NCSE PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH PILOT PROGRAMME

SCHOOL RESEARCH SUMMARY

School name: Ransboro National School Sligo

Practising teacher leads: Siobhan Buckley and Caroline Hynes

Research theme: Exploring the Impact of a Specifically Developed Transition Programme for Children with Additional Needs into a Special Class within a Mainstream School.

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Research aim:
Transitions represent a critical period in the educational journey of any child, but for children with additional needs, this process can present unique and often heightened challenges. Moving into a special class within a mainstream school from a very familiar preschool/creche environment, involves not only adapting to a new physical environment but also navigating new social, emotional, and educational landscapes. Ensuring this transition is smooth, inclusive, and supportive is vital to the child's emotional well-being, learning outcomes, and long-term success in the school environment.

We explored the impact of a structured transition programme specifically developed for our children with additional needs coming from a preschool/creche environment and entering a special class in a mainstream primary school. We looked at what we felt were the key components that contribute to a successful transition. These were identified by semi structured interviews and questionnaires completed by parents, special class teachers, preschool/creche staff and children.

We placed emphasis on the role of building positive relationships, ensuring there was clear communication between all the stakeholders. Building trust was key to what we were trying to achieve. By developing the transition programme, we wanted to build an environment where the children were relaxed, secure and were ready to learn.

Methods

A mixed-method research design was implemented to include qualitative and quantitative data collection. Participants included 10 parents, 2 Special Class Teachers, 10 preschool staff and 2 children.

Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with parents, special class teachers and preschool/creche staff and children to gather qualitative data on their experiences, expectations, and views of the transition process.

Questionnaires were distributed to all participants to collect quantitative and qualitative data on their understanding of effective transition practices, perceived outcomes, and areas for improvement.

Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection, with all participants providing informed consent.

Research Findings

Positive Relationships as a Foundation

Across all stakeholder groups, the development of positive, trusting relationships emerged as a key determinant of a successful transition. Parents expressed appreciation for the consistent presence of key adults and noted their children's increased sense of security as a result. Staff emphasised the importance of building rapport not only with the child but with the family.

Communication

Clear, consistent, and open communication between school, preschool/creche and home was mentioned by parents as essential. Parents commented that it was 'Lovely to be contacted by the school who want to engage with us and our child instead of our experience of always chasing up people to try and get support'.

Trust and Emotional Safety

Building trust between parents, school, preschool/creche and children was viewed as the foundation of the successful programme. Parents reported initial anxieties about the transition process but noted that early engagement and transparency from staff helped alleviate these fears. In turn, children were observed to display increased confidence and emotional regulation as the number of visits and interaction with the school staff increased.

Child-Centred Approaches Lead to Comfort and Engagement

Children were described as more relaxed, comfortable, and engaged when they felt emotionally safe and understood. Familiarisation visits with preschool/creche staff, with families, with teachers, transition booklets and video priming were found to be particularly effective in reducing stress and building confidence.
We tailored the transition for each child, rather than using a one-size-fits-all model.

Impact of our research

Our research highlights the critical role of preparation, collaboration, and relationship-building in successful transitions for children with additional needs. A thoughtfully designed transition programme not only supports the academic integration of these students but also lays a strong foundation for emotional resilience and long-term success in a mainstream school context.

The programme facilitated strong, trusting relationships between students, parents, and school staff through early engagement and ongoing collaboration. Clear, consistent communication both formal and informal was instrumental in promoting transparency and reducing anxiety among families and students. As a result, children entering the special class setting displayed greater emotional regulation, comfort, and engagement in classroom activities.

Our work on this project shows us that effective transition planning which was grounded in building strong relationships, trust and inclusive practices, fosters a positive and supportive environment in which children with additional needs can thrive. The very positive impact this had on the children and their families showed us the importance of prioritising emotional security, relationship-building, and collaboration between school, preschool/creche, parents and children during school transitions, particularly within inclusive education settings. We feel that the value of listening to everyone's voice in designing and implementing transition supports emphasises the vital role of relationship building, listening to everyone's voice and trust in inclusive education.

Our transition programme was very successful and parents and preschool/creche staff were very happy with the process and felt that having a voice in creating the programme was very beneficial to them personally and to the children. The children's transition to school has been very positive. The children have been relaxed, confident and engaged in their new setting.