

Managing KS3/4 Transition

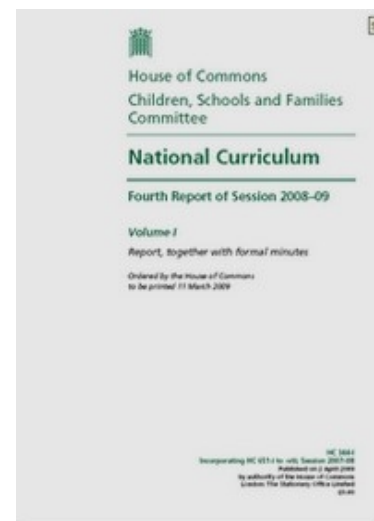
It has been reported that pupils perceived the content being delivered at Key Stages 2 to 5 as being very similar; coasts and rivers, for example, were 'appearing' at each of the key stages albeit in slightly different formats. This then fuelled the debate about the relevance of the content for pupils, as their perceptions were often that the work being undertaken was 'more of the same'.

Research with teachers suggests that geography is successful in competing with other subjects when it is relevant, topical, up to date, reflects the cutting edge of the subject, fun and interesting. Fieldwork is always cited as a vital element of geography by both teachers and pupils. Geography seems less successful where the pupils' experience of geography lacks progression or variety, and where pupils find it uninteresting or irrelevant.

Pupil voice is incredibly powerful and can be used effectively at the point of transition. However, this Government report from April 2009 shows that its effectiveness is not always recognised by everyone:

'In view of such an approach to curriculum review and reform it is not surprising that Ofsted continues to comment on the failure to improve pupils' transition from one Key Stage to the next, especially from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. We suggest that this practice stems from a failure to address the National Curriculum from the learner's perspective. A prominent strand of recent education policy has been encouraging schools to listen to the views of their pupils on all aspects of school life, particularly on teaching and learning matters. Despite the Department's emphasis on pupil voice in schools, nowhere in the evidence submitted to us did we get a sense that the Department particularly concerns itself with how the National Curriculum is experienced by children and young people. If it had, we suggest, it would have tackled the disjunction that children and young people face in their learning as they move from one phase of education to the next.'

House of Commons (2009)



In addition, Ofsted also state that, 'the quality of much teaching and learning in Key Stage 3 continues to be mediocre, often because secondary schools focus resources and expertise on examination classes, assigning non-specialists to teach at Key Stage 3.'

This issue compounds the difficulties faced by subject leaders and makes the management of staff at the KS3/4 transition point even more challenging. However, it is possible to alleviate these difficulties by offering careful, structured support for non-specialists or, if circumstances allow, by rotating staff or classes so that all KS3 pupils receive an equitable share of specialist subject teaching. The changes offered by the curriculum changes at KS3 offer much scope for the development of a lively, engaging and relevant curriculum. It is equally important that KS3/4 transition is not just seen as a Y9 issue - the entire key stage should be structured to allow pupils to become more independent learners, develop their understanding and progress their thinking and expertise as geographers.

Transition can be managed in a variety of ways. Some schools use a system of peer mentors, where Y10 students give advice or help to Y9 geographers. Bridging projects may be established, so easing the movement from KS3 to KS4 and offering cohesion between the end of Y9 and the beginning of Y10. Such plans are often typified by a KS3 curriculum that encourages pupils to take more personal responsibility for their own progress, that develops skills of investigation and research and which gives pupils the opportunity to practice their decision making skills. All of these elements can be consolidated as pupils progress through KS3, so that they become more confident and better prepared for the challenges that lie ahead in KS4.