10	3.3
	Typical	0	0	0	0	7.5	57.5	35
N=131	SEN	0	6.5	38.7	0	41.9	9.7	3.2
Maths	SSLD	1.7	10	30	5	35	17	1.7
	Typical	0	0	2.5	0	15	53	28
N=131	SEN	3.2	9.7	26	0	43	13	3.2
Science	SSLD	3.3	9.8	25	1.6	18	36	6.6
	Typical	0	0	0	0	5	50	45
N=132	SEN	0	6.5	23	0	23	45	3.2

<sup>i</sup> Practitioners, policy makers and researchers use a range of different terms to describe this population (see Lindsay, Dockrell, Mackie and Letchford, 2002). Moreover, a range of terms are used in Europe (dysphagia) and North America (USA: SLI, or in parts of Canada: dysphagia) and more recently primary language disorder (Tomblin et al., 2003). The population is heterogeneous with the specific nature of their problems residing with one or more subcomponents of the language system. We use the term Specific speech and language difficulty in this paper to reflect the term used by UK practitioners.