Preschool to Primary School Transition Initiative
Final Report

February 2018

Contents

Introduction to the initiative

This document reports on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (NCCA) *Preschool to Primary School Transition Initiative[1].* The driver for this initiative was set out in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (Department of Education and Skills [DES] 2011), in which the NCCA was assigned responsibility for developing suitable reporting templates and to make these available on-line to:

> *Improve arrangements for the transfer of information about the progress and achievement of students between all schools and state-funded ECCE settings by requiring all settings and schools to provide written reports in standard format to schools and settings to which students transfer (reports to be provided following admission of student to the new school/setting)* (DES, 2011, p.82).

This work was also referenced in the DES *Action Plan for Education* (DES, 2017; DES, 2018) under Objective 1.4 to improve the transition of learners at critical stages in the education and training system. The focus on this transition links closely with other aspects of NCCA's work, in particular, the proposals published in 2016 related to restructuring the primary school curriculum. The proposals suggested a single stage for the two preschool years and infant classes to support progression and continuity of experience as children move from preschool to primary school. The consultation found that there was positivity and support among respondents for a single curriculum stage encompassing the four years. Therefore, this report is particularly timely.

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[1] *The Preschool to Primary School Transition Initiative* will be referred to as 'the initiative' throughout the report.

Research underpinning the initiative

Three research reports on the transition to primary school were commissioned by the NCCA as preparation for the work. These are:

1. *Transition from Preschool to Primary School: Research Report 19* (O'Kane, 2016) which is a review of literature nationally and internationally.

2. *Transition from Preschool to Primary School: Audit of Policy in 14 Jurisdictions* (O'Kane and Murphy, 2016a) which looks at data transfer and the transition process.

3. *Transition from Preschool to Primary School: Audit of Transfer Documentation in Ireland* (O'Kane and Murphy, 2016b) which is an audit of ten transfer documents that were developed collaboratively between preschools and primary schools. See https://www.ncca.ie/en/primary/primary-developments/developments-in-the-early-years-of-primary/early-childhood-transitions-research-series

The following key messages from the research reports underpinned the NCCA's work throughout the initiative:

▪ A **positive experience** for children during the transition to primary school is important. The initiative focused on making the experience as positive as it could be.

▪ Certain **dispositions, skills and knowledge** are important for children as they make the transition to primary school and, therefore, should be focused on in preschools. These include a strong focus on oral language/communication skills and on developing positive learning dispositions like independence, curiosity and resilience. Particular learning experiences and transition activities can help children to develop a deeper understanding of the transition to primary school and therefore should be focused on. The initiative highlighted the dispositions, skills and knowledge that are important in the transition and also suggested a number of transition activities that could be undertaken to enhance the experience for children and families.

• Greater **alignment in curriculum and pedagogy** across preschools and primary schools is highlighted as being critical to children's learning and development. The potential use of *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009) in both the preschools and primary schools was an important part of the initiative. The cultivation of **trusting, reciprocal relationships**

between preschools and primary schools is vital and can help a greater understanding of the curriculum and pedagogy in the different settings. Nurturing the development of relationships was a key priority of the NCCA project team, as was supporting greater alignment in curriculum and pedagogy.

- Supporting transitions is a **shared responsibility between families, preschools and primary schools.** There is a need for all involved to work together to support the child's transition and there is less focus on a child's 'school readiness' and a greater focus on 'ready schools'. Parents' awareness of, and involvement in, supporting their children's transition from preschool to primary school is very important, as noted in the research reports. Supporting settings and parents to work together was a key part of the initiative.

- Some, though not all, children experiencing disadvantage, children with English as an Additional Language and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) may require **particular extra supports** at the time of transition. In the initiative this was highlighted.

- The **transfer of information on children's learning and development between preschools and primary schools** is an important part of the transition process and can act as a lever in opening up the relationship between preschools and primary schools as well as helping support continuity and progression for the child. Piloting the NCCA reporting templates was a key part of the initiative.

Aims of the initiative

It was evident from the research that the development of reporting templates in isolation would be inconsequential without the wider explicit focus on the concept of transitions. This provided the initial impetus for the *Transition from Preschool to Primary School Initiative*.

The initiative aimed to:

- Support practitioners and teachers in helping children and their families experience a more positive transition from preschool to primary school.

- Pilot and evaluate two draft Reporting Templates (A and B) developed by the NCCA for the sharing of information on children's learning and development between preschools, schools and families.

- Promote and build positive, reciprocal relationships between preschools and primary schools through participation in shared transition activities and experiences.

- Work with and involve children, families, preschools and schools in different ways in the transition process.

Preschools and schools in the initiative

The NCCA project team worked closely with a network of ten preschools[2] and nine primary schools, located, for geographical accessibility, in counties Tipperary, Laois, Limerick and Galway. Within these areas, preschools and schools were invited to participate with the final network reflecting a diverse range of setting types (e.g. urban/rural; different type of schools and preschools including Irish medium settings). Each preschool practitioner worked in partnership with one primary teacher[3]. While one preschool might be feeding into a number of primary schools and each school might be receiving children from a variety of preschools, it was considered most feasible to work with a small number of participants. NCCA worked in collaboration with Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta with the Irish medium settings in Galway.

In supporting each setting and school to participate fully in the initiative, the NCCA provided the following:

- A grant of €1,000

- Travel expenses and substitution cover for participants' attendance at the introductory session and four workshops.

- Intensive guidance and support from the NCCA project team through:

  - Attendance at an introductory session and four full-day workshops

  - On-site visits

  - Ongoing phone and email communication

  - Support materials including participant information sheets, parent information sheets, suggested transition activities, guidance on generating the reports, guidance on using the reports to support children transitioning into junior infants. (See appendices 1, 2, 3 and 4.)

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[2] There was an additional ASD Preschool Unit attached to a primary school in addition to feeder preschool.
[3] One Home School Community Liaison teacher was also involved.

Only three of the ten preschools had an existing relationship with their partner primary school prior to the initiative. Those involved in the initiative are representative of the Irish context, in which there is little tradition of preschools and primary schools working together. The absence of any prior relationship between participants necessitated them having to build familiarity and trust with each other. With support from the NCCA project team, relationships gradually developed over the duration of the initiative, with a range of outcomes achieved. On occasion, a desirable level of communication and collaboration between partner practitioners and teachers proved challenging. Some participants welcomed and embraced the concept of collaboration and sharing more than others. The NCCA project team worked hard to ensure that the initiative was the very best it could be while also acknowledging the reality within which each preschool and school was working. Also, some repeated communication and prompting was required to gently remind some participants of tasks they had agreed to undertake after each workshop.

Roll-out of the initiative

The roll-out of the initiative began with an invitation for all practitioners, teachers, setting managers and principals to attend an introductory information session. This was followed by three full-day workshops between March and June 2017 with the final workshop being held in October 2017. Practitioners and teachers attended these workshops. The workshops were the first time practitioners and teachers met for shared professional learning. They were regularly invited to work collaboratively in pairs and small groups on different tasks. Importantly, they were encouraged to keep building these professional relationships in between workshops.

The initial workshops were used as an opportunity to share the learning from the research reports on the importance of quality transitions. These inputs provided participants with relevant information about the knowledge, skills and dispositions that are important for children as they transition into junior infants. There was also a lot of focus on planning for and undertaking various transition activities. Advice, suggestions and guidance on how to support continuity and progression in curriculum and pedagogy from preschool into primary school using *Aistear* was an important component of the workshops. Participants had opportunities to describe their experiences of working with *Aistear*. Materials from the Transitions pillar of the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide (www.aistearsiolta.ie), including a suite of podcasts on supporting the transition to primary school by

Professor Sue Dockett, an international expert on transitions, were a key support in the initiative. (See www.aistearsiolta.ie/en/Transitions). In the third workshop, the draft reporting templates were introduced and practical guidance was given on how to fill them in (see Appendix 3). Practical advice on how teachers might make optimum use of the information in the reports was also provided. (See Appendix 4).

Workshop 4 provided an opportunity for participants to evaluate, reflect and give feedback on their involvement in the wider initiative and on the draft reporting templates. Participants were open and reflective about all aspects of their involvement. Having developed trusting relationships over the course of the initiative, participants felt more confident in sharing their opinions and ideas with the other participants. They provided detailed advice and suggestions on how the draft templates could be improved and modified. They also reported on the level and type of support that would be needed to roll out such an initiative nationally. Participants were invited on the day to make podcasts of their experiences and reflections about different transition activities and on their experiences of working together. These will be made available on the NCCA website (www.ncca.ie). At the end of the workshop each participant was presented with a Certificate of Participation.

Throughout the initiative there was a considerable amount of informal telephone and email communication between participants and the NCCA project team. Participants were also encouraged to share their contact details with their partner preschool/school to establish and maintain open lines of communication and collaboration. NCCA continued to support participants in the interval between workshops. Support focused on the transition activities to be undertaken and on communication and collaboration between participants.

The draft reporting templates

A key part of the initiative was the piloting of two draft reporting templates developed by the NCCA. It is intended that, when finalised, the Transition Report Templates will be universal in application and designed to support the transition of all children from preschool into primary school. This means that every preschool practitioner will be able to use the templates for every child in the group. The transfer of additional information pertaining to children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is achieved through a variety of processes conducted by a range of organisations supporting young children with

SEN. For example, Better Start Quality Development Service, as part of its work through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) (www.aim.gov.ie/) has developed a resource to support preschool settings in planning for children with SEN to transition to school. In addition, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has guidelines for parents/guardians of children with SEN who are starting school (http://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/02155-NCSE-Starting-School-Guidelines-final-08.02.16.pdf) and they work with schools and parents once children with SEN have been enrolled in school.

The NCCA templates are designed to give a snapshot, at a particular point-in-time, of a child's holistic learning and development as he/she moves to primary school. Practitioners were provided with a user guide to assist them in generating reports using the templates (see Appendix 3). Each template had three sections:

- Part 1: Practitioner Part
- Part 2: Family Part
- Part 3: Child Part

The Family and Child Parts were the same in templates A and B, while the Practitioner Part was different in each. In Template A, the Practitioner Part was more open-ended while in Template B, the questions were closed and had a range of options allowing the practitioner to indicate the children's current phase of development/achievement – almost always, sometimes, not yet. Both templates A and B were linked to *Aistear's* four themes (2009) and to the subjects of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). It was envisaged that each preschool would pilot both templates. However, the preschool for children with SEN requested that it use only Template A as it felt it was more suitable for the cohort of children it works with and this request was facilitated.

The practitioners generated a report using draft template A or B for each child moving on to primary school regardless of which primary school they were transitioning to. This meant that if a child was moving to a primary school not involved in the initiative, the report was given to the parents who were encouraged by the practitioner to share it with the school. For children transitioning to the partner primary school in the initiative, the preschool practitioner, with parental consent, shared the reports with the teacher. Subsequently, the practitioner and teacher had opportunities for a face-to-face meeting to discuss, in more detail, information presented in the report and for follow up conversations and/or meetings in September. A total of 109 reports were generated by practitioners using the draft reporting templates. A total of 62 reports were then used by the teachers directly involved in the initiative to inform planning. The document called *Using the reports* (see Appendix 4) shows some of

the information that was shared in the reports (copies of completed anonymised reports were shared with the NCCA project team) and how that information might be used to benefit children as they made the transition to junior infants.

Evaluation Methodology

This section outlines the methodology used to evaluate the initiative. Based on the key messages of the research reports on transition from preschool to primary school about transitions being a shared responsibility (O'Kane, 2016) and the need to involve all stakeholders, a multifaceted approach to the evaluation was designed. A mixed methods approach to data collection was employed by the external evaluator in order to capture the complexity of the initiative and to ascertain the perspectives of the various stakeholders. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p.32)

> *Mixed methods research combines elements of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research to give a richer and more reliable (broader and deeper) understanding of a phenomenon than a single approach would yield*.

Data collection

The research methods included in this evaluation were:

- Questionnaires

- Focus groups

- Interviews

- World café discussions

- Feedback on workshops

- Child participation.

- **Questionnaires** gave all adult participants the opportunity to give their views through both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaires were accompanied by explanatory sheets and 'invitation to participate' letters. Levels of agreement were specified where relevant, i.e. *strongly agree, agree, not sure*. Online questionnaires (in English and Irish) were made available to the practitioners and teachers. Hard copy questionnaires were distributed to the participating parents. Prior to distribution to parents, the questionnaire was sent to the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA) to put it into plain English. The questionnaire was then translated in to Irish and also to Polish (as this was the most common other home language of children in the initiative).

The data set includes:

- Online practitioner questionnaire

- Online teacher questionnaire

- Hard copy parent questionnaire

- **Focus groups** offered a valid way of collecting group views on the initiative. Interactions between the participants can yield insights not otherwise available (Cohen *et al*. 2018). Questions and prompts were agreed in advance and independent facilitators conducted the discussions which focused on participation in the initiative. The data set includes:

  - Two parent focus group sessions

  - One practitioner focus group session

  - One teacher focus group session.

- **Interviews** recognised the agency of individual participants and enabled them to discuss their interpretations of the project on a one-to-one basis. As with the focus groups, questions were prepared in advance and the interviews were conducted on a semi-structured basis to probe participants' views on their participation in the initiative and the issues involved. Again, independent facilitators carried out the interviews. The data set includes:

  - Parent interview

  - Principal interview

  - Three practitioner interviews

  - Two teacher interviews.

- **Small group/World Café style sessions.**[4] Small group sessions similar to focus groups were conducted in October 2017. The data set includes:

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[4] World Café is a structured conversational process for knowledge sharing in which small groups of people discuss a topic at several tables, with individuals switching tables periodically and getting introduced to the previous discussion at their new table by the table host. See http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/research/

- 4 World-Café style small group sessions with all participants, on final changes needed to the templates

- Small group facilitated session with all participants, discussing how the reports were used.

▪ **Feedback on initiative workshops**. Participants were asked to evaluate each of the workshops. The data set includes feedback from 4 workshops.

▪ **Child participation.** The following methods of data collection were used for the child participants:

- **Review of child parts of reporting templates**: Completed child parts of the reporting templates were reviewed. The data set includes all the completed child sections of the 62 reports.

- **Annotated children's art work**. The teachers annotated children's artwork about the move to school. Teachers provided opportunities for the children to draw pictures and provide a narrative about their experiences of moving to the primary school. The data set includes 47 pieces of annotated art work.

- **Video recording of children**. NCCA staff members visited two schools in November/early December 2017 to video record children in pairs or groups of three talking about their views on their experiences of starting primary school. The data set includes 8 short videos of children.

The mixed methods used led to methodological triangulation whereby broadly similar results were found across the different methods and group samples. It also led to saturation of findings. Saturation is reached when no new insights are produced even when new data is added and all the variables are covered (Cohen *et al*., 2018, p.720). This was certainly true in the present study as no additional or dissenting views emerged after the initial focus groups and questionnaires were coded and analysed.

The project was located in a variety of geographical areas, thereby capturing and reflecting the diversity of the local context in Tipperary, Limerick, Laois and Galway.

Research ethics

Mukherji and Albon (2015) state that research ethics should be of central importance in any research project and this initiative applied the highest ethical principles to data collection and analysis. All participants were treated with respect and courtesy throughout the initiative, their views were reported accurately and full confidentiality and anonymity were promised in the evaluation. Informed consent was received from each participant. (See Appendix 5 for adult consent form and Appendix 6 for child assent form). Specific focus groups for the adults involved—parents, practitioners and teachers—allowed each group to voice their opinions freely and the final workshop allowed practitioners and teachers to discuss issues together and separately.

There is some debate in the literature about the vulnerability of children in research contexts (Dockett, Einarsdóttir and Perry, 2011). However, the agentic nature of children's involvement in relevant research is now recognised as important (Harcourt and Conroy, 2011), provided that informed consent of parents accompanied by assent from children is gained and that appropriate data gathering methods are used. Both parent consent and child assent were received for the participation of the children in the evaluation and appropriate methods were used as outlined above.

Addressing data limitations of initial evaluation

Initial plans for data gathering from adult stakeholders to support the evaluation included both questionnaires and focus groups. However, a review of the questionnaires revealed incomplete information, particularly associated with qualitative items. To address these gaps in the evaluation data, a number of individual interviews were organised to try to learn more. Also, two focus groups with parents had been organised initially, but as only one parent attended the second focus group the independent facilitator decided to do a parent interview instead. Following this, a third focus group was organised to ensure that the voice of parents was fully included in the evaluation process. Additionally, as many practitioners and teachers had remarked, the space for children's drawing about their experience of starting school on the templates was very restricted and children in three schools were asked at a later stage to draw pictures on A4 pages and these were annotated by teachers.

Data analysis

The research methods outlined above yielded a large amount of data and a two-stage approach to data analysis was adopted.

Stage 1

Data collation

All the data from each stakeholder group, parents, teachers, practitioners and children, was collated for subsequent analysis.

- **Questionnaires:** Hard copy questionnaires were distributed to the participating parents and online questionnaires were made available to the practitioners and teachers. The findings were analysed under the question headings in the questionnaires.

Group	Number of questionnaires returned	Total number of participants
Parents	37	62
Practitioners	09	10
Teachers	07	09

- **Workshops:** Feedback was collected on participants' views of the four workshops. The responses were very positive with both practitioners and teachers valuing the input on *Aistear* and the opportunity to meet their fellow professionals.

- **Focus groups and World Café discussions:** The number of focus groups with each group is given below. These were analysed from the perspective of the questions asked, and presented in narrative format.

Focus groups and World café discussions	Number of sessions	Topic
Parents	2	Participation in initiative
Teachers	1	Participation in initiative
Practitioners	1	Participation in initiative
Teachers	1	Using the reports
Practitioners and teachers (World café)	4	Discussion on final changes to the templates

- **Interviews:** There were seven interviews. The recordings were transcribed and analysed from the perspective of the questions asked and presented in narrative format. The data set includes:

Group	Number of Interviews
Parents	1
Principal	1
Practitioners	3
Teachers	2

- **Children's drawings:** In partnership with their teachers and classmates, participating children drew pictures and provided commentary about their views on moving to primary school.

Schools	Number of Drawings
School A	16
School B	19
School C	12

Children's sections of the reports and videos of children were also analysed. As stated earlier the drawings on the reports were of little use in the evaluation due to lack of space but the children's thoughts and ideas as scribed by parents and practitioners were reviewed.

The stand-alone sections of the different data sets formed the basis for the Stage 2 synthesis and also for future conference presentations and journal articles.

Stage 2

Analysis and synthesis

The data associated with each stakeholder group was reviewed in detail and the key messages identified. A synthesis of the findings from the methodological approaches used is given for the two main categories of stakeholders:

- Children and families

- Practitioners and teachers

Research questions

The main research questions for each category are given below.

Category 1: Children and families

- Was the transition a positive experience for children?

- Was there greater communication with and sharing of information with parents?

- What were parents views on their child's completed report?

- Did parents get any information/support on how to help their children prepare for the transition to primary school?

Category 2: Practitioners and teachers

- Did participation in the initiative lead to the building of relationships and communication between teachers and practitioners?

- Was there a sharing of professional knowledge in terms of learning environment, pedagogy and curriculum between practitioners and teachers?

- What does the data reveal about sharing written information about children's learning and development between preschools, schools and parents? What difference did having a report on a child make? How did teachers use the reports?

- What type/design of Report Template is indicated by the data?

Data collection and analysis was rigorous and thorough. The views of parents, practitioners and teachers were collected through multiple means and a great deal of helpful insights were gained from the perspectives of the various participants. The views of children were also taken into consideration. The findings from the analysis of the data are presented next.

Presentation of findings

In-depth analysis was carried out on the information gleaned from the combined data sources and the findings are presented here under different headings connected to the research questions. Category One deals with children and families while Category Two deals with practitioners and teachers.

Category 1: Children and families

The first aspects of the data looked at parents' views of the initiative and all its different components, including reflections on their child's completed report.

Transition as a positive experience for children and parents

The evaluation data showed that all parents were very positive about the transition process and felt that their child had settled in to school very easily as they were well prepared. As one parent stated: *I thought the whole experience was a positive one, for us and for the child.* Many factors played a role in this positive experience for the children. These included the processes in the initiative, the co-location of school and preschool, and having an older sibling already in the school. However, parents with children at off-site preschools or their first child starting school did not encounter any difficulties either.

The data indicates the parents felt that their children were given opportunities to get to know what 'big school' would be like through the initiative, that it *took the mystery and therefore the anxiety out of it*. In addition, they said that the children felt a bond was created with the new school—the teacher knew about them already and they had visited the primary school in advance of the first day.

Communication with and sharing of information with parents

The data shows that parents were very happy with the opportunity to attend meetings with the preschool and school that happened as a result of the initiative. Schools and their feeder preschools were encouraged to organise a joint meeting with parents before the end of the school year. Some meetings were jointly chaired while others were chaired by the school. Both the practitioner and

teacher (19/20) were present at most meetings. Parents valued highly the opportunity to meet the new teacher and found the practical information given very informative. They had ample opportunity to ask questions and articulate their concerns. The parents discovered that *little things like the child's ability to use the toilet, learning to put on your coat, how to recognise and look after your stuff, were, in fact, more important than whether your child could count up to twenty.* Some parents were concerned that their child might not have the requisite pre-academic skills, but were reassured when the teacher spoke about self-help skills and the importance of good communication skills.

Parents were glad of the opportunity to hear what the children would be doing in junior infants. In cases where the teacher was yet not assigned to the junior infant class, they would welcome the opportunity to meet him/her at another time. Parents welcomed advice given on appropriate activities to carry out during the summer break and reported that they took on that advice and talked a lot about school during the summer break; they read stories often and practiced the practical skills of opening the lunch box and putting on coats and shoes. They made a point of walking or driving past the school to help the children become familiar with the building. They also tried to develop the children's social skills by meeting other children, particularly those who would be going to the same school. Overall, the evaluation data shows that parents were happy that their role was recognised, that their views were valued and that their concerns were listened to during the initiative.

Sharing information on children's learning between preschools and primary schools

Regarding the transition reports, the evaluation data shows parents were very happy that detailed information about their child was being shared with the primary school teacher and were surprised that transition procedures were not in place prior to this: *As an idea it was something that should have happened years ago. You just can't understand that nobody ever thought of it.* Parents were impressed by the reports they got from the preschool, particularly at the level of detail in them and how each child was individualised. This came across to parents as an opportunity to learn how their child had developed in preschool and how they were getting on with other children. The reports also offered a recognisable portrait of the child viewed through the eyes of another. Parents were happy to have a role in the compilation of the report. One parent said it was important because she found out *how I could help my child even more.*

Parents welcomed the opportunity to write about their own child and had no concerns about the data being shared with the teacher. All parents thought it was very important to share this information

with the teacher so that he/she would gain an insight into the child from the parents' perspective, learn about the child's interests and strengths and any worries parents might have.

Some parents were familiar with transfer reports from primary to post-primary schools and said such reporting was even more important for young children as older children can speak for themselves at second level. The reports were more detailed than they expected and they appreciated the amount of work that had gone into writing them: *I did not expect it to be as detailed…it was brilliant. I couldn't believe, actually, the amount of work that had gone into it. It was evident that they knew my child very well.* Some parents showed the report to other people like grandparents and were glad it reflected the individuality of their child: *I remember showing people the form and saying 'Look at this, isn't this great! It wasn't a generic reply like 'he's a confident, outgoing child'; it was very specific to the personality of the child*. A parent of a child with special needs was very happy that strategies that helped her child in preschool were passed on to the school: *I thought it worked really well with her*. It was very reassuring for the parents to find that what they had written in the parent section of the report was read and valued by the infant teacher. However, one parent suggested that some parents who received a less positive report, (for example, small behaviour issues) might not be happy with their child being labelled at the point of starting school: *Parents might like a fresh start starting school.* One parent thought an outline report on the child would be sufficient because people react to each other differently and children change over the summer. She also recommended that the exchange visits between the preschool and primary school should start in March/April to prepare the children for the transfer.

Parents had more mixed views about the importance of children being involved in completing the report. One parent thought it was very important that *the child feels involved in the whole process. After all it is all about them*. Some children were excited and happy to talk about things they wanted the teacher to know about them but other parents reported that the children did not understand what was involved. They thought the visit to the school was more beneficial: *But they did understand when we brought them over to the class that day…This is going to be your new class now, and they did understand that.*

Parents helping their children prepare for the transition

The data shows that over the summer, most parents adopted some of the activities suggested in the initiative. The most popular activities included talking about going to school, reading books about starting school, practicing self-help skills like opening and closing school bags, lunch boxes and beakers, trying on the uniform, visiting local playgrounds and arranging to meet other children. Some families also practiced more pre-academic skills and board games were popular for fun and for turn-taking. Lots of messy play also happened with sand, water and play-dough. Some preschools gave books about starting school to the families to read at home. Parents of children going to a Gaelscoil spoke more Irish at home over the summer in preparation for the move to school.

There was general agreement among the parents that the initiative was a great success in their experience and that it should be happening in all preschools and schools:

> *Finally, just thanks a million to whoever is responsible for it [the initiative]…it was very beneficial for all the children and the parents.*

Children's participation

The main aim of the initiative was to enhance the experience for children moving from preschool to primary school, so getting their input in the evaluation was important. A range of transition activities were suggested in the initiative to improve their experience, such as visits to the school, having props to play with and so on (see Appendix 2 for more information). The evaluation included children's voices as detailed in the Methodology chapter. Below is a flavour of some of their comments. Pseudonyms are used to protect the confidentiality of the children. The child parts of the completed reports revealed very interesting data on children's perspectives before starting school while the video clips and the annotated art work showed their views on school in the early months of the school year. It is important to remember that parents or practitioners assisted the children in completing the Child Part of the report and may have influenced what was said or paraphrased the child's words. Also the space for drawings was very small and so most children did not draw in the space and for those that did, the drawings were difficult to analyse. Below are tasters of the comments children provided on the child section of the reports as scribed by either parents or practitioners.

Comments from children on the child part of the reports

Children's feelings about going to school

Many of the children were very excited and happy about going to school as noted in the Child Part of the reporting templates in June 2017:

I am happy and excited to go to school. I love going to big school.

Reasons mentioned included learning new things, wearing a school uniform, staying at school longer and playing with new friends.

I am excited about doing lots of new things.

I am excited about picking my new uniform and going to school every day.

It will be so much fun in big school because I get to stay there longer and running and play with new friends.

Some children expressed a little nervousness alongside their excitement but others were not at all nervous:

I feel happy and a bit nervous about going to school; I am a bit nervous, a bit scared.

I'm not afraid of anything at school 'cause I can do everything.

Activities in preschool and school

Children were asked what they liked to do in preschool. Favourite preschool activities that featured in the reports included playing inside and outside, painting, drawing, colouring, cutting out and jigsaws. Other children liked singing, music and dancing and reported that they liked books and would like to learn to read. Not surprisingly, many children said they would like to play in school:

I want to play as well when I go to school.

I would like to do playtime and read books in junior infants.

However, one child thought that play in school might be different*:*

I will like playing with stuff in school. I think it will be different.

Some reported what they would like to learn in school:

I want to learn letters, numbers, reading and writing.

I want the teacher to know that I draw and paint well and that I run fast and that I am good.

Significant adults and children

A small number of children expressed some sadness about leaving their preschool teacher, but most had moved swiftly on to their new teacher and school friends. Jacinta drew her teacher and her friends. Some children said:

> *I feel happy and sad at the same time as I will miss my teacher.*
>
> *I hope I like my new teachers.*
>
> *I want to play with my friends and make new friends.*

Siblings ahead of them in the school or left behind in the crèche were clearly important:

> *I feel happy to go to big new school but sad to leave the crèche where I have made lots of friends and my little brother that I love.*
>
> *I am happy to be in the school with my big sisters*.

Almost all children mentioned friends, with proximity to friends being important, as was the opportunity to play with them:

> *I want to sit beside my friends (named).*
>
> *I like sitting with my friends.*

Uniform, lunch and homework

The outward indicators of being a school-going child were important and the school lunch, bag, uniform and homework were noted by the children in a positive manner.

> *I am very excited to be a big girl in my uniform*.
>
> *I will have my uniform, lunch and bag.*
>
> *I have my school bag and lunch box with love hearts.*

Homework took on the guise of a marker of their new status and was connected firmly to work:

> *In school I am looking forward to reading and doing my homework.*
>
> *I will have homework and will be working.*

One child appeared to be somewhat doubtful: *I think I want to do homework.*

Annotated art work and video recordings

A large body of annotated art work was received and made interesting reviewing. The **school building** obviously loomed large in the children's minds and in their drawings. Natasha's drawing showed a big school, which she says she likes drawing. Michael's school building is also big. He says: *it's very big and blue and there's loads of teachers in it*. Maria loves going to the *halla* in school because they play gymnastics and the principal gives them prizes. The happy nature of the drawings of the school yard is significant given that some parents expressed misgivings about their child's ability to manage the school yard. Darren drew a picture of his friends playing on the slides in the school yard and there are *lots and lots of children in the yard* in Sasha's drawing.

While two visits to video record interviews with children by their teacher occurred, only one resulted in material that could be analysed. In one school the children were shy and reluctant to participate. In the other school the children talked about the new school being bigger, about lunch being different, about doing different things and making new friends. They also talked about their preschool practitioner who is based on the school site calling in at regular intervals during their first few weeks in school to visit them.

Category 2: Practitioners and teachers

From the information received through the evaluation, the initiative was deemed by teachers and practitioners to be a great success. It facilitated professional communication between practitioners and teachers in local areas, in many cases for the first time, and allowed both teachers and practitioners to gain a greater understanding of each other's work and work environment. This in turn enabled teachers to plan for the specific group of children starting school and gave them a deeper understanding of the child's views on starting school. This all helped to ensure children's transition from primary school was a positive and well-planned experience.

Relationships and communication between practitioners and teachers

The evaluation data shows clearly that participants thought that the building of a professional relationship between preschools and schools was one of the greatest benefits of the initiative. They emphasised, in particular, the direct communication and trust developed between the junior infant teachers and practitioners. A practitioner remarked: *I'd never met the teacher and wouldn't even recognise her. She said she had no recollection of even ever seeing me.* The practitioners felt that they were made very welcome by the junior infant teachers on school visits. Both teachers and practitioners felt that the personal connections made during the initiative worked very well: *I developed a good relationship with the teacher. She was very welcoming and made me feel at ease.* One preschool received a letter from the local primary school beginning with 'Dear Colleague' and felt that this was a good indication of professional recognition arising from the initiative. Prior to the initiative only three of the schools and preschools had already been working together and all three of these said the initiative extended what they had been doing previously. For example, while one preschool was on the school site, the teacher had never visited the preschool prior to the initiative. For the other preschools and schools who were not connected before the initiative, in most cases they welcomed the opportunity to build a working relationship. However, one person cautioned that not all personal relationships work out so well. The data shows that most participants hope to maintain and build on this relationship going forward. A school principal who was interviewed thought it would be important for all teachers in a school to know about any future transitions initiatives, as teachers in many schools rotate classes.

Sharing professional expertise

Through building good professional relationships the participants felt more confident about sharing professional expertise. The evaluation data showed that practitioners and teachers welcomed the chance to do this during the initiative. There were opportunities to do this in several ways:

- 4 full-day workshops

- Site visits to each other's workplace

- Sharing reports and follow-up meetings

- Joint information sessions with parents.

Several practitioners expressed the view that it was a very good idea to have joint professional development with teachers and that this facilitated very good discussion and sharing of experiences during the workshops.

The mutual site visits were deemed by all to be very beneficial. Practitioners were very happy to have the opportunity to visit the primary school and in some cases to bring groups of children there during the school day. The practitioners and children had the opportunity to see the activities that children experience in junior infants. Therefore, they had a better sense of the environment the children would be going to and the things they would be doing there. One teacher said she felt it helped both of them *to develop a better understanding of the nature of each other's work.* Teachers valued the opportunity to see preschools 'in action' and to talk to the practitioner. Reasons included seeing the layout of the classroom and activities available, seeing the children's creative work, finding out what equipment/toys they had in common and finding out what the children liked to play with. Teachers were interested is seeing how the children were grouped and how the preschools implemented *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009). A teacher commented: *I had never visited a preschool before so it was great to get an insight into how their day is planned. I especially enjoyed seeing how their room was laid out in different areas.*

Relationships with parents

One of the aims of the initiative was to involve parents more in their child's transition to primary school and practitioners felt that the initiative built on the relationship they had established with parents already: *We know the parents well and are working with them already.* One practitioner felt that she got to know the parents better through the initiative and *felt that they had more trust in me as they were kept informed.* It was also stated that parents may not agree with the practitioners' views on their child and may wish to disagree. This raised the question on whether parents should have an option on the form of agreeing or disagreeing with the practitioner's views.

The data indicates that the joint meetings with parents to discuss the reports and the transition to primary school were a great success with both teachers and practitioners present. Some of these meetings were held in the mornings and others in the evening, but May proved a challenging time of year for scheduling meetings. In some schools, other professionals such as speech and language therapists also attended. Some settings offered follow-up meetings with parents after the initial meeting.

Transition activities

At each of the four workshops, different aspects of transition and good practice were focused on. There was a particular focus on *Aistear* since it has relevance for both preschools and infant classes in primary school. In the evaluation data all of the participants said they welcomed presentations and discussions on *Aistear*. They thought that this input was a significant benefit of their involvement in the initiative. Some teachers said it helped them realise the importance of the Framework and that it revitalised some aspects of their practice such as enhancing the learning environment, having more play and active learning and putting a greater emphasis on formative assessment.

A list of suggested transition activities was also provided to participants and most practitioners explained in the evaluation data that they had tried several of these. These included practitioners visiting the primary school on their own, others brought the children to visit the school, they read stories about going to school and developed a transition resource box with school-related items. Through the transition resource box, play-based activities related to the transition to school happened in the preschools. Some children used dramatic play to pretend to be the teacher or children at school. One practitioner took photos of each child and their new school and displayed them in her setting to

the great delight of the children and parents. One preschool had a large life-sized doll dressed in a school uniform visit the primary school and took photos in the different places. The practitioner made a book of the photos to read in the setting before the children went on a tour of the school a couple of weeks later to visit the same places as the doll. They also used the doll to learn about the different parts of the school uniform. Another school made a 'Hope Tree' with leaves of the children's and parents' aspirations for primary school. Preschools undertook a variety of activities and chose the ones that they felt suited them best.

In the data some teachers were critical of what they considered an overly academic approach in some preschools in the initiative, especially in regard to number work and suggested that a third party should discuss more appropriate provision of oral language development and development of dispositions with practitioners. They thought this could be made more explicit too on the report templates.

Draft reporting templates

The evaluation data showed that the initiative, and in particular the reporting templates, helped create a context to enable the practitioners and teachers to discuss the child's strengths as well as challenges. Practitioners were very happy to share information about children's learning and development with parents and teachers. Practitioners were already discussing issues with parents and were happy to be able to discuss the issues with the teacher as well as they now had signed parental consent to do this. However, several practitioners emphasised that the report was only one part of the initiative and that there were several other strands that were equally important: *It was the whole scheme, not just the reports*. They thought that the personal contact between practitioners and teachers was important and that professional relationships take time to form. Teachers were very happy with the reports and felt they knew quite a lot about the children on whom they had reports. They too valued the opportunity for further conversations about the children. Teachers used the reports in different ways - for grouping friends together, by providing play items on the first day that they knew children liked. Others organised topics in their classroom that they knew children enjoyed in preschool, for example farm-related activities. Many of them used the strategies highlighted in the reports to help children who had little issues like holding a prop while listening to a story for a child who found it hard to sit, removing books with pictures of spiders for a child who had a fear of spiders, or providing prompts for a child who needed to be reminded to go to the toilet.

All agreed that language is powerful, and that written comments in the reports could be interpreted differently by different people. There was evidence of awareness of the impact of this first report in terms of sensitivity to parents' existing understanding and knowledge of their child's educational progress. The key point made by practitioners was that the reports should be built on strong communication with parents well in advance of the report being drafted so that there were no big surprises for parents on reading the report.

The question of bilingual templates or Irish only for Gaeltacht schools was discussed. A bi-lingual version was not made available in the initiative, and templates were available in either English or Irish. One practitioner said they worked out well in Irish only as Gaeltacht settings have a similar scheme which is working well (Nasc leis an mBunscoil). Some participants thought the language, especially in the Irish version of the NCCA template was very complicated and stilted: *Bhí an Ghaeilge an-chasta agus gan a bheith nádúrtha*.

Regarding the child part of the reporting template, some practitioners said that second language children could not verbalise their feelings about school and the questions in the Child Section were not suitable for them.

It was pointed out by all that the reports took a long time to fill in. Overall, Template A took longer to complete than Template B. It is clear from the data that the practitioners felt there was a great deal of work involved in this initiative and, in particular, in completing the reports and meeting the teacher to discuss them. They felt that this would be even greater if the reports were to be generated for all children in any such scheme in the future. The workload was manageable with a small number of children transferring to school, but would be challenging with up to 20 children going to primary school. Most of the work had to be completed during unpaid non-contact time. Practitioners stated that if the completion of reports becomes a national requirement, then they would have to be paid for doing this work. The evaluation data show that time for writing reports, meetings between practitioners and teachers and reading reports would need to be factored in to the working day for both practitioners and teachers.

Key points for revising the reporting templates

A key part of the initiative was the piloting of the NCCA reporting templates. The last focus group session held in October 2017 allowed time for practitioners and teachers to reflect on the completion and use of these reports and to advise on changes needed going forward. Teachers who now had the experience of using the information on the reports said that they found the reports to be very useful, and they acknowledged and appreciated the time involved for the preschool practitioners in completing the documentation. However, one teacher said that she would prefer to develop her own impressions of the children first and look at the reports later in the year.

All agreed that the **summary section** of the child's learning and development on Templates A and B was the most useful in that it:

- contained key and concise information about the child

- gave further insight to where the child is currently at

- identified children's interests and strategies that suited different children

- described ways to engage children fully in activities

- noted things children found challenging or difficult.

The overriding view was that one or two page summaries would be the most useful format, given that practitioners would have to complete up to 20 reporting templates and teachers to read 30+. It was stated that the *Aistear* themed pages were professional and informative but that the detail overshadowed the main messages.

- **Choice of templates:** There was no definite preference for a specific template. The following suggestions for change emerged:

  - templates should be available online

  - child's picture could be added to the print-out

  - there should be a choice of templates

  - there needs to be sensitivity to the impact of "skills not yet developed" on parents and children

  - more space is needed for additional comments.

- **Language**: There was a great deal of discussion on the language and terminology used on the reporting templates. Some participants felt that use of professional terminology recognises the professional status of teachers and practitioners while others thought that the terminology was too technical for some parents. Some parents might have literacy difficulties, or may not have English/Irish as a first language. Several participants thought that the reporting template and the language used should be kept as simple as possible to make it accessible to everyone.

- **Questions:** Teachers and practitioners were happy in general with the questions on the reporting templates but thought that specific questions in both templates should be revised, as some were deemed not useful while gaps in information were noted. Participants thought that the report acted as a prompt to parents to speak to their child about starting school and to pass on relevant information: *It is well laid out with relevant questions and prompts to assist parents filling it in. It prompts parents to speak to and listen to their child about starting school. The additional information box allows parents to pass on anything they think might be relevant.*

- **Child part**:

  - Respondents were happy to see that the child's consent/assent was required but felt that it could be more child-friendly such as using happy face images.

  - Teachers found the information on children's friends very useful, enabling seating of the children in friendship groups in the classroom at the beginning of the year. However, as not all children will be going to the same primary school it was suggested that the question regarding friends be rephrased to ask about friends going to the same school and be moved to the parent section.

  - Some participants queried the rationale for a child portrait in the child section but teachers reported that it gave them a sense of the child's fine motor and drawing skills. Some children had difficulty with drawing and got help from older siblings/parents while others did not complete it at all. It was strongly suggested that children be given an A4 page for a drawing of their own choice if they wish, as the space provided on the draft template was too small. Prompts were provided to help children draw the pictures but many adults used these as prompts for questions and scribed their answers, rather than the child drawing a picture. It is not clear why this happened but the space for drawing the picture was very small and so this may partially explain why so few pictures were drawn and why so many answers were scribed.

- The teacher in the special preschool found that the child section didn't work for her as most of the children were non-verbal and had not yet developed refined motor skills for drawing. Instead she devised a different format that included photos of the children undertaking activities they liked during the year and this was shared with their new teacher and with parents. Options for flexibility and creativity like this needs to be factored in to the child section of the template so that all children can participate.

- **Feedback:** Practitioners indicated they would like feedback from the school on how the information provided in the report template was used.

- **Professional development and payment:** The evaluation data shows agreement among participants that national training for practitioners and teachers should be organised and that given the time commitment in completing the reporting templates, practitioners would have to be paid for this work.

Overall, all participants— children, parents, practitioners and teachers—agreed that this was a very worthwhile initiative and that it should be rolled out on a national basis. It was stressed repeatedly that the reports were only part of the transition and that the totality of the initiative was important in building relationships and exchanging information about the children. A number of suggestions were made regarding the format and wording of the final reporting templates and in view of the work involved in writing and using such reports appropriate arrangements should be made for payment for this work.

Discussion of findings

Overall, the initiative was a very worthwhile, timely and positive experience for all involved—for families, practitioners, teachers and for the NCCA. In general, the evaluation showed that transition from preschool to primary school was a positive experience for most children. However, the evaluation also spotlighted many challenges in supporting transitions, and replicated research findings both nationally and internationally as outlined in *Transition from preschool to primary school: Literature review* (O'Kane, 2016). Active participation in all the experiences and encounters of the initiative further developed and improved participants' expertise and confidence in managing the dynamic process of children's transition into junior infants. Participants were given the opportunity to develop a reconceptualised understanding of a high-quality transition process and reflect on the concept as a shared responsibility. By highlighting the interplay between relationships and responsibilities in the transition process, participants learned how to take leadership of a more positive, effective transition process for children moving from preschool to primary school.

Benefits and challenges of the initiative

Benefits

Building professional relationships

A significant positive outcome of the initiative was the fostering of respectful, reciprocal relationships and partnerships between practitioners and teachers, emphasising the complimentary nature of the professional roles. The initiative demonstrated the importance of providing a structure to build the levels of leadership, collaboration and communication needed between participants to help them work together with the shared aim of enhancing the child's transition to primary school. Through the different initiative experiences, participants reported that their own professional confidence was strengthened through the open sharing of professional knowledge, skills and previous experience with co-participants and the NCCA project team.

Continuity of curriculum and pedagogy

The design of the initiative was premised on a number of key messages from literature, one being that focusing on high quality early years' education through alignment and consistency in curriculum and pedagogy across preschools and infant classrooms has positive outcomes for children. O'Kane (2016 p.11) states that *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009) *provides support to increase connections in quality experiences and learning throughout early childhood including infant classes in primary schools. Aistear* and the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* were central to participants' professional learning during the initiative. This can be seen by the data from participants in the evaluation where they talked about *Aistear* and where they outline some of the changes they made, like improving the learning environment, having more play and active learning and putting a greater emphasis on formative assessment. The data also shows that mutual visits to each other's work places was a very worthwhile experience, allowing each to learn about the environment, curriculum and pedagogy of the other.

Information transfer through NCCA reporting templates

An important component of the initiative involved piloting the draft reporting templates developed by the NCCA. Feedback on the reports generated through the templates was very positive from both parents and teachers, and practitioners welcomed the opportunity to share the valuable information they had on children's learning and development. Mirroring key messages from the research report (O'Kane, 2016), participants were keen to reaffirm that the reports were only one component of the transition process and that relationship-building and mutual respect as professionals was paramount. Participants provided a lot of useful feedback on the draft reporting templates which will be used to finalise the templates.

Sharing the responsibility of supporting the transition between families, preschools and primary school

Supporting transitions is a shared responsibility as outlined in O'Kane (2016). There is an onus on families, preschools and primary schools to work together to support children making the transition from preschool to primary school and this shared responsibility was emphasised throughout the initiative. As outlined by O'Kane (2016), work on transitions has shifted from a sole focus on a 'school ready child' to a 'ready child', 'ready family' and 'ready school'. O'Kane (2016 p.13) also points out that *Parents play an important role in the transition process and should be seen as collaborators, with respectful dialogue being all-important.* The initiative provided an impetus for practitioners and

teachers to involve parents more in their child's transition to primary school. Feedback from the evaluation data signalled that parents' interactions with practitioners and teachers had increased and were very positive. The joint information sessions were reported as being particularly useful in highlighting the skills and dispositions that children need for starting primary school. The sessions helped to clarify some of the myths that exist about what children need to be able to do prior to going to school, in particular in the areas of formal academic skills (literacy and numeracy). From summarising the data in the literature review O'Kane (2016, p10) states that:

> *In terms of the key dispositions, skills and knowledge that best support children at this transition point, a good degree of consistency was identified. The focus is on social and emotional skills, communication and language skills, positive learning dispositions like independence and curiosity, and self-help skills with less focus on academic skills.*

In relation to the reports, parents welcomed the opportunity to contribute to their child's report and were happy for the completed reports to be shared with their child's new teacher. In the data parents queried why the sharing of information on a child's learning and development had not happened prior to this.

Children's involvement in the transition process

The initiative was orientated towards making the transition to primary school a more positive experience for children in keeping with national and international research as highlighted in the literature review by O'Kane (2016). While working with adults in supporting transitions, the NCCA project team was cognisant of including the child's active and willing engagement in the process. Many different transition activities were suggested so that children could learn more about the move to school; for example, visiting the schools, reading books and having discussions about going to school, and having play related props in preschool. Focus was placed too in the initiative on emphasising the skills and dispositions that are important for children – having good communication and self-care skills and having positive learning dispositions. Capturing the child's voice in the transition experience was also seen as very important. As noted by a parent, it is very important that *the child feels involved in the whole process. After all it is all about them.* Data analysis revealed that children appeared happy in the main with their transition experience and had settled well into their new school.

Challenges

Building professional relationships

While the development and fostering of professional relationships was the greatest positive outcome of the initiative, it was also revealed as one of the biggest challenges. Only three of the ten preschools had any kind of existing relationship with their partner primary school prior to the initiative. Of the three, two were co-located, and the third was a special preschool linked with the special school located nearby. There were still practical challenges in working collaboratively for these settings, but the challenges were even greater for the preschools and schools not co-located. The absence of any prior foundational relationship between participants necessitated them having to build trust, appreciation, communication and familiarity with each other. This was gradual over the duration of the initiative, was supported by the NCCA project team and was experienced differently by participants.

Time and remuneration

The initiative revealed the considerable amount of time, energy and commitment participants invested outside of their normal working hours during the initiative. This additional workload, while beneficial, generated almost universal queries and concerns from participants as to what extent the transition activities for children, extra contact with parents along with the work on reports would be manageable going forward without additional funding and without resource provision similar to that provided by the NCCA project team. The success of the initiative was due to the level of commitment and enthusiasm of the participants who gave freely of their own time to formulate and accommodate the range of activities which fed into the dynamic transition process.

An important component of the initiative involved piloting the draft reporting templates developed by the NCCA and, while beneficial, it involved many challenges. It is important to acknowledge and draw attention to the time involved for practitioners in generating the reports and for teachers in both reading the reports and meeting the practitioners to discuss them. Teachers' time was spent too in devising strategies to use the information in the reports to support children in their new classroom. Completing the Practitioner Part and managing the completion of the Child and Family Parts of the template took considerable time for practitioners.

Recommendations

In presenting these recommendations, NCCA notes that the development of reporting templates is but one element in supporting the transition process from preschool to primary school. As noted in the review of research by O'Kane (2016), and through the NCCA's experience of this initiative, the templates can only be fully effective in the context of positive relationships among all involved – children, parents, practitioners and teachers. In particular, nurturing positive relationships between preschools and primary schools must be a concern in any efforts to support positive transitions for young children. These recommendations are presented in two sections; the first is focused on the templates which the NCCA was asked to develop, and the second includes a series of considerations for the wider education system within which the transition from preschool to primary school takes place.

Finalising the templates and supporting their use

- When finalised the templates should:

    - Be reduced in complexity and avoid repetition across sections

    - Provide a range of options that can be used at the discretion of the setting to suit individual children

    - Increase the visibility of the summary section

    - Enhance the layout and design of the Child section to make it more suitable for all children

    - Be available online, with guidance on generating reports and using the information provided.

- Provision for non-contact time for practitioners will be needed to enable them to provide reports and to prepare for transition activities.

- Online materials and resources should be provided to support planning and implementation of a wide range of transition activities.

- Support for parents in their role in completing the reports should be provided.

- Training should be provided for practitioners and teachers together in the context of shared, collaborative professional learning.

Wider considerations

- The dispositions, skills and knowledge that are important for children moving on to school need to be highlighted and shared with all involved in the transition—children and families, practitioners, teachers and other relevant stakeholders.

- Practitioners and teachers should be supported in developing an awareness of the importance and value of initiating, developing and strengthening professional relationships with each other. The ongoing redevelopment of the Primary Curriculum, in particular considerations of curriculum and pedagogical continuity from pre-school to primary school, may in time contribute to this awareness.

- Consideration will be needed in terms of the conditions attached to scaling up from a small initiative like this to a full roll-out of a transition process for all children moving from preschool to primary school.

Conclusion

NCCA would like to take this opportunity to thank all the children, parents, practitioners and teachers involved. We would also like to thank Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta for their assistance. All the participants gave generously of their time and efforts, and engaged with commitment, enthusiasm and good humour. NCCA would particularly like to thank the schools and preschools for their courtesy and hospitality to the Education Officers with whom they worked so closely.

The reporting templates and accompanying support materials will be made available in Autumn 2018. The suite of support materials will focus on all aspects of the transitions process, including but not just confined to the sharing of information between preschools and primary schools. The NCCA will also provide suggestions to the Department of Education and Skills on how to scale up from small initiative like this to rolling-out a transition support process for children moving from preschool to primary school once the templates and support materials are available.

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Appendix 1: Information for preschools and schools

What is the preschool to primary school transition initiative?
The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) advises the Minister for Education and Skills on matters in relation to early childhood, primary and post-primary education. As part of this work the NCCA has developed a Reporting Template to record a child's learning and development as he/she makes the transition from preschool to primary school. This transition is an important time in a child's life, as highlighted by both national and international research.
The NCCA is inviting preschools and primary schools including a special school, from counties Tipperary, Laois and Galway, to participate in a transition initiative to support practitioners and teachers as they work with, and help children and families experience a positive and effective transition to primary school. This initiative will include an opportunity to use the draft Reporting Template developed by the NCCA. There will also be an emphasis on building positive relationships between preschools and primary schools through participation in shared transition activities and experiences. Everyone that the transition to primary school impacts on will be involved in some way – children, families, settings and schools.   The initiative will be facilitated by three NCCA initiative team members. Mary Daly and Derek Grant will work with the schools and preschools in Tipperary, Limerick and Laois. Neasa Ní Chuaig, in collaboration with Pattie Stundún from Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta, will work with the schools and preschools in Galway.

What does the transition initiative aim to achieve?
For children and families, the transition initiative aims to: • support them during the transition to primary school   • highlight the role of parents and families in organising and supporting the transition of their children to primary school   • promote an understanding of preschool and primary school roles and responsibilities in supporting a positive transition to primary school, focusing particularly on 'ready schools'   • include them in the transfer of information to the primary school. Both the parent and the child are asked to provide information on the template and the parent is also asked for consent for the information to travel to the primary school.
For early years' practitioners and primary teachers, the transition initiative aims to: • build positive, secure, and respectful relationships between practitioners and teachers   • provide information about transitions in the *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide   • identify and come to a shared understanding of the key dispositions, skills and knowledge that are most critical for children as they move to primary school   • facilitate the sharing of information on curriculum, teaching approaches, resources and the learning environment between preschools and primary schools   • provide support, guidance, and direction on how to promote successful transition strategies between preschools and primary schools

- share information on each child's learning and development between preschools and primary schools using the reporting templates developed by the NCCA and to find out how this information is used in the primary school
- give them the opportunity to share their practice with a wider audience through the NCCA website.

For the NCCA, the transition initiative aims to:
- enable practitioners and teachers to take part in a transition initiative
- enable parents and children to be part of the initiative
- enable practitioners and teachers to pilot the NCCA Reporting Template and evaluate its use so that it can be finalised for sharing nationally in Autumn 2018
- enable a sharing of transition experiences with a wider audience using photographs, learning stories and podcasts made available at **www.ncca.ie** and **www.aistearsiolta.ie**

What will the transition initiative involve for the preschools and primary school involved?

Preschool practitioners and managers plus primary principals and junior infant teachers will attend a one evening introductory. The Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise, Co. Laois and the Connemara Coast Hotel are the two venues for the introductory sessions. This is an opportunity to hear about the importance of successful transitions, the structure of the transition initiative and the research underpinning it.

Following the introductory session, each participating preschool and primary school will:
- receive a visit in their preschool/school from one of the NCCA initiative team members
- inform parents of the initiative and request their written consent for their child to be involved
- receive a Service Level Agreement
- agree to practitioners and teachers participating in four full-day workshops

Four full-day workshops for preschool practitioners and teachers will be held in Athlone Education Centre, Co. Westmeath. The workshops will provide an opportunity to share existing good practice and strategies; and explore how these can be further developed. After each workshop participants will undertake transition activities/actions in their own preschool/primary school. Participants will provide feedback and advice on these activities/actions at the following workshop and may share them for use on the NCCA websites with parental consent.

There will be compulsory and optional transition activities/actions to undertake during the transitions initiative.

Compulsory transition activities _will_ include

- the school principal, junior infant teacher, manager and preschool room leader attending the introductory session
- the junior infant teacher and preschool room practitioner attending four workshops
- the junior infant teacher visiting the preschool and the preschool practitioner visiting the infant classroom in the primary school
- a family information session on the transition to primary school, held jointly by the preschool and primary school
- the junior infant teacher providing feedback on how they used the information provided in the NCCA Reporting Templates
- the preschool room leader providing feedback on their experience of completing and sharing the NCCA Reporting Templates

Optional transition activities _may_ include

- preschool children visiting the primary school
- primary school children visiting the preschool
- talking to older children about their transition to primary school and what advice they would give to children transferring in September
- developing a transition resource box with materials to support preschool children in their move to primary school
- reading story books and having discussions about going to primary school
- sharing the children's learning portfolios/journals with the junior infant teacher
- reorganising the physical space of the setting/classroom
- getting feedback from parents and children about their thoughts on the initiative
- sharing material for publication on the NCCA websites (with parental permission)

Timeline and details of the transition initiative

Proposed activity	Date	Venue
Introduction session to initiative for Tipperary and Laois.	Tuesday 28th February 2016	The Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise
Introduction session to initiative for Galway.	March 1st to 13th 2016	Connemara Coast Hotel, Barna, Galway
Visit by member of NCCA initiative team member	Between 13th March and 16th April 2016	Preschools and primary schools
Workshop 1 focuses on building relationships between preschools and primary schools around the area of transition.	Monday 13th March 2016	Athlone Education Centre
Workshop 2 explores activities/ actions to support children's transition to primary school.	Thursday 6th April 2016	Athlone Education Centre

Workshop 3 introduces the NCCA Reporting Template and provides guidance and assistance on how to use it.	Tuesday 9th May 2016	Athlone Education Centre
Completion of a Reporting Template for each child moving to primary school.	Late May[5] 2016	Preschool
Information session for families	May / June 2016	Preschool
Preschool practitioner and junior infant teacher **meeting to share information** on Reporting Templates.	June 2016	Preschool / primary school
Junior infant teacher **reviews information on the Reporting Template**. Teacher may follow up with preschool practitioner during first term.	August / September 2016	Primary School
Information **session for families of new junior infant children**	September 2016	Primary School
Workshop 4 is about reviewing, reflecting and evaluating the transition initiative; and providing feedback on the NCCA Reporting Templates	Thursday 12th October 2016	Athlone Education Centre

How will participating preschools and primary schools be supported to take part in the initiative?
Each participating preschool and primary school will: • receive a grant of €1000 with suggestions on how it could be used • receive guidance and support from the NCCA initiative team through workshop participation, on-site visits and phone/email communication • be encouraged to work closely with their partner preschool/primary school to build their relationship • have the support of the other participants involved in transition initiative.

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[5] It is recognised that for children with SEN, planning for the transition may have begun a lot earlier.

How will information on each child's learning and development be shared between the preschool and primary school?

The opportunity for the preschool to share relevant information with the primary school about each child's learning and development will be an important component of the transition initiative. The preschool practitioner will fill in a written Report Template for each child. The Reporting Template is linked to the four themes of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and has three sections:

Part 1: the Practitioner Part
Part 2: the Family Part
Part 3: the Child Part

Guidance and support on how to complete The Report Template will be provided during the third workshop. In addition, a written guide on completing the Report Template will be made available to all participants. When the completed Report Template has been shared with and signed by the child's parent in the preschool, it will then travel from the preschool to the primary school. Shortly after, it will be followed up with a face-to-face meeting between the practitioner, who completed section 1 of the template, and the junior infant teacher.

The preschool will have the opportunity to complete the Reporting Template for each child moving on to primary school regardless of which primary school they are moving to. This means that if a child is moving to a primary school not involved in the initiative, the Reporting Template can be given to the parents and will not be sent to the primary school by the preschool.

What role will parents have in the transition initiative?

Parents and families play a central role in a child's transition to primary school and information on the initiative will be provided by the NCCA for parents. Photographs or short video recordings of children and samples of their work may be used to provide feedback on the transition initiative at the workshops. Written parental consent will be required before a child participates in the transition initiative. These forms will be available during the introductory session.

Each partnership preschool and primary school will organise an information session for parents, informing them about the importance of a successful and effective transition to primary school and the use of the Reporting Template as part of this. Part 2 of the Reporting Template will provide parents with the opportunity to share information about their child with the primary school. The parent's signature will also be requested before the Reporting Template can be sent on to the primary school.

Some materials may also be made available for sharing on the NCCA website. A special consent form will be available for this in addition to the consent form for taking part in the initiative.

What role will children have in the transition initiative?
The child is the key person in this transition and all aspects of the transition initiative are being undertaken to make this time as positive an experience as possible for the child. Part 3 of the Reporting Template being used during the transition initiative will provide the child with the opportunity to share information about likes and dislikes, feelings about going to school and what they want to do when they go to primary school. Children's feedback during the initiative will also be used to inform the template. Photos, learning stories and podcasts of children may also be made available for sharing on the NCCA website with parental consent and with children's permission.

Where can I find out more about transitions from preschool to primary school?
The Early Childhood Education section of the NCCA website (www.ncca.ie) contains published research reports which have been developed to support the work on transition from preschool to primary school. The *Aistear Síolta* Practice Guide has a number of materials on the transition to primary school including a suite of podcasts by Professor Sue Dockett, a leading international expert on this transition. See **http://www.ncca.ie/en/Practice-Guide/Transitions/** Part 4 of the Supporting transitions self-evaluation tool also provides important prompts for guiding this work. See **http://www.ncca.ie/en/Practice-Guide/Transitions/Supporting-transitions-Self-evaluation-Tool.pdf** Both resources will be used in the transition initiative.
For further information on the transition initiative Email Mary Daly **mary.daly@ncca.ie**

Appendix 2: Possible transition activities[6]
<u>DRAFT</u>

Table 1 is for preschools

Table 2 is for primary schools

Table 3 is for both preschools and primary schools

These are just ideas. You can also choose to do your own transition activities that are not on the list. Use the Practice Guide Element 4 of the Transition's Pillar Self-evaluation tool: Transition to Primary school too - http://www.aistearsiolta.ie/en/Transitions/Supporting-transitions-Self-evaluation-Tool.pdf

(Other suggestions can be found in Dockett and Perry (2014)[7] which was a key resource used by participants in the initiative and which is referenced in the tables below).

Table 1: Preschools

Choose at least one from each group

Group 1: Activities
Make photo books of the different schools the children will be attending – photos of school, uniform, principal, teacher, SNA, classroom, toilets, office, playground, hall, where children's coats and property will be stored etc. and/or wall displays of the different schools the children will be going to with photos of the children going to each school underneath along with a photo of the teacher
Children visit a classroom during the school day and stay for an activity.
Children visit the primary school during yard time and spend 10 to 15 minutes in the yard.
Invite junior infant teacher to visit children in the preschool (a couple of times) and read a story or part-take in some activity, answer children's questions about school.
Think about hiring a bus to tour the area and simply 'drive-by' all of the schools where the children will be attending. This is good idea if the school isn't enthusiastic about having too many visitors or if there are many schools the children will be attending.

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[7] All page numbers referenced in this section refer to *Continuity of Learning: A resource to support effective transition to school and school age care* (Dockett and Perry, 2014) :
https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/pdf_with_bookmarking_-_continuity_of_learning-_30_october_2014_1_0.pdf

Virtual visits - use Skype sessions either with children in infant classes, get them to show the preschool children the classroom to the preschool children OR just with the teacher to let the preschool children have a 'tour' where schools are too far away.
Joint visit to local park for a picnic
Joint sports day for preschool and junior infants
Children from the preschool write to (scribed by adult) or Skype children in the primary school asking questions about primary school
What school needs to know about me! Asking children what school should know about them, see page 37 of Dockett and Perry (2014)
Introduce story books about going to school that prompt discussion. Keep note of children's questions and discussions. You might ask the children to think about one aspect they are really looking forward to and maybe one thing they are worried about. Discussing the differences and similarities between the two settings helps the children to anticipate the kind of changes they will encounter. Discuss children's feelings about going to school. Keep note of these. Different names (comparing school and preschool). Use the ideas on page 55 of Dockett and Perry (2014) to help children increase their awareness of what school will be like. Make notes.
Group 2 Environment
Consider changing the home corner to 'school classroom' briefly. This will give insight into how and what the children are thinking about school and allow them to role play the various roles.
Playing school Have a transition box in the pre-school classroom with items in it that children will come across in junior infants – pencil cases, pencils, pencil sharpeners, erasers, school bags, lunch boxes, books, copies, photo books of the different schools the children will be attending. These can be used during free play and also during some adult guided discussions. You could brainstorm with children before you start what kind of things might be in it. Make observations of children and keep note of their comments during free play and take photos. Also take note of children's comments and questions during the guided discussions. (See Dockett and Perry, 2014, page 33, for more ideas)
Have sample Uniform(s)/track suit(s) in the dress up area in the preschool, and if possible life-sized bear /doll for dress up, or children can try them on themselves. Velcro runners and school shoes for trying on and taking off would also be useful for the children themselves.
Group 5: Working in partnership with parents
Hope tree: use ideas from Dockett and Perry (2014) page 53 to ask parents for their hopes/aspirations for school.
Use ideas on page 57 to ask parents to outline three wishes.
Use ideas on page 68 to get parents to provide information for other parents.
Use ideas on page 27 to get advice for transition and to ensure parents feedback is taken and used to improve things.
Support parents, understanding that they may also find the transition process difficult. We try to alleviate worries by reassuring them informally and by talking about the differences and similarities between the two settings. (The parent info session will help with this)
With parental consent and where appropriate we discuss children's transition to school with other professional such as special needs assistants, social workers etc.

Group 6[8]: Special educational needs
Use ideas from 'A new transitions and school setting for Martin' (Dockett and Perry, 2014, p. 38) to support a child with SEN in your setting.
Use ideas from 'We found out so much' (Dockett and Perry, 2014, p. 50) to help a child with SEN with the transition to school.
Use ideas from 'Transition with Special Needs' (Dockett and Perry, 2014, p. 64) to support children with SEN.
Work with parents and school to ensure resources and support are in place for children with SEN.

Primary Schools

Choose at least one from each group

Group 1: Activities
Deciding well in advance who junior infant teacher will be and informing parents/preschool who that person will be and sharing a bit about the teacher (for example, special interests – art, gardening, puppetry etc.), and sending a photo of the teacher to preschool so that children can add it to school display
Giving children a buddy: see 'Big buddies' ideas on page 23 and page 40 of Dockett and Perry (2014)
Teachers learn at least basic words in the child's home language where appropriate and ensure resources and displays reflect all cultures and backgrounds of children.
Thinking about newcomer/traveller children who are coming during the year; see 'Moving around' (Dockett and Perry, 2014, p. 43) for ideas
Allowing children to have a transitional object in the school – favourite toy or comforter. Have a designated place for these.
Make sure the school is ready for the child (using the info in the templates to help with this), making school well prepared to receive each and every child and they are given the time and space to transition at their own pace.
Group 2: Environment
Having photos of preschool/s in the junior infant classroom
Making sure families feel welcome (welcome posters in home languages of children, knowing few words in home language of child, having some books in home language of child etc.) See 'More than one language' (Dockett and Perry, 2014, p. 69) on the importance of children's home languages.

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[8] This group is relevant for settings who have children with SEN moving to school

Having a family wall with photos of family, pets etc.
Make sure children know where things are- e.g. toilets – see ' If you don't know you'll be sad' (Dockett and Perry, 2014, p. 75) See also the podcast on toilets by Sue Dockett in the *Examples and Ideas for Practice* section of the Transitions pillar of the *Aistear Siolta* Practice Guide: http://aistearsiolta.ie/en/Transitions/
Make changes to the physical environment so that classroom seems more familiar – set up into interest areas, fewer tables and chairs.
Having a more active classroom. See the podcast on transition to primary school and the expectation to sit at tables for long periods of time by Sue Dockett in the *Examples and Ideas for Practice* section of the Transitions pillar of the *Aistear Siolta* Practice Guide: http://aistearsiolta.ie/en/Transitions/
Make connections to children's cultural identities such as resources, displays and experiences.
Group 3: Play and holistic development
Having child-led play to support teaching and learning by using more playful interactions throughout the day.
Focus on well-being, identity and belonging, communicating and exploring and thinking (integrated, holistic learning)
Make less use of workbooks - See the podcast on workbooks by Sue Dockett in the *Examples and Ideas for Practice* section of the Transitions pillar of the *Aistear Siolta* Practice Guide: http://aistearsiolta.ie/en/Transitions/
Group 4: Including the voice of children
Asking this year's group of junior infants what it felt like coming to school - things they really liked and things that they found difficult. Children could provide visual representations of what their first day in school was like and talk about that. Adult to scribe. (This activity to be repeated in September with the new intake of children from the preschool.)
Asking children in older classes what they would like to tell the incoming group of children – gives child perspective on what school is like and what children need to know about it.
Having older children visit the preschool to tell children what school will be like.
Getting feedback from children on the child section of the reporting template.
Group 5: Working in partnership with parents
Find out about family and parents' aspirations for their children (see Dockett and Perry, 2014, pages 53 and 57 for ideas)
Have an open-door policy where parents feel welcome and their input is respected and valued, give parents opportunity to share information. Support parents, understanding that they may find the transition process difficult.
Explain the role of the HSCL teacher (see Dockett and Perry, 2014, page 21 for ideas on linking to the community)

Have the HSCL teacher visit the settings in lieu of a teacher if they are yet to be assigned, or have them visit along with the teacher. Make sure the HSCL is around for children and for parents for the first few days of class in September.
Have a Parent info session in late September/early October to tell parents about curriculum and how their children are getting on and/or phone parents to let them know how school feels child is getting on and asking parents for their views, particularly for parents that don't visit school regularly.
Develop a variety of ways to deliberately engage with parents during the first year of school so they develop a sense of belonging to the school community - having a coffee morning during the first week, inviting parents to help with *Aistear* during the year, inviting paretns to visit, to bring in a pet, share a skill or talk about their culture, going on trips, setting up an Irish class for parents of children in Irish medium-schools (if they don't speak Irish themselves) etc.
Ask parents for feedback on transition process in the school (use page 27 for ideas)
For Irish medium primary schools, provide information about immersion education (especially in the first two years – if they choose to leave English until later on), provide tip sheets and advice on how to support the Irish language at home
Group 6[9]: Special educational needs
Use ideas from 'A new transitions and school setting for Martin' (Dockett and Perry, 2014, p. 38) to support a child with SEN in your setting.
Use ideas from 'We found out so much' (Dockett and Perry, 2014, p. 50) to help a child with SEN with the transition to school.
Use ideas from 'Transition with Special Needs' (Dockett and Perry, 2014, p. 64) to support children with SEN
Work with parents and school to ensure resources and support are in place for children with SEN.

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[9] This group is relevant for settings who have children with SEN moving to school

Joint activities – preschool and primary schools (all activities to be undertaken)

Activity	Name of preschool and school
Working together to build a better understanding of each other's curriculum in order to promote continuity of learning for children (see Dockett and Perry, 2014, p 74 for ideas). Reciprocal visits etc. See 'The pedagogical chat' p 77 for ideas about sharing portfolios and learning stories. Sharing of learning portfolios/curriculum floor books – children to talk to the teacher about them	**ALL preschools and schools**
Joint parent information session. Put together Starter pack for parents – explains the transition process, how the information on their child is used, include practical ideas like the NCCA tip sheets, information on Irish immersion education, ideas for parents of children who are learning English as an additional language etc.	**ALL preschools and school**
Share the complete reporting with parents	**All preschools**
Gather feedback from parents on filling in the parent section and also on the information in the completed templates.	**All preschools**
Feeding back to preschools and NCCA on how they used the info in the templates, and keeping in contact during the early part of the term.	**All schools and preschools**

Appendix 3: Guidance on generating reports
<u>DRAFT</u>

Part of the *Preschool to primary school initiative 2017* involved trying out draft templates to create reports to be shared with parents and junior infant teachers. It's a balancing act to do justice to a child's learning and development while keeping information brief and relevant for a teacher. Put yourself in the teacher's position: *what information do I need in order to support each child coming in to my classroom*?

The reports generated through the draft templates will, hopefully, provide this information by framing the child's dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding under the four themes of *Aistear* and linking them to the subjects of the primary school curriculum. It is important to base the information about a child on evidence – can you back up what you are saying with photos, observations or notes? The reports use a strengths-based approach which includes the child's strengths and interests as well as areas where he/she might benefit from extra support.

<u>There are two different draft reporting templates—A and B.</u> The child and family parts are the same in both templates while the practitioner part is different. Feedback, suggestions and evaluations at the end of the initiative will guide decisions on which template A or B should be finalised for transferring information on children's learning between preschools and primary schools. You will be asked for feedback related to the following areas:

Accessibility of the templates – are the statements / prompts / directions easily understood? Does the language register need to be reviewed? Would supporting material be helpful? If so, what types of material?

Usability – how easy are the templates to complete by practitioners / parents / children? How useful is the information recorded in the templates, to teachers in helping them to prepare for the arrival of the new junior infants?

Manageability – how manageable are the templates? How long does it take to complete the templates for an individual child? What challenges, if any, are there for practitioners in overseeing the completion of the child and family parts?

In order to answer these questions practitioners are asked to use both templates. Use Template A for half of the children and Template B for the other half. This will give the junior infant teacher experience of using the information from both A and B and allow them to compare the usefulness of both.

Draft Reporting Templates A and B

Part 1

The first page looks for the child's background information and the name of the school the child is going to.

Child's name:	
Date of birth:	
Gender:	
Name and address of primary school child is moving to:	

Preschool name and address:	Contact telephone number:
Contact person:	Date:

The second page is a summary of the child's learning and development and <u>is only filled in when the rest of Part 1 has been completed.</u> As the reports use a strengths-based approach the summary includes the child's strengths and interests as well as areas where he/she might benefit from extra support. In this part, summarise the key strengths and interests of the child based on the information in the rest of the report. *What does the child like doing? Has the child particular interests that could help them settle in and learn in school - dinosaurs, farming, rockets?* It is also a summary of activities the child finds challenging, avoids or has difficulty with. It is important to give a full picture of a child's learning and this part is an opportunity to refer to an area(s) where he/she may be experiencing difficulties. Mention strategies you have found to help the child, for example, if a child finds transitions

hard, does singing a song help? For a child who finds it hard to listen to the story, does giving a prop related to the story help to hold his/her attention.

Summary of the child's learning and development[2]	
Summary of child's strengths and interests	Key information for the new teacher (*strategies that you found helpful in supporting the child's learning and development*)
Summary of activities the child currently finds challenging, avoids or has difficulty with	Key information for the new teacher (*strategies that you found helpful in supporting the child's learning and development*)

Part 1: The child's learning and development (Practitioner part)

This is the only part in Templates A and B that uses a different format. However, both Templates make connections to the four themes of *Aistear - Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating* and *Exploring and Thinking* and the curriculum areas of the primary school curriculum *(Mathematics, Language, Social, environmental and scientific education, Arts education, Physical education and Social, personal and health education).* This creates a link between the child's experiences in preschool and what they will experience in junior infants.

Template A

In template A you are given four narrative boxes and are asked to describe the child's dispositions[10], values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding in relation to the four themes of *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. The themes are *Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating* and *Exploring* and *Thinking.*

When completing the boxes you should refer to the aims and learning goals of the themes and to the evidence you have gathered during the year on the child's learning and development. In particular, think about the child's

- **Dispositions:** for example, curiosity, concentration, independence, resilience, and perseverance

- **Attitudes and values:** for example, respect for themselves and others, care for the environment, and positive attitudes to learning and to life

- **Skills:** for example, fine and gross motor skills, social skills, problem-solving skills

- **Knowledge and understanding:** for example, classifying objects using colour and size, learning 'rules' for interacting with others, finding out about people in their community, and understanding that words have meaning

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[10] A disposition is the tendency to respond to situations in characteristic ways. It is a pattern of behaviour shown frequently by the child, e.g., curiosity, independence, perseverance, resilience.

Describe the child's dispositions[4], values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding in relation to the four themes of Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework – Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating and Exploring and Thinking.

Aistear's theme of ***Well-being*** is about children being confident, happy and healthy. While the whole primary school curriculum is concerned with a child's well-being, this theme links particularly to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Arts Education (Visual Arts, Music, Drama), and Physical Education (PE).

Aistear's theme of ***Identity and Belonging*** is about children developing a positive sense of who they are, and feeling that they are valued and respected as part of a family and community. This theme links particularly to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Arts Education (Visual Arts, Music, Drama) and Language (Irish, English) in the primary school curriculum.

This section of the template also includes boxes for the remaining *Aistear* themes of *Communicating* and *Exploring and Thinking*.

Template B

In Template B statements related to each of *Aistear's* themes are used. Tick the most appropriate box for the child in relation to each statement choosing: 'almost *always'* or *'sometimes'* or *'not yet'.* There are examples in brackets but these do not cover the span of the themes; they are just examples to get you thinking. At the end of each theme there is a narrative space for additional comments.

The final page in Part 1 (Templates A and B) looks at the child's attendance and punctuality. These are included to show parents the value in regular attendance and in being on time. Importantly, at the end of this page the parent is asked to give his/her written consent to allow the report to be sent to the primary school. The parent should only be asked to sign this part <u>after</u> the completed part one has been shared with them. Parents should also be given a copy of the completed report.

SAMPLE Section from Template B

Aistear's theme of **Well-being** is about children being confident, happy and healthy. While the whole primary school curriculum is concerned with a child's well-being, this theme links particularly to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Arts Education (Visual arts, Music, Drama) and Physical Education (PE).

	Almost always	Sometimes	Not yet
1. Child is confident. (Makes friends easily, handles day-to-day transitions well, ask questions, <u>can express</u> feelings, can ask for help, is not fearful and can assess risk.)			
2. Child has good physical co-ordination including fine and gross motor skills. (Climbing, running, throwing and catching, pouring, cutting, painting.)			
3. Child is independent and self-reliant. (Able to use the toilet, look after lunch box, put on coat, tidy up.)			
4. Child enjoys being creative. (Exploring paints, playing with open-ended and natural materials.)			
5. Child is generally persistent. (Can take part in activities and can concentrate/stay engaged.)			
6. Child is generally resilient. (Can cope well when things don't go as planned.)			
Additional comments including areas the child enjoys:			

This section of the template also includes sections for the remaining *Aistear* themes.

Part 2: The family part

In March, parents were informed of the initiative and asked for their consent for sharing material with others in the initiative and on the NCCA websites. It was explained that a written report would be shared with the primary school and/or with parents, themselves. The NCCA parents' letter explained that parents and children would have the opportunity to complete parts of the report. Some parents may choose not to fill in the family part; some will be quite happy to complete it themselves while others may need assistance to fill it in. You can offer to help parents complete this part or they can fill it in at home—you know your parents best. The questions focus on how the parent feels about his / her child starting primary school, details parents want to share about their child and giving the teacher direction about what might help the child settle into junior infants.

A joint information session for parents on the transition to primary school is planned for May / June. The structure and purpose of the reports can be explained to parents during this information session. Having a parent who already has a child in primary school share their experiences might also be a useful part of the session.

Part 2: Family part
Name of family member completing this form:
Relationship to child:
How does your child feel about starting school? (*What is he/she looking forward to?*)
How do you feel about your child starting school? (*What are your hopes and expectations?*)
What would you like your child's new teacher to know about him/her? (*What are your child's interests, strengths? Are there areas that you are worried about?*)

Part 3: The child part

This should only be completed if the child gives his/her assent that they are happy to participate and to share information with their new teacher. A box on the child part page needs to be ticked showing whether or not the child gives his/her assent. Some discussion and transition activities could be done with children as part of the preparation for leaving preschool and this will help children to think about things they might like to share with their new teacher. This can be completed at home and/or in preschool. The start of this part includes the child's name and age. There is space to include the name of two friends who will be transferring to the same school with them.

When completing the child's input the adult needs to talk to the child about what they would like to do when starting junior infants. Depending on the child's preference, the adult could scribe what he/she says, they could annotate pictures (write a description of the child's picture) or the child could include drawings about things they like and things they want to do in school. There is also space for a self-portrait. It is important to ensure that there are skin-coloured crayons/colouring tools available in a variety of skin tones to reflect all children in the setting for this.

Child assent received for completing this part of the template (i.e. child is happy to do the activity and to share the material with the teacher)	
Yes	
No	

My name is

I am   years old.

Friends starting school with me are:

1.

2.

Things I want my new teacher to know about me (*Prompts – Thing I like to do in preschool…, How I feel when I think about going to school…, Things I want to do when I go to school…*).
The child may respond with drawings or an adult can act as scribe for the child.

Conclusion

Completing all the parts of the report will ensure the junior infant teacher gets a comprehensive picture of each child's learning and development as he/she starts on their journey in primary school.

Appendix 4: Ideas for teachers on how to use the information in the reports
<u>**DRAFT**</u>

The completed reports from children, parents and practitioners, along with meeting the preschool practitioner have provided you with a lot of information. But how do you now use it? The reports will help you learn about each child's strengths and challenges, as they make the transition from preschool to primary school. Using this information will help you to support children to learn and develop in a way that best suits them. The reports will help you to understand the uniqueness of each child - their strengths, interests, temperament, the things they find challenging and their preferred modes of expression and learning.

This key information gives you insights in to each child before they enter your classroom, enabling you to plan a curriculum which builds on each child's previous learning; especially useful in those first few weeks of junior infants. Outlined below is a taster of some of the information that has been provided in the reports and examples of how you might use it.

Part 1: The child's learning and development

Part 1: the practitioner part including the summary, outlines the child's **strengths and interests** as well as where he/she might benefit from extra support. **Strategies** are included which the preschool practitioner found helpful to the child. The following examples are taken from the reports generated by practitioners and show the strategies used by the preschool and also other ways you might use the information in the reports in your classroom. The first two columns use direct quotes from children's reports in the initiative.

Providing resources and experiences linked to children's interests

Child's strengths and interests	Strategies preschool used	Other ways you might you use this information
Alex has a big interest in all kinds of machinery.	Chat lots about tractors/ machinery. Talk to him about the pictures he draws. Ask him to bring in some of his different tractors and talk to the group.	Have some books and jigsaws about farm animals and machinery on the first day and the small world play area should include farm animals and machinery. Make links between the concepts being taught and Alex's interests. Many aspects of literacy and numeracy could potentially be taught through Alex's interests in machinery. For example, the number of tyres on the tractor, how to sort the sheep from the cattle.
Dara has excelled in preschool. He has autism and particularly enjoys construction and knowing what is coming next.	Always have construction materials available especially when he gets upset. We use visuals to help Dara follow the daily routine.	Show Dara the range of construction materials available in the classroom and use visuals to outline the timetable of each day.
Diane is very creative and imaginative and produces remarkable art work.	Providing various writing and art materials to promote her creative side. We scribe what she says about her creations and take photos of them as many of them are made with stone and twigs and can't be kept.	Provide opportunities and choice for Diane to use a range of media from day one such as clay, construction materials, fabric and natural materials like stone and bark. Take photos and ask her to describe her creations and write these down.
Sam likes to play on his own and loves nature. He is especially fond of spiders, snails and insects.	Having pictures and books on insects and containers for collecting materials and insects outdoors.	On the first day, have books about nature available. Also in the first week bring Sam and his peers outside to look and observe at what

		nature is around them. Encourage Sam to share his interest with another child or small group to help him make new friendships.
Groupings – classroom organisation		
Ben tends to be happier in a small group. He can be shy in a bigger group.	Ben sits beside his best friend most of the time as this helps him to feel more confident.	Look at the Child Part of Ben's report and find out who his friends are and make sure he can sit near them in the first few weeks. Make sure Ben gets to do activities in small groups not large groups.
Resources in the play environment		
Megan loves role play and pretend play. She loves to use all her different voices and has a wide vocabulary.	We create opportunities for role play and ask her for suggestions for play ideas.	Make sure there are lots of opportunities for pretend play during those first few weeks. Ask Megan to suggest play ideas. Encourage her to talk to other children and to recite nursery rhymes and tell stories so that they can learn from her.
Time for child-led play indoors and outdoors		
Seán loves play and this is where he really comes out of his shell.	Provided lots of opportunities for Sean to play with his friends in pairs and small groups as it takes a while for him to come out of his shell. He is nervous outside so lots of encouragement about going outdoors is needed.	Provide extended periods of time for Seán to play in class. Extra vigilance is needed to make sure Seán is comfortable in the playground as it may be quite a scary place for him.
Mary loves the outdoors much more than being indoors.	We move as many activities as we can outside whenever weather permits and go outside everyday despite the weather as we have waterproofs and wellies. Mary would really benefit from outside play. You may notice that when she is outside she will take part in	In September, think about moving some of the activities such as reading stories, Physical Education, pretend play or playing with sand and water outdoors. Also, organise a nature walk at least once a week throughout the year to

	activities more enthusiastically and show greater confidence in the outdoor environment than inside.	collect leaves, learn about the seasons etc.
Activities/tasks the child finds challenging	**Strategies preschool used**	**Other ways you might you use this information**
Fostering positive dispositions and differentiating learning		
Anya has a shy disposition; making it difficult for her to mix with her peers.	Getting her doing little jobs or sitting near her to show support.	Check who Anya's friends are in the Child Part of the report. Also, see if the Parent Part gives any ideas on how to help Anya settle in. Having a comfort item from home like a teddy bear or a photo of her family might be useful. Tell her that you understand she might be finding the transition hard so tell her you are there to help her and locate some story books about being shy, making friends.
Joe finds new environments and change a challenge. He also needs reminding about going to the toilet.	Routine and consistency are good for Joe and helps him settle if he knows what to expect.	Make sure from day one that Joe has a sense of what the day will be like, where the toilets are located, when lunch will be and when he will be going home. A personal visual might be useful with toilet break included.
Tara finds it difficult to take turns.	We explain to Tara when it will be her turn and have a rota for who does jobs. We also play turn-taking games with Tara.	Use rotas so that everyone in the group gets a chance to do different activities. Provide sufficient materials so the children don't have to wait too long. Use an egg timer for things that have to be shared and make Tara aware of when her turn to do something will be. Plan lots of activities where Tara practices turn-taking but be patient as you know this is hard for her.

Colm finds it difficult to separate from his mum in the mornings.	Giving him a job tends to distract him and also reassure that mum will be coming back soon.	You know Colm is probably going to find the transition hard so chat with his parents in advance to see how this can be managed.
Nicola tends to give up easily and finds it difficult to remain at a task if she is having difficulties.		Find opportunities to affirm Nicola so that she will persevere with challenging activities and tasks. This can make the difference between an enjoyable learning experience and a disappointing or frustrating one. When she is finished an activity, it would be a good idea to draw attention to what she has done or created.

Time and transitions

Josh takes a bit longer than average to complete tasks and gets upset if he has to leave things unfinished.	Give lots of warnings about moving on to the next activity.	Make sure Josh is given plenty of time to complete activities. Allow him to stay on task as others move on to other things if possible.
Lily is a very slow eater.	Lily can stay on to finish her food while other children move on to different things.	Make sure you provide Lily with enough time to eat her lunch.
Leo finds it really hard to move from one activity to the next. He just doesn't like transitions.	We have cut down the number of transitions we have throughout the day and this has really helped Leo and a number of the other children. When we looked at our daily routine we realised that we had way too many transitions.	Keep transitions throughout the day to a minimum and flag transitions well in advance.

Groupings

Tom avoids interacting and playing with his peers.	Organising group activities encourages him to participate. He likes to be with adults.	Keep a special eye on Tom during the first few days. Make sure to check in with mum/day to see how he is settling in. Allow him to sit near you and find out if there is any special toy or comfort item he would like to bring in from home. Look at the child part of his report and see if there are one or two children that you

		could buddy Tom up with to help him start to make friends.
Alan finds it hard to listen to stories in a large group.	Finding props that Alan can mind can be of benefit. We also stopped reading in the large group and now do stories with smaller groups. This works better for all the children. They can ask questions and interact more in the story.	Have props to support the stories you are going to read and make sure Alan sits near you for story time. Think about reading stories to small groups rather than the whole class.
Shawna is very gentle and tends not to like noisy play. She is very nervous outdoors.	We encourage her to take part in games which are less noisy for example playing with her friends in the home play area.	Explain to Shawna that the playground might be noisy and ensure there is an area that she can go to if she is finding it overwhelming.
Peter shuts down when upset.	Keep the lines of communication open and you can help better if you know what's happening/ wrong	Get down to his level and make eye contact when Peter is getting upset. Try and find out more about what makes Peter shut down.
Need for one-to-one support		
Luke's concentration can vary and he gives up easily. He often needs adult prompting to complete a task.	One of us tries to sit beside Luke at different stages though out the day to help extend his perseverance.	Luke may benefit from one-to-one interactions and ensuring tasks are broken down. In the rest of the report it would be useful to find out what activities Luke really likes to undertake so that they can be incorporated into the school day.
Joe tends not to participate in group discussions and blushes when asked a question in a group.	We made sure not to ask Joe questions in a group situation but tried to make one-on-one time for him.	Provide opportunities for Joe to speak with one other child or an adult in the classroom. Perhaps avoid pairing him up with a very out-going or dominant child. He may benefit from working with the same child over the first few weeks to build a sense of familiarity and trust. Be sure to praise his efforts.

Language support		
Colm's speech and pronunciation can sometimes make it difficult for him to interact with the other children as they find it hard to understand him.	We worked with the speech therapist to do the different things she suggested.	Find out more about the kinds of activities that were suggested by the speech therapist. Look at Colm's report to see what his interests are and who his friends are. These will be useful in helping him settle. Look too at what the Parent Part of his report says and get in contact with Colm's parents as they will know more about Colm's speech outside of school.
Zita's first language is Polish. Her parents speak a little English. She understands a lot but has little spoken English.	We use lots of non-verbal cues to help Zita – pointing etc. We also use lots of pictures around the room – for the different areas and had a visual daily routine.	Use pictures to label the different areas of the classroom (pretend play area, quiet area, construction area, messy area). Also use a photo to show where the toilet is. Learn a few Polish words like hello, goodbye please thank you. Provide welcome signs in Polish so that Zita's family feel welcome on the first day and encourage them to keep speaking to her in Polish at home.

Part 2: The Family Part

Part 2 of the report focuses on how the parent/s feels about his/her child starting primary school. It also details what parents want to share about the child and gives the teacher ideas about what might help the child settle into junior infants. The following examples are taken from the reports. It is important to read this part carefully, as the parent may have shared some important details about their child that you need to take note of.

What might help your child to settle into junior infants?

"Being patient with him initially for him to learn the task at hand"

"Working in small groups"

"She likes being given responsibilities"

"Being with friends"

"Enjoys working in a group and being given responsibilities"

"He accepts things better if it's explained to him"

What would you like your child's new teacher to know about him / her?

"Alex loves outdoors, farms, machinery, tools, animals. Loves practical activities and learning all about new things. Very inquisitive and good listener"

"She is kind and caring and loves meeting people and making friends"

"He is a bit shy"

"When trying to do things that are difficult for him he sometimes gets frustrated and gives up easily"

"Loves running and sports but also worried about her being shy"

These are important insights for you to think about as the children enter your classroom.

Part 3: The Child Part

This focuses on the child's input and can be completed in the setting or at home. The child has been asked for permission to share the material with the teacher: things they liked doing in preschool, how they feel about going to school and things they want to do when they go to school. This part of the report provides invaluable insights in to the kinds of things children are interested in and it is important that you provide similar experiences for them in junior infants.

Things children like doing in preschool

Playing, and being with friends were the main responses but it's important to see exactly what types of play and what friends are important for the children coming into your classroom. Children talked about building and playing with octons, lego, mobile, blocks and stickle bricks, drawing, painting, making jigsaws, playing with tractors, playing with the sand, singing and making-up rhymes, playing in the kitchen, learning about dinosaurs, dancing and doing gymnastics, choosing own things to play with, being with friends and playing outside, running and going on the bikes.

How children feel about going to school

Most children feel good about going to school but some children are worried about it. You need to look at the reports you have and to see how the children coming into your classroom are feeling about the move. Children said:

I feel good about starting school, I feel happy about going to school, I think it will be different

I feel a bit nervous about going to school, I feel bad about leaving playschool and good about big school, I feel excited, I feel happy to go to big, new school but on the other hand sad to leave nursery where I have made lots of friends and my little brother that I love, I'm worried that I won't know what to do when the teacher talks to me, I'm worried I won't understand, I am not afraid of anything at school 'cause I can do everything. Everybody have to go to school to be wise like parents.

Things children want to do in school

You need to look at the reports you have to see what the children coming into your classroom hope to do. Children said:

I will play with stuff in school, I am going to do homework and play in the yard,

I want to read books, I am looking forward to playing with the sand and the music things

I want to play with everything when I go to big school, I want to play with my friends

I want to play with the blocks and the sand pit, I want to make new friends

I want to play with the bears in the airport (as seen on visit to school), I want to play outside at lunch, I liked playing with the animals in the classroom the day I went to big school

I'm so excited to play outside and to see the fairy doors, Play in the kitchen I saw on the opening morning, I want to learn to write and do colouring.

Conclusion

The reports provide you with individual insights in to each of the children that are coming in to your classroom. Use the information provided by the child, parents and practitioner to organise your classroom, to provide resources and experiences linked to children's interests and to foster the positive learning dispositions they already have. You also know that some children may need extra time to eat their lunch or to complete tasks so especially in those first few weeks keep the timetable flexible. Make sure children are given enough time to complete activities, as the theme of having enough time occurred frequently in the reports. The information in the reports will also assist you in grouping children; you already know who the leaders/helpers in the group are, who are the shyer children and who has English as an additional language. You also have an idea of what children are more likely to be upset on the first morning and what might help them settle, who might need to be reminded about going to the toilet, who finds being in a large group difficult, who will find it hard to adjust to being in the yard, who doesn't like tidying-up, who might need extra support so use all that you have learned to enrich the experience for children and don't forget to feedback to children, parents and the practitioner how useful the information was!

Appendix 5: Parent consent form

For use of videos, photographs and/or materials made by your child for sharing at the professional workshops related to the initiative

What is the Transition from preschool to primary school Initiative?

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), who advises the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to curriculum and assessment for all schools is running a *Transition from preschool to primary school initiative* with a small number of schools and preschools in Tipperary, Laois, Limerick and Galway. The preschool/school your child attends has been chosen to participate.

Name of setting/school: _____

How is our setting involved?

Our preschool/school is part of the *Transition from preschool to primary school initiative* and over the coming months we will be undertaking different activities designed to help your child's transition from preschool to primary school. We will be attending workshops where we can discuss our practice and share good ideas with the other preschools and primary schools in the initiative.

This work will also involve the preschool practitioner completing part of a report template about your child's learning and development to share with his/her new junior infant class teacher. You and your child will also have an opportunity to fill in a section of this reporting template. You will hear more about this during the coming months and no information will be sent until you see it and sign that you are happy for the information to travel to the school. The practitioner and teacher will then have a chat about the information to make sure they use the information to help your child settle in to junior infants.

How will my child's information be used?

As part of the initiative, we may be asked to take photographs, make video clips and/or record what the children are saying and doing as they learn through play and other activities. These may then be shared with practitioners and teachers from the other preschools and schools in the initiative so that they might take ideas from these resources for use in their own work.

We can show you examples of what these materials might look like, for example, it might include the group learning journal that includes photographs and quotes from the children to show what they are learning through the curriculum or it might be a photograph of something your child has built or drawn.

We would be delighted if your child could take part in this initiative aimed at helping with the move to primary school. Not taking part in the initiative does not affect our work with your child. You can choose to withdraw your child from taking part in the initiative at any stage.

Please contact _____ for more information.

Parental consent for materials for the Transition from preschool to primary school Initiative

I understand the purpose of the **Transition from preschool to primary school Initiative.** I give consent to my child _____ (child's full name in block letters) to take part in the initiative.

I understand that my child may be included in photographs, videos and/or audio recordings.

I understand that these materials and his / her learning journals / portfolios may be shared with other practitioners, teachers and NCCA staff taking part in the transition initiative.

Name of Parent/Guardian (Block letters): _____

Signed (Parent/Guardian): _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

Please complete this consent form and return it to

_____ (name of staff member) in

_____

_____ (name and address of service).

Thank you for allowing your child to be involved in this important work.

Appendix 6: Child assent form to participate in video recording and sharing of drawings

Preschool to Primary School
Transition Initiative

ASSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN

Child's name		
Primary school		
Parent's consent given	Yes	No

I am happy to talk about school and preschool.	🙂 🙁
I am happy to be video recorded.	🙂 🙁
I know that I can go back to my group at any time.	🙂 🙁
You can tell what I said in your report, but do not give my name or school.	🙂 🙁
You can use my pictures in your report.	🙂 🙁

Thank you very much