

St. Colman's Primary School



Annaclone

**Primary 6 & 7 Wellbeing:
An Emotionally Healthy
Approach to Transfer
Preparation.**

For Parents, Carers & Pupils of St. Colman's Primary School (Annaclone)

WHY IS PRIMARY 6/7 WELLBEING IMPORTANT?

It is widely understood that positive health and wellbeing - including mental health - contribute to a child's ability to flourish, thrive and achieve (Public Health England, 2014), and equipping children with the skills to enhance their resilience against adversity will enable them to navigate challenges without compromising performance.

The phrase "Eleven plus or TRANSFER" can be a trigger for stress in teachers, parents and children all over the country. Opinion is divided over GL/AQE transfer tests but it is still vital that Primary 6 & 7 pupils are able to navigate their workload without experiencing undue stress or anxiety.

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

It starts with a whole school approach to mental and emotional wellbeing, from the foundation years right through to Primary 7. This doesn't mean talking about transfer from Primary 1, but rather teaching positive coping skills on how to communicate how you feel and how to manage when you encounter something difficult or upsetting. By making space to talk about these things it not only gives children 'permission' to express how they feel, but helps them to understand that emotions are global experiences common to everyone, which helps counter worries of being 'different' or 'ashamed'.

LANGUAGE.....

The language we use to communicate with children about the transfer can have a powerful impact on how they're later approached. The concept of 'pass' or 'fail' for Primary 6s is quite hard to digest and communicates that there are only two possible outcomes. No child likes to fail, and having a fear of failure may actually discourage them from engaging, rather than inspiring them to work hard to do well.

Emphasise that everyone will get different results, as it's an individual experience.

Frame the transfer as assessments to see how much has been understood in only two curriculum areas. It does not give a broad nor balanced assessment. - this also takes away the emphasis that it's only P 6 input that counts.

The most positive thing you can contribute to your child's wellbeing during 2017 or at any time is to talk to them, reassure them, and where possible, provide a relaxed home environment.

ENVIRONMENT

Children and primary schools are often a noisy combination, and so exam conditions can be incredibly alien at this age. Children are suddenly being asked to sit for prolonged periods in total silence, with no external stimulation from others. If they're used to concentrating with a backdrop of noise and movement then they're unlikely (at first) to produce their best work in silence. In the early stages 'walking and talking' together through the work is essential.

Teach children how to manage silence, prepare them for the exam hall, and equip them with the skills to remain calm.

Create times and spaces that are tranquil and technology free.

Start early. Not by mimicking exam conditions, but by having quiet times of day when talking and movement are kept to a minimum. (Saturday or Sunday mornings?)

Introduce mindfulness techniques (see the Mindfulness in Schools project) and encourage the children to practice mindfulness at bedtime or when they feel worried.

CREATIVE APPROACHES TO LEARNING

The children will know that the transfer is on the horizon in Primary 7, and it's possible to teach them all they need to know without constant reminders. The more children hear the 'transfer' word, the more likely they are to develop anxiety around having to do it. This isn't the case for every child but be very conscious that moods and attitudes will ebb & flow throughout the year.

Avoid talking about transfer until well into the Spring Term - this doesn't mean you're not still teaching them what they need to know. Maintain a normal routine for your child in both P6 and 7. Sport, music, friends and youth club - if they enjoy it, they'll need it more than ever come autumn.

"The two days before sitting the transfer and receiving our result this year were brilliant because our teacher knew we needed to relax and take our minds off things. That meant I didn't go home with a full head worrying about the next day. Some went to a quiz, some went to football and others even had a party!" P7 student (February 2017)

SUMMER OF P6 AND AUTUMN OF P7 BEFORE TRANSFER

Model calmness and positivity- if the children can see how much you may be dreading the test, they're going to follow suit.

Reassure children that the outcome of the transfer is not an indicator of what they may go on to do later in life. This can't be over-empathised enough.

Reinforce how proud you are of their efforts, and that effort is more important than outcome.

Explain what free time they'll have after the test, and how the weekend will run once they leave The Sacred Heart (which will be the test centre) - don't underestimate what an incentive this may be for some!

Discuss coping strategies - what's a good thing to do if they feel anxious or worried? Why can anxiety be a good thing and how can we learn from it?

Acknowledge if there's anything negative in the media about the transfer and help them to unpick it. Children are exposed to headlines in a number of settings from online, newspapers on the kitchen table or what they see in newsagents and supermarkets - so don't assume they're ignorant to media coverage.

Remind pupils they have already taken standardised GL Tests in Primary 3,4,5 & 6 already. It is likely they will not remember but for those that do it may ease their concerns.

Visit The Sacred Heart on the pupil orientation night. The child can never feel too familiar in this environment. Encourage them to talk through the process with children in their class and from previous years.

What can I do as a parent / carer?

- Attend any meetings the school holds about the transfer.
- Direct any questions or concerns you have about the transfer to myself or your child's teacher, rather than worry your child with them.
- Give your child opportunities to go outside and avoid overuse of screens - this can apply to leisure pursuits as well as how they study.
- Try to provide a quiet corner of the house for homework and study, that's as free from distractions as possible.
- Encourage your child to talk to their teacher or another adult they trust if they express persisting anxieties

Remember that a small amount of anxiety is normal and not harmful.

- If your child is unwilling to talk to their teacher, talk to them yourself.
- Plan something nice and fun for the weekends before and after transfer - this will help your child start the week well and also give them something to look forward to.
- Ensure your child is eating and drinking well, and getting a suitable amount of sleep.

REMEMBER THIS ABOUT THE TRANSFER

The Transfer will focus on what they know about Maths and English. They won't reflect how talented they are at Science, Geography, Art or PE, and *they certainly won't highlight positive personal characteristics such as kindness and integrity.* (SADLY)

In reality it's just two papers lasting 45-50 minutes. You can't emphasise enough the importance of keeping that in perspective!

It would be unnatural for the transfer not to induce a certain degree of worry or anxiety but there is, of course, a tipping point.

The Transfer should not:

- affect a child's appetite
- affect a child's ability to sleep
- alter a child's personality
- induce panic, tears or disengagement from lessons
- be a reason not to attend school

If any of the above are evident, then the transfer may be causing an excessive degree of anxiety and you may benefit from speaking directly to myself or your child's teacher. Parents also provide an invaluable network during this time. It is important that you know you are not alone and can talk to someone who cares.

This isn't about removing the reality of the transfer, but rather equipping your 10 or 11 year old child to cope with the situation and be stronger for it.

Talk to the school

Is your child showing the same symptoms at school as they are at home? Is there anything else going on at home which may be contributing to your child's overall level of stress? Work with the school so everyone concerned can be offering the support that's needed.

Spend time with your child

Try to understand what aspect of the transfer concerns them most. Is it the worry of 'failing'? Is it the worry of getting stuck on a paper? If your child can

pinpoint what's bothering them most, you can take specific steps to help reassure them.

Try not to project your own anxieties or views on the Transfer

If you don't believe in the transfer, or do not think your child should be doing them, then neither will they.

Confront any media coverage

Show clippings if there's been anything negative and ask them to talk about what they have seen and how they feel. Reinforce the reality.

Encourage your child to talk to their teacher

We are in their corner. The whole way!

Children are very resilient and, with support from you and the school, most will have a very positive experience of the transfer.
Good luck!