

The West Partnership presents: St Monica's (Milton) Primary, Glasgow City Council Family-centred transitions with Harry the Dinosaur



This storyboard details how St Monica's (Milton) Primary school, in Glasgow, adapted its programme of transitions in response to the pandemic. We hear how the team used Harry the Dinosaur to creatively engage pupils and their families through remote transitions.

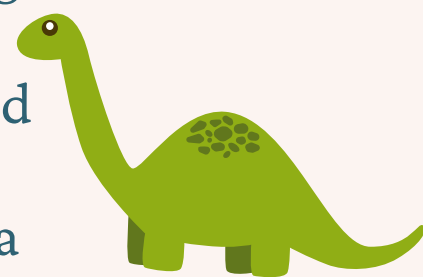
What was the problem?

Prior to the pandemic, St Monica's transitions activities were mainly completed in person. In September 2019, the school community had focused on improving their transitions activities to aid pupils and their families in moving between the school's partner nurseries. The team had aimed to implement a more family-centred approach. Although this change to practice had begun prior to COVID19, the pandemic meant the school had to respond again to ensure an effective transition process took place remotely.



Why is this important?

Positive transition experiences have been linked to wellbeing, attainment and appear to be correlated with reduced pupil and parental anxiety. Research has begun to understand the importance of family-centred transitions, with some evidence pointing to improved transitions experiences when parents and carers are engaged deeply in the transitions process. Ensuring a positive family centred transition was important to St Monica's Primary.



Aims of the change to practice

The school had two main aims in their change to practice:

- 1) To support children and families with physical resources and digital information that could aid transition and encourage family learning.
- 2) To provide an effective and playful transitions programme that generated excitement amongst incoming pupils and their families.



What did you do?

The team quickly realised that normal in-person transitions activities could not take place. In collaboration with the school's family learning worker and partner nurseries, the team designed a transitions pack that included key information and resources. At the heart of the transitions pack was Harry the Dinosaur, an EVA dinosaur that would hatch from a small egg placed in water. Family learning activities, such as playdo modelling and join-the-dot drawing of the dinosaur, were encouraged with resources provided in the transitions pack. To increase excitement around the dinosaur, staff at both the primary school and the participating nurseries engaged in several activities. Staff at the nurseries would ask questions and read stories about the dinosaur. Primary school staff developed video content where they would detail their favourite dinosaur. Pupils and their families were given a personalised invitation to come to the school and pick up their transitions pack. This was completed in the school grounds and adhered to social distancing regulations.

What happened?

The school began giving out their transitions packs in June 2020. They were pleased that 75% of incoming pupils collected their packs on the first day. A total of 98% of pupils/families collected their pack, with the team directly communicating with those who had not picked up their packs at the first opportunity. The school had 62 incoming pupils, meaning 61 learning packs were distributed, with 1 family unable to pick up the pack as they were not in Glasgow at the time. The team received a lot of informal feedback on their packs. Some families posted comments and pictures on Facebook. When entering their new school, a few pupils identified their new teachers as they had seen them in the 'my favourite dinosaur' videos.



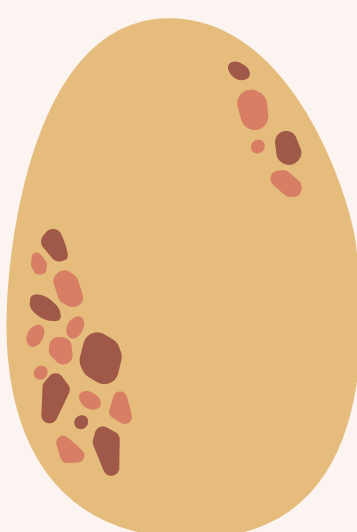
What are the key points you have learnt?

The team have identified a number of key points from their change to practice. Firstly, the team placed importance on being flexible, adaptable and open to change. Without these traits the team could not have delivered family-centred transitions in the unique circumstances caused by the pandemic. Secondly, the team believe their new approach to transitions had led to better pupil engagement. They believe that encouraging family learning had led to better engagement from both the child and their family. Thirdly, the team place importance on partnership working, especially with their family learning worker and their partner nurseries. Excitement around the packs was enhanced by a joined-up approach. Finally, the team believe their change to practice, which was aided by PEF funding, had created a noticeable impact for relatively little cost.



What next for the project?

The team have considered their next steps in their transition work. They intend to continue using Harry the Dinosaur and associated activities and are considering further ways to develop the theme. The team also intends on gathering more formal evaluation data to further understand the needs of their learning community. In the short term, the team aims to investigate opportunities to further engage families, nurseries, and supportive agencies in the context of COVID restrictions. As the short term remains uncertain the team aim to continue being dynamic and responsive to new situations.



The West Partnership presents:

St Ninian's Primary, Inverclyde

Moving Transitions Online



The storyboard details how St Ninian's Primary, in Inverclyde, adapted to the pandemic in order to maintain positive transitions for pupils entering the school from its feeder nurseries. We hear how the school put in place digital solutions to maintain transitions activities while also encouraging parental engagement.

What was the problem?

Every year St Ninian's gains new pupils from up to 11 feeder nurseries. Traditionally, transitions had involved a lot of in-person interaction with incoming children, their families and with other members of the school community. In person parent workshops and the schools buddy programme, where P7 pupils act as mentors to incoming pupils, could no longer take place due to social distancing procedures.



Why is this important?

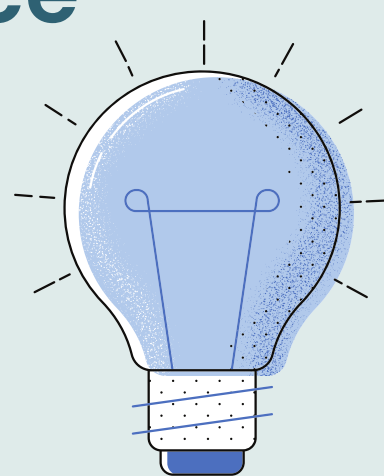
Positive transition experiences have been linked to wellbeing, attainment and also appear to be correlated with reduced pupil and parental anxiety. Positive transitions are therefore key to avoiding dips in attainment and wellbeing. Maintaining the schools transitions activities was important to ensure the wellbeing and learning of pupils and their families.



Aims of the change to practice

The project had one overarching aim:

- 1) To change practice in order to maintain effective transitions experiences for pupils and their families



What did you do?

St Ninian's begins its transitions process in the August the year before pupils enter the school. Fortunately, when the pandemic took hold in spring 2020, the school had already developed relationships with incoming pupils and their families. Underpinning their response to the pandemic was a desire to continue applying the 5 C's that are critical for ensuring positive transitions (*Communication, Consistency, Culture, Collaboration, Child-centred*). In the first instance, the school had a phone call with each family to ensure they were meeting the needs of their community. To remotely support families, the team developed a range of digital resources that would help inform pupils and their wider families of what to expect with their future school. The school developed a YouTube channel, with the first video posted in April 2020. Incoming pupils and their families could watch a Primary 1 virtual tour video to get a better understanding of what to expect in the following year. A number of videos were created to raise awareness of the environment both inside and outside of the school. The school also found digital solutions in Sway and a virtual map. The Sway was used to accessibly send out important information to families, while the virtual maps were again used to build awareness of the school environment and layout.

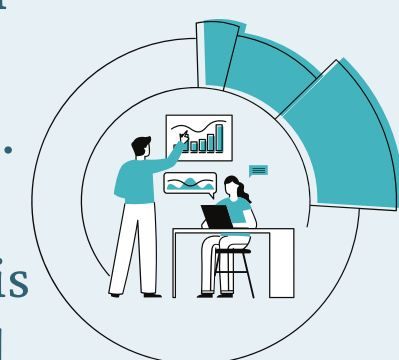
What happened?

The school's use of videos developed over time. After developing virtual tours, the school also encouraged their older pupils to create supportive videos. P6 pupils were matched with incoming pupils to act as buddies that would ease the transition into P1. The schools YouTube videos have had significant engagement, with the Primary 1 virtual tour receiving just over 1300 views. When regulations allowed, pupils and their families engaged in socially distanced school visits. Small groups of 6 entered the school in June 2020 and had a chance to see the classroom and their future teacher. By August, when the transitions process for the following cohort began, the school continued with socially distanced early visits to the school. The school featured on both CNN and ITN news as an example of how schools were coping with social distancing measures. For both transitions cohorts, the school made sure that pupils with additional support needs were given extra visits to build awareness of the school layout. The school sent out surveys to better understand the needs and experiences of families through the transitions process.



What are the key points you have learnt?

The team at St Ninian's have identified a number of key lessons from their change to practice. Firstly, they acknowledge the importance of communicating with parents and ensuring active involvement of parents in transitions programmes. Secondly, the team note the value of reflecting on practice from the first lockdown. The nature of the pandemic meant that a number of practices were being undertaken for the first time. This meant the school could learn a lot about what worked, what didn't and how practices could be used or modified in the future. Thirdly, the school recognised the importance of digital platforms as spaces that allowed for transitions practices to continue.



What next for the project?

Going forward, the school intends to continue using small group sessions as part of transition induction events. They are also motivated to continue developing their online and digital content, which has been well received thus far. The team have begun this process in recent transitions work, where enrolment once again took place online. The team created an interactive Sway document which included short videos and links to the schools YouTube channel. The team are keen to explore opportunities for meeting live online if it would be helpful for families in the transitions process after the pandemic. The school is also open to sharing practice with others and learning from their colleagues across our region.

