

Cross European Project to develop a model of support for transitions from preschool to primary school with parental involvement (PSPS)

International Research Report 01

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Research context

The Preschool to Primary School (PSPS) Erasmus+ funded project brings together partners from Ireland, the UK*, Bulgaria and across Europe. The project aims to support the transition from preschool to school, particularly for vulnerable and hard to reach groups by developing training materials for primary school teachers, Early Years practitioners and parents.

The transnational project partners comprise of:

- **European Parents Association**

EPA is the only EU-level organisation representing parents as a stakeholder group in education. It has over 40 member organisations with representation in most EU member countries as well as some non-EU countries. It aims to support and represent parents as key to their children's education and to support high quality education.

- **Marie Curie Association (Bulgaria)**

The Marie Curie Association is a non-profit NGO, active since 1998. Its mission is to help people with disabilities live independently through education, training and employment opportunities and many other activities. The organisation also focuses on early intervention which is crucial for child development, especially for children with disabilities.

- **PEIN (Ireland - project lead)**

The Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN) is hosted by Northside Partnership. It is a network of evidence-based practice, advocacy and research organisations across the Republic of Ireland that share a commitment to improving outcomes for children, young people, and their communities.

* The Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University (UK) were originally transnational partners in the project. While LBU had to withdraw from the PSPS project due to unforeseen circumstances, this scoping paper and subsequent intellectual outputs still include UK data and analysis, for both comparative and collaborative purposes.

1. Aims of this report

Smooth and successful transitions from preschool to primary school are of paramount importance in shaping children's learning and educational journeys. The transition process itself is shaped by a range of factors, including national policies, education systems, preschool structures, common practices, and support mechanisms. Understanding the similarities and differences in how these elements are addressed in different countries is crucial for educators, policymakers, and parents to ensure effective transitions that promote optimal learning outcomes and holistic development.

This report explores children's transitions from preschool to primary school in Ireland, Bulgaria, Estonia (as an EPA member country spotlight) and the UK. By examining the national policies, education systems, preschool structures, and transition support mechanisms in these countries, it seeks to identify key approaches, strategies, and best practices that contribute to successful transitions and inform educational stakeholders.

The transnational research for this paper subsequently informed the development of resources and training to support parents, Early Years practitioners and teachers to plan and manage young children's transitions from preschool to primary school. Essentially, by providing the relevant adults with more knowledge and an accessible toolkit on supporting transitions, we aim to provide young children with positive and meaningful transition experiences. After all, these are the formative experiences that have a lifelong impact.

2. Transitions in a research context

What is transition?

Children will experience multiple changes during their lives at school but the initial transition to full-time compulsory schooling is seen as potentially the most important in terms of both immediate and later social and academic outcomes (Heckman 2013; Melhuish et al. 2015). It is also likely to be the most emotionally charged transition that children make.

Transition involves moving from one provision or setting to another, and should be seen as a process, not a single event. School entry is important to children, a sign of maturity, and marks a key change in identity to 'school pupil' which will be theirs for the next 10 years or more. Fabian (2002) describes three 'discontinuities' children encounter in the transition to school: physical, social and philosophical. Physical discontinuities or changes include differences in classroom layout and size compared to their preschool setting, in facilities such as toilets, in furniture, lighting and resources. Social discontinuities include making friends, mixing with a larger and possibly more disparate group, learning social rules and routines, and learning the language and expectations of school. Philosophical discontinuities reflect a change in pedagogy and expectations with a greater focus on a fixed timetable and formal 'work' rather than play. According to Fabian and Dunlop (2002, p.87):

"Each of these (transition) experiences is likely to affect children and their capacity to adjust and

learn. Such is the significance of early transitions for young children that it is essential that parents, educators, policy makers and politicians pay close attention to young children's experiences in order to provide well for them".

While most children are ready for the changes they encounter and are able to adapt and learn the new routines, between 5 and 10% of children find the transition more challenging (Brooker, 2018). Children with Special Education Needs (SEN) are particularly vulnerable to finding settling in difficult (Baker et al., 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2013) especially as they are less likely to attend preschool settings with their peers in mainstream schools (Gilley et al., 2015). Many children will experience some disjunction between the culture of home and of school: even when the same language is spoken in both contexts, there will be differences in experience, knowledge (Brooker, 2002; 2008), social and cultural capital and family funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). This mismatch will be greatest for families who speak a different language, are from minority religious or ethnic communities with different expectations around education, or who have little experience themselves of school or, indeed, negative experiences of schooling themselves.

Who are the stakeholders in transition?

Transition to school is sometimes conceptualised as 'school readiness', involving the child being ready for the intellectual and social challenges of school. However, transition involves a wider range of stakeholders than just the child. Bronfenbrenner's (1988) Ecological Systems Theory and more recently, the Ecological and Dynamic model of Transition (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000) argue that children do not develop in a vacuum; instead, the child's development and transition to school is shaped and influenced by interactions between the child and their family members, the local community, their parents' work, preschool and medical facilities, as well as more distant systems such as the culture and society they are growing up in, local and national laws, and wider events occurring politically and internationally. The transition to school therefore involves the child, their parents and siblings, the school and the preschool setting as stakeholders. Depending on the country, culture, social norms and individual situations, other family members may also be closely involved as well as social services, interpreters and medical services. This means that the views, attitudes and expectations of school staff, preschool staff and parents and family members are all important in ensuring a smooth transition.

Research suggests that children adjust better socially to the transition to school when their parents are confident about the move (Giallo et al., 2008). Cross-cultural interview research suggests that what parents and teachers feel is important for a positive transition experience can differ: Parents see adapting to change, friends and communication as most important, whereas teachers emphasise establishing order and routine with crying seen as a barrier to this (Atkinson & Takriti, 2021; Takriti et al., 2021a, 2021b). Two further key themes that affected how well mothers felt the transition went were how tired their children got, particularly during the first term, and communication between the school and parents (Atkinson & Takriti, 2021).

What advice is there about supporting transitions in the literature?

Academic research about transitions emanates largely from the USA, UK and Australia. This research presents ideas on ensuring successful, positive transitions into compulsory education. Transition programme should begin in the year before the child enters school with strong links established with preschool settings (O'Connor 2018), open days and frequent visits to see the new classroom and meet staff and children (Fabian & Dunlop 2007; Donkin 2014; O'Connor 2018), information sessions (Donkin 2014) and establishing good relationships and communication channels for sharing information between parents or carers, school and preschool (Brooker 2008; O'Connor 2018). O'Connor (2018) stresses the importance of children having a named key worker and getting to know them well before they start in school so that they have time to develop an attachment to them, as well as becoming familiar with the setting and its rules and routines (Dockett and Perry 2002). Some continuity with home in the new setting, such as bringing in a toy as a transitional object (O'Connor 2018) can be emotionally supportive. Making the transition to school with friends (Stanek 2019), either from preschool or from the local community, and being grouped with them in class also contributes to a successful transition and enables children to support each other and further develop their social competencies (Fabian and Dunlop 2007). Once children are starting school, useful strategies include some continuity between preschool and school curriculum and pedagogy (Fabian and Dunlop 2007; Donkin 2014). Shorter days or a flexible start are recommended initially (Fabian and Dunlop 2007; O'Connor 2018), as well as continued good communication (Brooker 2008; O'Connor 2018), listening to children and encouraging their independence (O'Connor 2018).

Dockett, Einarsdottir and Perry (2019) bring together research on children's experiences of transition from Denmark, Chile, Sweden, Iceland, Germany and Portugal but they are not comparing expectations and practices directly across countries. Their overall conclusions emphasise that most children look forward to starting school and that making the transition with friends matters. In addition, because transition activities and events are decided upon by teachers and schools, they advocate listening to children's voices and opinions on transition to inform decisions.

Preschool to primary school transitions in Europe at a glance

The transition from preschool to primary school varies across Europe, with countries adopting diverse models of good practice. While the specifics may differ, several common elements and principles, such as advanced planning and the involvement of parents, contribute to a meaningful transition.

In most European countries, preschools align their curricula with the early stages of primary education, emphasising foundational skills in language, numeracy and social development. This is largely done through play-based activities (i.e. sorting, role play, social stories etc.). There is a critical focus on supporting children to develop and practice their social and emotional skills.

Primary schools provide a structured curriculum that builds upon the skills acquired in preschool, incorporating more defined learning objectives, geared towards academic achievement.

In terms of models of good practice for supporting effective and meaningful transitions, during the

literature review for this research, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands emerged as practice leaders in Europe:

- Finland's transition model is characterised by its play-based continuity and collaboration between educators. The play-based approach does not stop once primary school begins (as it does in many countries) and preschool practitioners and primary school teachers collaborate as standard practice to share insights on each child's developmental progress, ensuring a smooth transition.
- Germany values a structured transition period and educational partnerships. Preschool children gradually spend more time in primary school before their official start. This is facilitated by strong partnerships between preschools and primary schools who collaborate on joint planning and assessment practices.
- Within Europe, the Netherlands is particularly strong in implementing parental involvement programmes around transitions. This is achieved through information workshops, site visits and family-friendly literature. Dutch preschools focus on enhancing social skills, preparing children for the collaborative and social nature of primary education.

The importance and benefits of including parents in the transition process is recognised across Europe, although put into practice to varying degrees. The three countries outlined above highlight three of the most important components of parental involvement:

Information-sharing: This includes information meetings and workshops designed to help parents understand the importance of their child's transition and the expectations of primary school. Open communication channels are established between preschools, primary schools and parents to share information about the child's needs and progress.

Emotional support: Including parents in school visits and introductory events to ease children's anxiety and provide emotional support. Good models also ensure that parents are provided with resources and guides on how to support their child emotionally during the transition.

Continuity of learning: Encouraging and normalising collaboration between parents and teachers to ensure a smooth continuity of learning from preschool to school, and involving parents in their child's learning journey by providing resources and strategies to support learning and play at home

The success of the transition from preschool to primary schools depends on a collaborative approach that brings parent and educators together. Models of good practice prioritise the three components highlighted above. We know from research that countries that actively engage parents in the transition process tend to create a more supportive and seamless educational journey for young children.

As policies and practice evolve, ongoing research and evaluation are essential to refining and improving these transition models. This Erasmus+ funded research project aims to contribute to that growing body of work. The following sections outline transition policy and practices in Ireland, the UK,

Bulgaria and Estonia, thereby providing an overview of how children experience this process in North-Western, Eastern and Northern Europe. For each country, contextual data includes systems and structures (i.e. what preschool and primary school looks like in each country); national government policy and guidance; and local government policies/practice and guidance. Finally, as this research took place during the Covid pandemic, the impact of that pandemic on transitions must also be noted, as an entire cohort of children missed 'normal practice' in terms of their transition experience.

'The transition from preschool to primary school is a critical juncture in a child's educational trajectory, influencing not only academic outcomes but also shaping social and emotional development. Effective support during this transition is pivotal for fostering a seamless continuum of learning and promoting positive adjustment in the new educational environment'.

(O'Kane & Murphy, 2016)

3. Systems and structures across the partner countries and organisations

Bulgaria

The school system in Bulgaria is centralised and it is governed by the Ministry of Education and Science, while its implementation and monitoring is assigned to regional educational inspectorates, subordinated to the Ministry. The exception to these is musical, art or crafts schools which are both under Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture. Although the schools and kindergartens (whether public or private) are independent bodies, their activities follow the same structure and scope as stipulated in the national legislation. The headmasters have the liberty to plan and arrange the education process and to include extra curriculum activities, but the main policy follows an identical model all over the country.

Preschool

Preschool education in Bulgaria includes nurseries (children aged 10 months to 3 years old) and kindergartens (children aged 3 to 6 years old). These institutions operate Monday to Friday, 7am-7pm, but parents can choose to take their children home around lunch time. In public nurseries and kindergartens parents pay only a monthly fee for food, which is fixed by the respective municipality where the nursery or kindergarten is located. Depending on the type of funding they are public, municipal, or private. Private funding is mainly based on fees collected from the parents and covers food, care, tuition, education materials and accommodation.

In Bulgaria, these two education stages are regulated by the *Preschool and School Education Act (Promulgated, State Gazette No. 79/13.10.2015, effective 1.08.2016, last amended 18 September 2020.)* According to it, Preschool education shall be compulsory as from the school year starting in the year in which the child becomes five years of age. As of 2010/2011, two years of *pre-primary education is compulsory* either at kindergarten or in preparatory groups at primary schools. Preschool education for 4-year-old children in Bulgaria will become mandatory by 2023. In practice, the majority of parents prefer to send their children to the kindergartens when the child turns 3. The

compulsory preschool and school education at state-owned and municipal kindergartens and schools shall be free for children and pupils, and the state and local governments shall create conditions to involve all children.

Preschool education lays the foundations for lifelong learning, providing for the physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual, moral, social, emotional and creative development of children, taking into consideration the importance of games in the pedagogical interaction process. The weekly work schedule is balanced by alternating static with dynamic activities (e.g. mathematics with music or Bulgarian language and physical activities) with a smooth transition between them. Everything is thematically linked so that children can learn the material more easily. Preschoolers learn i.e. the names of colours, basic shapes, the body parts, the seasons and months of the year; develop fine motor skills - drawing and colouring, cutting, gluing; throwing and catching balls; construction play, building puzzles, dancing, singing; The preschool curriculum is based on learning through the fun and games - didactic or role play games are usually implemented. Activities related to better understand the concept of time and the order of daily activities etc. Kindergartens and preschool groups provide outdoor games for children of all ages for at least two hours per day for all-day organisation and at least one hour per day for half-day organisation whenever the weather conditions allow. The additional (extracurricular) activities according to the interest of the child are based on the children's choice and fees from the parents are required. These may include, for example, foreign language learning, dancing, martial arts, essentials of benevolence etc. They are held mainly in the afternoon after the end of compulsory classes.

Within 14 days before the end of the school time of the pupils in the preparatory preschool compulsory group, the teacher of the respective group establishes the school readiness of the children who will enter the first grade in the next school year. The child's readiness for school takes into account their physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development. The kindergarten, respectively the school, issues a certificate for compulsory preschool education for the children from the preparatory age groups at the end of their preschool education. In case of disability, impairment or other special need, the certificate may include recommendations to encourage and motivate the child to participate in additional activities and / or to include him / her in extra support for personal development. When the health condition of the child prevents admission to the first grade and the certificate suggests recommendations for the inclusion of additional support for personal development, the beginning of school education for this child may be postponed by one school year under conditions and in the order specified in the state educational standard for inclusive education (2017).

The preschool teachers organise regular individual meetings with parents where the child's development and the transition process from kindergarten to school are explained and discussed. Despite the reforms and modernising of the preschool education system in Bulgaria in the last 5 years, there are still no available official guidelines for teachers or any other type of support for parents and preschool practitioners to guide them through the transition process. Therefore, the full responsibility lays on school principals and teachers who usually arrange different mutual activities involving kindergarten and the school to ensure a swift transition. Some examples of good practices are provided later in this scoping paper.

School

School education in Bulgaria begins at the age of 7. Six-year-olds may also enter school, if their physical and mental development allows for it and after their parents/guardians gave their explicit consent. The transition to primary school is supported by the parent's meetings organised prior to the beginning of the school year, which starts in Bulgaria on September 15th. There is joint practice, with each primary school arranging a minimum of 2 parent meetings to make the parents familiar with the school practice and what their child can expect. The first one is usually initiated and led by the school headmaster and is carried out around 4 months before the start of the school year. The main topics addressed during the meeting are the school routines and forthcoming learning activities, the internal rules and safety measures, the structure of the school curriculum and the compulsory and optional subjects offered. The second parent's meeting is conducted right before the start of the school year. It is led by the designated primary teacher, who welcomes the parents and shows them the classroom. The specific aims of the second meeting are to make parents familiar with the overall organisation of the learning process, the required materials and tools as well as the practicalities, the classes and breaks, school uniforms, the official bank holidays, the calendar of school celebrations and others.

Ordinarily the primary teachers arrange the space in the classroom in a such way to resemble the environment in the kinder garden, thus trying to support children to feel more comfortable and less stressed during their first months at school. This is achieved mainly through thematic posters/ tables placed on the classroom walls. They usually show favourite and familiar images such as animals, the Bulgarian alphabet in a big size, the numbers, and other objects, which help children to feel more at ease in their new environment.

Instruction for the attainment of a primary education degree is provided from grade I to grade VII including in the following two stages: (1) elementary- grades I to IV inclusive and (2) pre-gymnasium - grades V to VII inclusive. Pupils who have completed their studies in grade IV are issued transcripts on the completion of the elementary stage of primary education. Primary education in Bulgaria is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 16. Parents have legal responsibility to secure the school attendance of their child. Education at state-owned schools is free of charge. The curriculum is structured into three components: compulsory, elective, and optional. Subjects fall into the following eight major areas of content: Bulgarian language and literature, foreign languages, mathematics, information technologies, social sciences and civics, natural sciences and ecology, music and art, physical culture and sports. Students from grades 1 through 4 normally spend half a day in school; the other half is dedicated to homework and independent study at home. In elementary school there is an option called *zanimalnya* (extended care) for students to spend the other half of the day in school working on their homework and lessons under the supervision of a teacher assistant.

Ireland

The Irish early years (preschool) and school sectors are managed and administered nationally by two different government ministries - The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Department of Education and Skills.

Preschool

Early childhood education and care services in Ireland are delivered outside the formal education system. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme supports these services for children of preschool age. This optional scheme is offered in both private and community-based early years settings (preschools, Montessori, crèches, *naíonraí* [Irish language preschools], playgroups) for 3 hours a day, 5 days a week, 38 weeks of the year. All children are entitled to 2 full academic years on the ECCE scheme and, as of 2019; there has been an uptake rate of 95% for what is referred to colloquially as ‘the Free Preschool Year’.

There is no set preschool curriculum in Ireland. Instead, planning and practice is supported by two national frameworks – *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (0-6)* and *Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*. *Síolta* focuses on all facets of quality within ECCE settings including learning and development, and *Aistear* helps adults provide appropriately challenging, positive and enjoyable learning experiences for young children. Both place significant emphasis on play as the main focus of preschool care and education.

To work in the early years sector in Ireland, practitioners must hold a minimum qualification of QQI Level 5 Major Award in Early Childhood Care and Education on the National Qualifications Framework. An Annual Early Years Service Profile survey is conducted in Ireland every year. Findings from the 2020/21 survey indicate that there are an estimated 31,600 staff working in the sector of whom 26,197 work directly with children. The average number of staff per Early Years service is 7.2, and 97% of Early Years practitioners hold a Level 5 qualification and higher.

Irish EY services, depending on their funding models, are subject to up to 3 regulatory bodies: *Tusla*, the Child and Family Agency, inspects all early years services for compliance with all childcare legislation; the Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI) is an announced inspection by the Department of Education and Skills to EY services who are providing the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme; and compliance visits are undertaken by *Pobal* (the state’s programme administrator) for all services in receipt of national funding.

Primary school

The compulsory school age in Ireland is 6 and all forms of pre-primary education are optional. However, children from the age of 4 can be enrolled in infant classes in primary schools. Traditionally children in Ireland generally started school in the September following their fourth birthday. However, the introduction of a Second Free Preschool Year in 2016 has increased that starting age for primary school. Currently almost 40% of 4-year-olds and virtually all 5-year-olds attend primary school, where early education is provided in infant classes (known as Junior Infants and Senior Infants).

The primary school curriculum is standardised and is designed across 6 curriculum areas, delivered through 11 subjects. There has been an attempt to make the school curriculum more play based for infant classes through the introduction of one of the early years frameworks (*Aistear*) into teacher training. To date, however, the emphasis on play remains an ‘add on’ to the curriculum rather than an integral component of it.

All primary school teachers in Ireland must hold either a Bachelor of Education degree or a minimum QQI Level 8 degree plus Postgraduate Diploma in Education. Almost 90% of primary school teachers are female.

Responsibility for school improvement rests primarily with the board of management, principal and staff of individual schools and is managed internally through school self-evaluation (SSE). External evaluation takes place through inspection visits from the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills.

While some preschools are co-located on school grounds and share physical space, they have separate governance structures. Relationships and communication between local or co-located preschools and primary schools are not mandated and, subsequently, depend on a variety of factors such as history, personnel, local infrastructure, community norms etc.

The introduction of the ECCE scheme means that children now have access to services that best meet their needs (i.e. special education, language etc.) or the logistical needs of their parents (i.e. proximity to work) which means that not all children attend the nearest service to them. This has largely diminished the concept of 'feeder' preschools, a practice whereby preschools and schools located in close proximity would collaborate to ensure that local children transitioned from one to the other.

Parental engagement practices are subject to the ethos and approach of individual early years services and schools. While some preschools and primary schools, particularly those in areas of disadvantage, collaborate on supporting transitions, others have minimal or no contact with each other. Notably transitions work, and parental engagement do not feature in the regulatory structure for either sector.

Estonia

The European Parents Association (EPA) was founded in 1985 and remains the only EU level organisation representing parents as stakeholders in education. The EPA comprises over 40 member organisations covering EU countries as well as some neighbouring countries (UK, Serbia, and Ukraine). EPA aims to advocate for the active involvement of parents as primary educators throughout their children's education, to support parent associations and individual parents, to support the highest quality of education possible for all children in Europe and to disseminate relevant European information to members. Because it represents parents and parent groups across Europe, EPA cannot contribute national or local government information here. Instead, online surveys of national parent associations were conducted. Their pan-European comparison is particularly useful and informative here. While data was gathered from Lithuania, Estonia and the Republic of Ireland, for comparative analysis, the results of the EPA survey from Estonia are used in this research report.

Preschool

Preschool education in Estonia is an integral part of the country's education system, focusing on early childhood development and preparing children for primary school. Preschool education is available for children aged from 3 to 7 years, although participation is not mandatory. The main goal of

preschool education in Estonia is to support children's holistic development by fostering their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills.

Estonian preschool education emphasises a play-based and child-centred approach, allowing children to explore their interests, develop creativity, and acquire essential skills. The curriculum focuses on language and communication development, pre-mathematical skills, nature and science exploration, music, arts, and physical activities.

Preschool education is provided by a range of providers, including public and private preschools, as well as day-care centres that offer preschool programme. The curriculum is guided by a national framework called "The National Curriculum Framework for Preschool Childcare Institutions," which outlines the goals, content areas, and expected outcomes of preschool education. The curriculum emphasises the importance of individualized approaches, collaboration with parents, and fostering a love for learning.

School

Primary education in Estonia is compulsory and typically begins at the age of 7. It encompasses grades 1 to 9 and aims to develop students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values while nurturing their overall well-being and personal growth.

Primary education in Estonia focuses on providing a learner-centred environment that encourages active student engagement, independent thinking, and collaborative learning. Teaching methods involve a combination of teacher-led instruction, project-based learning, hands-on activities, and individualized approaches to cater to students' diverse learning needs. Assessment in primary schools includes continuous evaluation, feedback, and periodic assessments to monitor students' progress and provide support when needed.

Primary education is primarily provided by public schools, but there are also private schools that follow the national curriculum. The curriculum framework is established by the Ministry of Education and Research and is guided by the "Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act." Primary schools in Estonia prioritise a positive and supportive school climate, cooperation with parents, and the integration of information and communication technologies in teaching and learning.

UK

The UK includes four regional countries with devolved responsibility for education. These are England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Although the school starting age is very similar across the four countries, there are key differences in the provision of Early Years Education and Care, in the school curriculum, in assessment in the primary years, in teacher training and in the nature and control of schools. These factors all affect the transition from preschool settings to school.

Across all four countries, it is common for young children to spend at least part of their week in a setting offering early childhood care and education. Settings include playgroups, day nurseries, nursery schools, nursery classes in primary schools, child minders and family centres. They are

operated by local authorities, private businesses, voluntary organisations or the self-employed (childminders). From the age of 3 years, or 2 years if eligible, families are entitled to a certain number of free hours education and care for their child.

In Scotland, children start school in the August of the calendar year they turn 5, so they are between 4 ½ and 5 ½ years old. National practice guidelines ('Realising the ambition: being me', 2020) are in place from birth into primary education, with the Scottish national curriculum (Curriculum for Excellence) providing a broad general education from 3 years into the secondary years. The overlap between the two sets of guidelines aims to support a smooth transition in learning between preschool settings and primary school. In Wales, children enter school in the school year they turn 5. They follow a Foundation Phase curriculum up until 7 years of age. During the Foundation Phase, children are encouraged to be creative and imaginative and learn by taking part in practical activities. There are plans to extend this further in primary schools. Northern Ireland sets its own curriculum; integrated education is expanding, but most pupils are still taught in either Protestant or Catholic schools. These countries all provide some guidance for schools and parents on the transition to school.

In England, the legal requirement for starting school is the beginning of the school term after a child's fifth birthday. In practice, most children start school at the beginning of the school year in which they turn 5 (September) in a reception class. Before this, children may have attended the school nursery from the age of 3, a private day nursery or been looked after by a childminder or relative. Every child is entitled to a number of free hours per week in a nursery from the age of 3, with some children receiving free nursery hours from the age of 2.

The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum (DfE, 2021a & b) is used in all settings for children from 0-5 years. This sets out what areas of learning should be covered and is built around a play-based curriculum. The statutory framework describes Characteristics of Effective Teaching and Learning (Playing and exploring; Active learning; and Creating and thinking critically) within 7 areas of learning: Communication and language, PSE, physical development, literacy, maths, understanding the world, and expressive arts and design. This is the curriculum children follow in Reception, in their first year in school. Therefore, the transition to Reception may involve a change of physical building, location and staff, but much is likely to be familiar to children. How schools implement the EYFS curriculum however can vary from a play-based pedagogical approach based around the child's interests to a more formal adult-led whole class or group teaching format, with many variations in between. Schools with a nursery may also choose to combine nursery and Reception classes into a Foundation stage class or separate the two age groups physically.

Primary and Secondary education in England is divided into Key Stages. Key Stage 1 is from 5 to 7 years (Years 1 and 2), Key Stage 2 is 7 to 11 years (Year 3-6). Key stages 3 and 4 are secondary school ages. After the Reception year, children move into Year 1 (age 5-6) where the curriculum changes to the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014). This is usually taught as discrete subjects: maths, science and English are core subjects, foundation subjects are art and design, computing, design technology, geography, history, languages, music and physical education. Religious Education and PSHE have to be taught but are outside the National Curriculum. The transition to Key Stage 1 is often harder for children and parents because of the change in curriculum which is usually accompanied by a change in pedagogy as well to a more formal approach with less parental involvement.

4. National government policies and guidance

Bulgaria

Between the ages of 0 – 3 years, early childhood education and care is managed by local authorities and is not part of the State's responsibilities. Between the ages of 3 – 6/7 it becomes part of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and Science. The main priority in the work of the Ministry of Education and Science is the full scope and inclusion of children and students of compulsory preschool and school age in the educational system, as well as ensuring equal access to education for all children and students. Education and training of children in kindergartens is organised and provided in line with the Preschool Education State Standard. Ordinance (number 5, June 3, 2016) by the Minister of Education and Science, determines the state educational standard for preschool education, educational field in which preschool education is carried out, the objectives and content of the educational fields, the requirements for learning outcomes in each field in different age groups, as well as the organisation of activities in preschool education, the requirements for the implementation of a programme system and the mechanism for interaction between the participants in the process of preschool education. According to this bylaw, the process of preschool education is based on the application of a programme as part of the strategy for the development of the kindergarten, which is adopted by a decision of the pedagogical council.

On the basis of the state education standard for the general education, the Minister of Education and Science approves the curricula for each general educational subject by grades, specifying the pupils' competences as the expected results from the instruction. The general education in the primary course should be identical for all types of schools and is acquired through the study of the same general educational subjects with the same number of hours for each of them in accordance with the state education standard for the syllabus. The state, municipal and private kindergartens, and their respective schools, can also apply innovative and author's programme systems. Through the innovative and author's programme systems additional competencies are acquired.

Each kindergarten or school issues its Rules of Procedure, which determines the organisation of the day and the activities, the way of choosing text books, the rights and obligations of the participants in the educational process, the activities organised out of kindergarten or town, cooperation and interaction between parents and kindergarten or school, the content of the children's portfolio, the conditions, and the order for support by the pedagogical specialists for families.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education and Science launched, for the first time in Bulgaria, the development of an early childhood education and care (ECEC) strategy. The reform would include introducing standards for ECEC (related to healthcare, education, early intervention, etc.), support and training for staff working with children aged 0-7 years, developing the system of state services and providing a more flexible approach, with the introduction of alternative forms of care and support. The goals of the National Programme "Development of the Preschool Education System" (as part of the ECEC strategy) are related to efforts, aimed at improving the quality of preschool education, ensuring an equal start before entering school, and creating conditions for optimal physical and personal development of children through the use and implementation of modern didactic materials and

promoting parents' participation in preschool education. The organisation of additional training for children from preparatory groups in state and municipal kindergartens and schools is foreseen for children whose mother tongue is different than Bulgarian and who meet the definition of "child at risk".

Another programme implemented in 2019 is "Together with the Student's Care", which aims to ensure a smooth transition between the kindergarten and the first grade and between the primary and the lower secondary level of primary education. It should support teamwork on planning and conducting joint lessons, as well as the preparation of materials facilitating the transition from kindergarten to school. Module 2 is entitled "Providing conditions for team work between kindergarten teachers and primary education teachers", which is aimed at ensuring smoother transitions between the different stages of education, especially between kindergarten and primary school, and exchange of good practices between pedagogical specialists, to enrich their knowledge about the age characteristics of the students and an adequate reaction and support.

These new programmes introduced in recent years are important step forward towards the efficient support of children and parents in the transition process. Although they are well designed and widely promoted at strategic policy level, their implementation into real practices and schools still remains limited. It is expected that in the forthcoming years the positive impact from the application of such programmes will be more widely spread and recognised in Bulgaria.

Ireland

As previously outlined the responsibility for the early years and education sectors in Ireland lie with two separate government departments – The Department of Children, Equality, Disabilities, Integration and Youth and the Department of Education. Each has its own policies, guidance and regulatory frameworks, although some joint planning and working has been operational since 2006. The transition from preschool to primary school, is gaining prominence in national policy since the launch of *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028*.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), a statutory body, has developed a series of research papers and resources to support greater cohesion between the two sectors around transitions. The lack of formal national guidance means that, while a variety of documentation and resources exist to support the transition, they are used at local level in an unplanned and uncoordinated way. There are also no joint continuous professional development opportunities between early years practitioners and primary school teachers.

Another statutory body, the National Council for Special Education, provide a number of resources to support schools around transitions work with children who have additional needs. This work does not generally involve collaboration with early years counterparts.

National funding is used by many community and voluntary organisations to support transitions work. Examples of this include parenting support programmes provided through the Area Based Childhood Programme, Family Resource Centres, Barnardos and so forth. The activities and outputs of such programmes tend to be localised.

Estonia

The Strategy of Children and Families is a national policy in Estonia that provides an umbrella for activities such as transitions from preschool to primary school. It sets out five strategic objectives which aim to ensure the increasing welfare of children and families and support a higher quality of life. The belief that “to prevent problems is more efficient than to mitigate consequences” is one of the principles underpinning the Strategy. It is centred around proactive approaches and early intervention on every level.

A new law on pre-primary education is currently being prepared in Estonia, making the system of pre-primary education more coherent in order to provide high quality pre-primary education to all children and support their readiness for school. Children under the age of 4 can attend kindergarten or childcare facility, which have different requirements and goals according to the current regulations. In kindergarten, a child can acquire preschool education according to the state curriculum. Childcare is a social service provided in childcare facility or at home to ensure the care, development and safety of the child.

The new law harmonises the requirements for kindergartens and childcare facilities, and municipal and private kindergartens to give parents a clearer understanding of the level of education provided in kindergarten or childcare facility. The new Preschool Education Act focuses on supporting pre-primary education for all, including home-raised children, and preschool counselling of parents; facilitating access to kindergartens; the joint responsibility of the family, local government, and kindergarten in supporting preschool education; the professional competence of teachers, assistant teachers and heads of kindergartens; the organisation of support measures and the development of the learning and growth environment.

UK

There are no statutory guidance or policy documents from the Department for Education for all schools in England. Ofsted school case studies (Pacey, 2014) as examples of good practice are available. Suggestions from these case studies to ensure smooth transitions include encouraging preschool settings to contact parents in March/April about which school their child is going to and send information on what they and parents can do to ensure smooth transition; ask schools if the child's keyworker and child can visit; make changes to the curriculum in May to support transition e.g. school role play; and sending a Learning and development summary for each child to a named teacher in school. Ofsted also recommend having bilingual staff available at visits and meetings; providing ESOL classes for adults; giving parents 'All about Me' forms to fill in when visiting. Opportunities for parents to stay with their children and gradually leave them on visits; home visits; and an interview with the class teacher or Headteacher are also suggested. A report from Public Health England (Donkin, 2014) recommends open days and part time starts to the year to support children. It also mentions that parents need support too. Ten good transition practices are identified including a focus on the whole child, having a variety of practices (open days, information sessions, 1-1 support), targeted support for at risk groups, flexibility, strong leadership, sharing information between preschool settings and schools, induction and orientation meetings, shortened days at beginning of year, continuing some activities and routines from EYFS to KS1, and ensuring good communication between all parties.

5. Local government policies and guidance

Bulgaria

A school in the capital Sofia has organised a day/days in which future first grade students have joint classes with first graders. In addition, they spend breaks together, where they exchange information and experiences. In parallel, the teachers from the preschool group are in close contact with the teachers who take 1st year pupils in the autumn. The future teachers at the 1st school year attend classes in the preschool group, where they meet the children.

Another public school in Plovdiv, the 2nd largest city in Bulgaria, is following a similar approach: arranging joint activities with the participation of pupils who are in the last year in the kindergarten and students from the 1st grade. In the year, preceding the 1st grade the pupils are gradually introduced to the new school environment. As a first step they are invited to visit the school and play together with the current 1st grade pupils during breaktimes between the classes. As a next step towards transition the primary teachers together with the 1st grade students are visiting the pupils in the kindergarten during holidays such as the Mother's day, the Day of Granny Marta (1st of March), The first day of spring and others. During these celebrations, they exchange greeting cards, Martenitsas and paper flowers. Then in May, (the last month of the school year for the 1st grade students) the kindergarten students visit the school classes. These visits are aimed to make the future students familiar with the school environment and the order within the classroom, and to get acquainted with their future teachers. The programme is entitled "Transition Step by Step" and it is implemented throughout the school year. The main responsible professionals are primary teachers and they work in cooperation with the kindergarten teachers.

A primary school in Plovdiv is implementing a welcoming programme for the newly arrived 1st grade students. The teachers get in touch with the parents usually 2 weeks before the start of the school year. They guide parents and ask them to prepare the child, to present him/her in the most appealing way - could be by photo album, favourite song, short poem, a drawing or something else the child likes. In the first day at school each child introduces themselves in front of their classmates in a way he/she has chosen. The teacher also prepares a game for the students to get to know each other. Examples of such games include "The welcome tree" - where the leaves represent the first letter of each child's name. Once the child finds their letter, they say their name and share a few things about themselves with their classmates. Another game used is "Happy aquarium" where the fishes are given the children's names and a small photo below each name. The children have the task to find their fish and to place it quickly in the aquarium, thus making a mirror representation of their class. During the first week only, the students are allowed to bring their favourite toy from the kindergarten. The teacher explains that the children are growing up and the toys are no longer needed during the classes.

Republic of Ireland

As the majority of early years services and all schools are part of a national structure, municipal authorities have no responsibility for either.

Local level City and County Childcare Committees (CCC) are the only exception to this. There are 31 of these in Ireland, designed to encourage the development of childcare locally. As they provide support to practitioners and parents, many of the CCCs have developed materials which are disseminated locally to support children's learning and development as they transition to primary school. There is currently no national template for this transfer information, although plans are underway to introduce such a resource.

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are county-level structures identified by government to improve outcomes for children and young people through local and national interagency working. They provided a forum for joint planning and activity coordination, with an age remit of 0-24 years. At local level, CYPSC can support partners in the early years, education and community and voluntary sectors with transition programme through promotion, resource-sharing and connecting services doing similar or complementary work.

In light of the heterogenous approach to supporting transitions in Ireland, there are a multitude of resources available to support children, their families, early years services and schools to manage meaningful transitions. These include things such as school readiness indicators, preparation checklists, glossaries, resource packs, etc. Many early years services and schools also provide preparatory supports such as parent information sessions and site visits. Traditionally, such work tended to focus on one of the three (family, early years service or school) with little connection, overlap or integration between them. In the last decade, significant progress has been made in trying to structure collaboration and communication between families, early years services and schools.

- Early Years example: *'Aistear Siolta Practice Guide: Transitions'*(2015)

As part of the national implementation plan for the quality frameworks for children aged 0-6 years, a practice guide was developed to support transitions from preschool to school. It includes curricular areas such as Building partnerships with parents; creating and using the learning environment; learning through play; and nurturing and extending Interactions. The practice guide, used in early years services, includes self-evaluation tools for practitioners, action planning tools and resources for sharing. It also provides comprehensive ideas and examples for practice, using play materials, video clips, photo galleries etc.

- School example: *The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) Scheme*

The HSCL operates as the formal link between families and schools in area of urban disadvantage, with a teacher released from teaching duties as the Liaison Officer. For incoming Junior Infants, the Liaison Officer generally links with local early years services to plan and support transitions. As this is not standardised practice, the level of activities varies from school to school. In one area, for example, the Liaison Officer may organise a parent information evening for incoming pupils. In another, there may be consistent joint working with local early years services, the co-creation of 'information passports' for each child, two-way site visits and the dissemination of resources such as checklists and preparatory play activities.

- Joint working example: *'Ambitions for Transition: A Guide to Support Every Child's Progression from Early Years Services to Primary School'* (2018)

This was developed by one of the Area Based Childhood Programme sites and was a pilot project to promote joint working between the early years and education sectors. Local services undertook the operational work, while a consortium of representatives (including parents and both government departments) oversaw the strategic elements of the project. Over a two-year consultative period, a three-part resource pack and corresponding training was developed. The pack was divided into a resource for families, one for early years services and one for schools. It was designed to emphasise the critical role of each in supporting each child's transition, and to support the sharing and transfer of meaningful information.

UK

Schools and local authorities both provide information about transitions and policies on their websites. For example, Bradford Council provides examples of Word documents for schools to gather information about children before they start school from parents and provides workbooks for children to complete with parents or carers to support the transition (Bradford, 2021). Local state funded schools, academy schools and preschool settings may use these to transfer information. Herts for Learning (2021) is an outstanding example of a county wide initiative to ensure that information about children is passed from preschool settings to schools; a transition toolkit has been developed to ensure each child's level of need is assessed so that additional personalised transition support and activities can be provided. Many nurseries and preschool settings also use online secure platforms such as Tapestry (<https://tapestry.info/>) to collect evidence in a learning journal about children's achievements and to share these with parents. These may also be shared with schools, but schools vary in how far they use them or value them.

Individual schools and preschool nurseries provide activities such as information meetings and visits for parents and children to the school and classroom to meet staff, home visits before starting school, information packs and sessions in school in the summer for the child to get to know the environment and staff. Some schools also have a buddy system where the new starter is paired with an older child in school who may write to them before school starts and is there to look after them at tricky moments such as lunch time. Some schools encourage parents to bring their child into school to settle them at the beginning of the day and see this as an opportunity to chat more informally to parents and develop the relationship. 'Learning diaries', going backwards and forwards between home and school, or shared online platforms such as Tapestry are also used to encourage communication between the contexts.

Some examples of what schools are doing locally in the UK to support transitions include;

- Parents meetings or evenings to introduce staff and what happens in Reception
- Visits to the classroom in the summer before the beginning of the school year
- Ensure that parents are welcome in the classroom and can speak to staff easily and freely.
- Use of online platforms to record and share information and evidence about the children e.g. Tapestry.
- School transition policy published on school website

4. Country comparative overview:

Bulgaria

Bulgaria's preschool and school systems are regulated by *the Preschool and School Education Act (2106/ 2020)*, emphasising the importance of quality early education. Preschools focus on building foundational skills aligned with the primary curriculum. Policies promote collaboration between preschool and primary educators, facilitating a smooth transition. Professional development for educators and informational sessions for parents enhance the overall transition process.

Ireland

In Ireland, the preschool system is characterised by a holistic approach, emphasising a balance between play-based learning and foundational skill development. *Aistear* the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework guides preschool education, focusing on key developmental areas. Transition to primary school is facilitated through policies that encourage collaboration between preschool and primary educators. The primary school system aligns with this holistic approach, incorporating a structured curriculum that builds upon the skills acquired in preschool.

Estonia

Estonia's preschool system promotes a child-centred approach, fostering a love for learning through play and exploration. The transition to primary school is marked by a structured curriculum, building upon the foundational skills acquired in preschool. Estonia places a strong emphasis on teacher professionalism and continuous development. The involvement of parents is encouraged through open communication channels and informative sessions.

UK

The UK's preschool system, governed by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), advocates a comprehensive early childhood education. Play-based learning and personal development are key components. The Primary National Curriculum provides a structured framework, ensuring continuity in learning. The UK places emphasis on parental involvement, engaging parents in the transition process through various initiatives.

Commonalities

Alignment of curricula: Across the transnational partner countries, there is a consistent effort to align preschool and primary school curricula, with the objective of ensuring a smooth and incremental learning progression.

Play based learning: The preschool systems in the four countries champion play-based learning in preschool education, recognising its significance in fostering holistic development.

Collaboration between Early Years practitioners and teachers: Each country recognises the importance of collaboration between preschool and school educators, particularly when sharing information about children with additional/special needs.

Parental involvement: The active involvement of parents is a shared priority, with initiatives such as workshops and information sessions designed to engage parents in the transition process.

Differences

Policy emphasis: While the overarching principles align, each country's policies emphasise different aspects, such as Ireland's holistic approach or the UK's vision for comprehensive early childhood education.

Parental involvement: The approach to engaging with parents is rooted in cultural norms and so varies across the four countries. Estonia, for example, promotes open communication channels and Bulgaria uses structured workshops.

Professional development: The extent and nature of professional development educators differs, reflecting the priorities in each national educational system as well as the qualification standards for practitioners and teachers.

All four countries exhibit a commitment to creating a seamless educational journey for children by aligning preschool and primary school systems, fostering collaboration, and recognising the pivotal role of parents in supporting a successful transition. The nuanced differences reflect the individual emphasis and context of each nation's educational philosophy and policies.

Parental surveys and focus groups (presented and analysed in the subsequent intellectual outputs for this research) demonstrate the lack of standardisation in how national policies on transitions are actually translated on the ground.

6. The impact of a global pandemic on transitions

This PSPS project was planned and agreed prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. Public health guidelines and subsequent restrictions changed the direction of the project, as in-person meetings and events had to be postponed and access to parents was very limited. More importantly, however, the pandemic changed children's experiences of transitions.

The transition period is a critical time for children as they navigate changes in their educational environment, social interactions, and learning expectations. However, the pandemic introduced unprecedented challenges that have disrupted the traditional transition process.

Disruption of routine and learning environment

The closure of preschools and primary schools during the pandemic disrupted the regular routine and learning environment for very young children. The sudden shift to remote learning or hybrid models has affected the structured and interactive nature of preschool education, making it difficult for children to fully engage in hands-on activities and social interactions. This disruption has impacted children's readiness for the transition to primary school, as they may not have had the same level of exposure to structured learning environments, peer interactions and more structured routines.

Limited social interactions and peer relationships

One of the key aspects of the transition from preschool to primary school is the development of social skills and the establishment of peer relationships. The Covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of social distancing measures restricted children's opportunities for face-to-face interactions and collaborative play. Limited social interactions can hinder children's ability to form

new friendships, develop social competencies, and adjust to the social dynamics of a new school environment. The absence of these experiences impacted children's social integration and emotional well-being during the transition process.

Academic learning gaps

The disruption caused by the pandemic has led to potential learning gaps among children. The shift to remote learning, variations in the quality and accessibility of online resources, and the challenges of home-based learning environments have impacted children's academic progress. As a result, some children have started primary school with differing levels of preparedness, which can affect their ability to meet the academic expectations and requirements of the new school. Addressing these learning gaps and providing appropriate support becomes crucial during the transition period.

Increased anxiety and emotional well-being

The uncertainties surrounding the pandemic, changes in routines, and the lack of physical interaction with teachers and peers contributed to increased anxiety and emotional distress among children. The transition from preschool to primary school is already a time of heightened emotions for many children, and the added stressors of the pandemic may intensify these feelings. The absence of familiar faces, new health and safety protocols, and concerns about personal and family well-being certainly impacted many children's emotional well-being and adjustment to the new school environment.

Adaptation of transition programme

During the pandemic, virtual orientation sessions, online meetings with teachers, and virtual school tours replaced traditional face-to-face interactions. Schools and preschools have also explored alternative strategies to support children's social-emotional development and readiness for primary school, such as virtual social activities, online support groups, and individualized transition plans. These adaptations aimed to bridge the gap created by the disruption and provide children with a sense of continuity and support during the transition process.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to the transition from preschool to primary school, impacting various aspects of children's educational journey. It is crucial to recognise that the effects of the pandemic on children's transition experiences are multifaceted and require comprehensive support.

Firstly, schools need to address the learning gaps caused by remote or hybrid learning models during preschool years. Providing targeted interventions and individualised support can help bridge these gaps and ensure that children enter primary school with a solid foundation.

Secondly, prioritising social-emotional well-being becomes essential during the transition process. Schools should implement strategies to address children's anxiety, provide opportunities for social interactions, and promote a sense of belonging and connection. Building strong relationships between children, teachers, and parents can create a supportive network that facilitates a smoother transition.

Additionally, **collaboration between preschools, primary schools, parents, and policymakers is vital**. Sharing information, best practices, and resources can ensure a coordinated approach to

children's transitions. This collaboration can also address the broader systemic issues that the pandemic has highlighted, such as the digital divide and the importance of flexible learning environments that can adapt to future disruptions.

This research report highlights the importance of recognising and addressing the complexities of children's transitions from preschool to primary school. By understanding the national policies, education systems, preschool structures, and support mechanisms in Ireland, Bulgaria, Estonia and the UK, much learning is extracted. The resources developed from this learning will enable educators, policymakers, and parents to work together to create inclusive, supportive, and seamless transitions that optimise children's learning experiences and holistic development.

7. Summary

Smooth and meaningful transitions from preschool to primary school have significant impact on children's educational achievements, social integration, and emotional well-being over the life course. These transitions provide a critical foundation for future learning and play a pivotal role in shaping children's attitudes towards education. When transitions are facilitated effectively, children are more likely to adapt well to new environments, establish positive relationships with peers and teachers, and develop a strong sense of belonging. Conversely, challenging transitions can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including academic difficulties, social disconnection, and heightened stress levels for children. Therefore, recognising and addressing the significance of smooth transitions is essential for creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment that nurtures children's overall development. This scoping paper explored the structures, policies and practices across Bulgaria, Ireland, Estonia and the UK that enable/obstruct that smooth transition.

The education systems and structures in Ireland, Bulgaria, Estonia and the UK significantly influence children's transitions from preschool to primary school. Understanding the key features of these systems is essential for developing effective strategies that support smooth transitions and ensure a seamless progression in children's education.

Each country has specific national policies and frameworks that guide the transition process from preschool to primary school. Collectively, the learning indicates that several success factors contribute to facilitating smooth transitions and ensuring positive outcomes for children:

- Effective communication and collaboration between preschools and primary schools are vital. Open lines of communication allow for the exchange of relevant information, such as children's strengths, interests, and learning styles, enabling primary schools to create a supportive and inclusive environment.
- Supportive relationships between teachers and parents also play a crucial role in easing children's transitions. Regular communication, parent-teacher meetings, and the involvement of parents in the transition process can help create a sense of continuity and trust.

- The active involvement of parents in the transition from preschool to school is not merely a supportive gesture but a fundamental cornerstone for a child's successful educational journey. Parents serve as crucial allies, bridging the gap between home and school, and their engagement significantly influences a child's emotional well-being, social integration, and academic achievement during this critical period of transition.
- Continuity in learning experiences is another success factor, where preschool and primary school curricula align to ensure a seamless progression in children's education. Child-centred approaches, orientation programme, and individualised support tailored to children's unique needs contribute to positive transitions.
- Building a sense of belonging, fostering social connections, and creating opportunities for peer interactions are critical for facilitating social integration and a positive transition experience.

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