

Transition Information Sessions Year Two Evaluation

Laurie Day and Katharine McKenna
ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd



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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

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Thanks also go to the evaluation team who covered a large number of interviews and observations over the course of the year, and contributed to producing this report.

Definitions

The report includes a number of key terms relating to certain aspects of the TIS demonstration project. For clarity and consistency, the following terms apply throughout.

Term	Report definition
Impact	In line with established definitions, 'impact' is taken to mean ' <i>the effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly</i> ¹ '.
Parents	Throughout this report, the term 'parents' is used as shorthand to represent the enormous diversity of arrangements that exist for bringing up and caring for children and young people in contemporary Britain.
External organisation	The term 'external organisation' is taken to mean organisations other than local authorities and schools, which were involved in the planning, facilitation, delivery or signposting for the TIS project. They include national and local providers of information and support for parents and families, and other organisations represented at TIS sessions. Examples included - but weren't limited to - Family Information Services, Connexions, Libraries, Police, Community Safety Teams, CAMHS, and third sector organisations.
Signposting, referral and follow-up	A distinction is made between three important aspects of the TIS project:, for the purpose of this report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>signposting</i> - the actions taken by schools and other organisations to raise parents' awareness of local and national sources of information and support for family life and parenting. • <i>referral</i> - the incidence of parents being put in direct contact with specific services, such as to make an appointment or seek individual support. Referrals were made by schools, external organisations, and self-referrals. • <i>follow-up</i> - the actions taken by schools in response to issues or concerns raised by the parents collectively at TIS sessions. Examples of follow-up might include organising extra TIS sessions, setting up new provision, or reviewing school policies.

¹ OECD (2002), *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management*, OECD Publications, Paris., pp.24.

User guide

This report is designed to be an accessible resource for all those planning, delivering or evaluating Transition Information Sessions (TIS). To help get the most out of it, the evaluators have provided the following guidance.

- **Policymakers** may wish to use the report to identify key messages about the high-level impact and effectiveness of TIS, as exemplified within the demonstration project, in the context of the Extended Schools and Parenting agendas. It is recommended that policymakers refer to the following:
 - the executive summary for an overview of key findings;
 - section one for the policy aims of the project; and
 - section five (Conclusions) for a more detailed analysis of the strengths and areas for development of the TIS project, with reference to other policy initiatives.
- **Government Offices and local authorities** may wish to use the report as a source of information about key issues for planning and delivering TIS sessions at a local level, drawing on the lessons learned from the demonstration projects. Bookmarks include:
 - the executive summary for an overview of key findings;
 - section two for an insight to the strategic planning and training issues;
 - section five (Conclusions) for more detail about key issues for offering TIS in all schools, drawing upon the models developed within the demonstration project and including suggestions for how resources might be shared.
- **Schools** may wish to use the report to explore more detailed practical issues around running TIS sessions, and to explore the successes of the demonstration schools in testing the various different models of delivery to parents. Bookmarks include:
 - the executive summary for an overview of key findings;
 - section two (2.5) for an insight to school-level planning issues, steps for effective recruitment (2.6) and challenges for engaging 'hard to reach' parents (2.7); and
 - section three for a review of the approaches taken to deliver sessions during the demonstration stage, including timings, venues, staffing and topics.

All stakeholders might wish to refer to section four of the report, for a more detailed analysis of the types of outcomes that were achieved for parents and schools, with reference to a number of case studies from the evaluation.

Further baseline survey information about the profile of parents who attended the TIS sessions, and a more detailed policy context are provided in the year one report. The document is published on the DCSF web-site, at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/>

Executive summary

In June 2006, ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd and Professor John Bastiani were commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to evaluate the Transition Information Sessions (TIS) demonstration project over two years. This report presents the findings from the second year of the evaluation, which ran from April 2007 to February 2008.

Background to the TIS demonstration project

Transition Information Sessions form part of the parenting support core offer within the Extended Schools prospectus, *Access to opportunities and services for all*. They aim to:

- lay the foundations of effective home-school partnerships;
- give parents information, ideas and an opportunity for discussion about parenting issues, including how to keep their child safe, happy and learning; and
- signpost parents to local and national sources of information, advice and support

The national framework for TIS

The DCSF launched a two year demonstration project for TIS in 2006, with the aim of testing effective models of sessions for local authorities to draw upon as they develop their practice in this strand of the parenting support offer. The Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) developed a toolkit of materials for TIS which local authorities and schools can draw upon as they develop their sessions. This included:

- presentations suitable to transition at Reception, secondary, middle and high schools;
- handouts for parents giving information on specific topics such as; keeping healthy, tackling bullying; and
- additional materials for schools on specific topics they may wish to cover in more depth, such as child development, how to be a more involved father, and the effect of family conflict on children / young people.

Training and consultancy was provided to test models of delivery suitable for dissemination to all local authorities and schools. Parenting UK designed a programme of training for TIS facilitators, which was refined by 4 Children in year two.

Local authorities and schools participating in the demonstration project

As participants in the demonstration project, nine local authorities were each given a grant to support their schools to develop and deliver TIS sessions in 2006-07. Each local authority was required to recruit up to 50 schools and 6-12 facilitators. 11 local authorities were given a grant to take part in 2007-08, alongside those that took part in year one. They were funded to recruit up to 50 schools and 6-12 facilitators.

Demonstration project local authorities nominated people with experience of work with parents to train as TIS facilitators, such as learning mentors, SENCOs, and family learning practitioners. The training involved explaining the aims and models of delivery for TIS, and introducing the toolkit.

In year two, a wider programme of capacity building was also offered by FPI to all local authorities. The aim of the work was to enable all local authorities to deliver TIS sessions drawing on the practice developed within the demonstration project. This work with authorities outside the 20 demonstration project areas was not included within the scope of this evaluation.

How did demonstration project Transition Information Sessions look in practice?

Sessions were offered to a cohort of parents with a child entering a new school setting. Session content was shaped by local preference and need but with a focus on how parents can keep their child safe, happy and learning. Session duration was expected to be around one hour with some additional time for refreshments and informal chat. All sessions were expected to signpost parents to local and national services that are there to support them and sessions often directly involved such service providers - in planning, delivery and providing materials. Format and delivery were designed to attract and engage with the audience, including parents less frequently involved in school events.

The main four phases of the delivery cycle for sessions can be described as:

- consultation with parents including groups less likely to be actively engaged with their child's school and learning, including fathers, non-resident parents and some BME community parents;
- planning, including content of the session, ensuring accessibility and tackling any barriers to engagement, work with external partners, publicising and marketing;
- delivery - making it happen on the day; and
- evaluation, including participants' views, what went well, what could be better next time, who wasn't there who should have been and how can they be involved next time.

Parenting Support Currently Available in Schools

Feedback from the Training and Development Agency (TDA) suggests that the majority of schools offer some parenting support, including information sessions for parents. As part of their offer of extended services, all schools are expected to offer access to a range of parenting support by 2010 according to need/demand based on consultation. This will include access to:

- parenting programmes using structured, evidence-based programmes, as well as more informal opportunities for parents to engage with the school and each other;
- family learning sessions to allow children to learn with their fathers and mothers;
- information sessions for fathers and mothers at the beginning of primary and secondary phases;
- information about nationally and locally available sources of information, advice and support (the LA should already provide this).

Such parenting support can be offered directly by the school, or may be provided through an existing provider in the local community or collaboration between schools.

Overview of the evaluation

The aims of the evaluation were to assess the effectiveness of the processes of planning and delivering TIS, and to establish the impact on parents and schools. The methodology combined quantitative and qualitative methods, with the same overall framework applied for each of 2006-07 and 2007-08.

The year one evaluation took a formative approach, to inform all local authorities and schools as they develop their practice in this area. The year two evaluation took a summative approach; based around two strands:

- strand one: follow-up with schools and parents who took part in year one, comprising telephone interviews with school staff and external organisations (20), and a tracker survey of parents (110). This provided a relatively small-scale snapshot of outcomes achieved over a wider timescale of one year; and
- strand two: a mixed-method approach to review the impact and effectiveness of the project in year two. This was a larger-scale exercise providing a robust dataset upon which to base conclusions about the project. It comprised a parent survey (2483) drawn from a cross-section of 116 schools, structured observations of TIS sessions, and in-depth qualitative interviews with local authority and school staff and parents (96).

YEAR TWO - KEY FINDINGS

Planning the session and engaging parents

The project timeframe in year two

- The programme for TIS in the demonstration project was broadly similar to year one, with the exceptions being a longer timescale for planning; updated training programme, and parallel training and action planning offered to all local authorities in 2007-08.
- The main impacts of the extra time were to boost the numbers of schools participating in year two, and to strengthen the consultation process prior to delivering the sessions.

Local strategic planning

- The key success factors for local strategic planning were reported by local authorities to include; clarity of aims, effective publicity and branding, and strong leadership from the local authority. Local authorities and schools routinely benefited from the lessons learned last year.
- Despite the similarities to TIS in year one, a number of characteristics were found to be distinctive to the project in year two. The main ones were identified as follows:
 - more defined links with other local programmes and strategies;
 - expanded local authority performance management for TIS, such as the requirement for schools to produce action plans or mini-funding bids, to confirm their approach;
 - a greater focus on accountability and value for money ;

- more ambitious TIS formats, with a wider view of 'transitions'; and
- positive influences from the TIS capacity-building programme for all local authorities, drawing on a toolkit for sessions and models of delivery developed within the demonstration project, and offered to all local authorities in 2007-08.
- The 20 local authorities had concerns as to how local arrangements would be planned and funded next year (2008-09) in preparation for delivery in all of their schools.

The TIS training programme

- A combination of earlier regional events and a more flexible roll-on / roll-off agenda for those events were generally thought to have been more fit for purpose than year one.
- A greater number of local authorities delivering aspects of the TIS training in-house in year two. This often coincided with other workforce development, such as where PSA and TIS training were successfully joined-up in one local authority.

School-level planning

- The evaluation showed that schools were at a varied baseline position in developing their extended service core offer, with some already having a wide range of services in place and others making slower progress. The project often coincided with school-level issues that affected the priority of TIS. These included leadership changes and inspection.
- As with year one, there was no single model for planning TIS sessions, and schools took a variety of approaches according to the timing, size, format and participants.
- The need for continuation planning was evident, and schools commonly used part of the portion of the local authority grant allocated then for TIS to develop re-usable materials. Where this wasn't considered in year one, some schools described having to start almost 'from scratch' in year two.

Recruiting parents

- It commonly proved time consuming to recruit parents, requiring a mix of different methods. Parents typically engaged more readily, where the activities involved children, and where the message was personalised to their child's time at the school.
- Recruitment was often supported by involving a range of different staff from within and outside of the school. Where TIS and PSA were delivered together, the PSA role was thought to assist by providing a single point of contact for parental engagement.

Engaging 'hard to reach' parents

- LAs and schools were aware of groups of parents without regular and constructive contact with the school who were less likely to be engaged in children's learning. A general distinction was identified between hard to reach *groups or communities* of parents, and *individual families* who might face barriers to engagement.

- Steps to engage whole local populations were said to include –
 - the use of mapping and consultation data to establish levels of need,
 - closer work with district or cluster teams to reach deprived local communities; and
 - strengthening third sector involvement within local TIS partnerships
- Even so, some schools faced deep-rooted cultural barriers to engagement that were thought to require a longer-term approach and a sustained allocation of resources.
- Steps to engage individual hard to reach families were routinely conducted on a school-by-school basis. Local authorities were sometimes able to assist this process, by providing a central support budget for home visits or SEN richer experience of working with parents.
- Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and special schools were considerably fewer in number than primary or secondary schools within the TIS project. The interviews showed that:
 - parents could often have very specific informational needs;
 - parents of new starters were often the least likely to engage due to a lack of confidence in the new environment, and required extra support to participate; and
 - it was not uncommon to open sessions up to all parents, to achieve TIS group sizes.

Delivering the sessions

Profile of the sessions in year two

- Two thirds of the sessions took place in the autumn term in year two, with most in November. This was the case for both primary and secondary, and largely reflects the pattern of delivery in year one. Most parents thought this timing suitable, because it avoided September but was still early enough to address concerns about transition.
- The timing of the sessions around the school day and duration were also very similar to year one. Primaries generally opted for shorter sessions at drop-off or collection points, with secondary favouring evening sessions with more of a 'big event' feel.
- The sessions were almost exclusively school-based, in response to some of the difficulties encountered with attendance at community venues in the first year. A minority of sessions were planned on a cluster basis, to achieve economies of scale.

Staffing, topics and handouts

- There were few noticeable changes in the patterns of staffing and topics delivered at the sessions from year one. A variety of written materials were used at the sessions. Parents were often found to have high demands for practical resources and handbooks.
- The tracker survey showed around one third of parents had referred to the handouts during the year - mainly as a factual resource. Parents from secondary sessions were less likely to recall any handouts, and less likely to have referred to them if they did.
- The proportion of parents who reported accessing internet-based information sources as a result of TIS more than doubled between the two years. This is highly promising, and suggests some combination of improved awareness-raising and wider availability.

Attendance

- The year two data shows that additional steps were taken to boost parent numbers. The average (mean) primary TIS numbers were very similar in both years, but the average secondary TIS numbers were up by a third. Even so, the very low parent numbers at some sessions was a cause for concern again in year two.
- The proportions of male to female carers remained as per year one. Male attendance was higher at secondary sessions than primary sessions, but women were still in a considerable majority, taken across the programme.

Models of delivery

- The core models that were identified at year one stage were evident again, although schools had sometimes adapted their approach in response to parental feedback. The key changes for year two were as follows:
 - more widespread use of theatre or arts-based activities
 - schools introducing extra activities for parents and children together
 - more sessions that took an extended format, with a series of different workshops.
- Some of the common success factors for effective delivery were found to be:
 - a clear focus and message(s);
 - ownership of the session by the school;
 - active involvement of external organisations;
 - attention to practical access arrangements;
 - opportunities for informal networking; and
 - effective use of parental feedback to school staff to shape parental engagement work, including future sessions.

Facilitation and support

- Facilitators were recruited to support the planning and delivery of the sessions. The specific roles of TIS facilitators were found to have been shaped by a number of local factors, which included:
 - the level of facilitator involvement requested by the school;
 - school / facilitator ratios;
 - the proposed format of the session; and
 - the facilitators' professional background.
- The year two evidence suggested a priority to further extend locally-focussed training and support, with attention to a diverse mix of skills and professional experience.

Impact and outcomes

Laying the foundations for effective home-school partnerships

- Almost half of parents who responded to the year two survey said that TIS gave them a lot of confidence about what to expect for their child's new school. Parents without other children at the school consistently reported higher gains. The interviews showed that this was due to their having lower prior knowledge of the school and its' staff.
- Male carers reported lower outcomes than female overall, and particularly in relation to knowing where to go for information on family life and parenting. There was a shortfall of materials and resources tailored to the needs of fathers.
- School staff commonly reported improved levels of dialogue with parents as a result of TIS sessions, whilst parents often identified being more aware of who to approach in the school if concerns arose. There were examples of schools that had secured parental support for 'whole school' policies or issues as a result of holding a session in year one.
- The tracker survey showed that schools had not routinely taken action to build follow-up into their TIS sessions. Less than a quarter of parents who were surveyed said that they were aware of any follow-up by the school. Whilst anecdotal, the interviews suggested that follow-up was more consistently factored-in to TIS planning in year two.

Providing information, ideas and opportunities for discussion

- Parents who took part in TIS in year two consistently reported feeling better informed about school life, including both academic and pastoral issues. School staff also sometimes noticed differences in parents' knowledge as a result of TIS, although they were less commonly able to support this viewpoint with reference to actual data.
- The interviews suggest that parents gained less from sessions where the aims were poorly communicated in advance, the session was pitched too low, or the facilitator lacked knowledge of issues that were specific to the school.
- The year two interviews showed that schools and parents alike saw TIS as an opportunity to share ideas and practices about supporting children to learn in the home. Parents often had high expectations of what schools would be able to offer them.
- Three quarters of parents who responded to the survey said that TIS had increased their confidence about supporting their children to learn to some extent. These changes were often subtle, and parents were selective about how they applied these new ideas.
- Parents often cited the contact with other parents as one of the most important aspects of TIS, to access social networks and share experiences. A third of parents responding to the year two survey said they had kept in touch with others they met at the session.
- The most valued relationships were often those where TIS had enabled parents to engage with other parents of their child's immediate social circle. This was more difficult to achieve - especially at secondary sessions where group sizes were much larger.

- Parents who were interviewed sometimes thought that schools had underestimated the importance of the knowledge that parents themselves brought to the sessions. Some parents identified other parents as the first point of call if issues arose for their child.

Signposting to information, advice and support

- Approaching two thirds of parents from primary sessions and half from secondary sessions reported having found out more about locally available services from TIS.
- However, 10% of parents reported that TIS had not helped at all. Male carers consistently reported gaining less confidence than female from the signposting information. This indicates that the quality of the signposting was sometimes an issue.
- The survey and interview evidence shows that TIS provided an important referral station to external sources of support for those parents who needed it, but the level of demand was relatively low. The survey indicates that 5-6% of parents were referred to other services as a result of TIS - a figure that was relatively consistent in years one and two.
- The interview evidence shows that steps were taken to develop schools' extended services through TIS. Schools commonly reported having accessed new expertise, whilst external organisations were often able to raise awareness of their services.
- As with year one, external organisations were less successful in raising awareness of their services where they had a peripheral role at the sessions.

Conclusions

- The demonstration project continued to build upon the year one achievements, in helping to develop good practice models to disseminate to all local authorities, as they develop their TIS sessions. The findings reinforce those in year one; that schools and parents valued TIS as one of a number of core types of school-based support for transitions, alongside school open days and one-to-one tutor time.
- The project was successful in delivering sessions to a greater number and range of schools in the second year, which was helped by the extended timescale. The difficulties with the TIS training programme were also resolved to some degree, by providing greater flexibility for professionals from a range of different backgrounds.
- In summary, the main strengths of the project in its second year were found to be:
 - the adaptability of the TIS concept and materials to a diverse range of school types and circumstances;
 - the development of viable delivery models, whose effectiveness is now established.
 - the widespread acceptance of TIS by parents, as one of a number of types of support for transitions;
 - the frequent contribution of TIS towards building parents' trust and confidence in their child's school, creating informal networks with other parents, and sharing ideas for supporting children's learning in the home;
 - the considerable impact from TIS on schools, where it was targeted effectively, including for 'whole school' parental engagement policies and practices; and
 - the role of TIS in extending schools' services.

- The main areas for development were identified as:
 - the greater challenges for planning and delivering TIS sessions at secondary stage, as a result of larger intakes, more dispersed parent populations, and less frequent opportunities for regular contact between staff and parents at the school;
 - the varied parent numbers at TIS sessions generally, with some sessions again experiencing a low turnout and poor numbers of male carers in particular;
 - the persistence of TIS sessions that are not linked to other types of parental engagement within the school, and lack clear plans for running sessions again in future years;
 - the varied quality and consistency of signposting information provided by schools; and
 - the potential dilution of the local authority support for TIS when the project ends.

Recommendations

1. *For local authorities and schools to further examine the support arrangements for delivering TIS in secondary schools.*
2. *For local authorities and schools to ensure appropriate targeting for 'hard to reach' parents, with specific measures to engage and support fathers and male carers,*
3. *For local authorities and schools to consider the available options for sharing resources, to enable a continued support infrastructure for TIS; and,*
4. *For local authorities and schools to review opportunities for linking TIS to other forms of parental engagement.*
5. *For the DCSF to continue to support the collation and sharing of good practice for TIS, for example through regional networking.*
6. *For the DCSF to consider a review of TIS in relation to other parent information initiatives, to encourage greater joining-up.*
7. *For the DCSF and partners to consider how schools might be supported to meet parental demand for resources and materials on the theme of 'at home' learning.*

1.0 Introduction

In June 2006, ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd and Professor John Bastiani were commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to evaluate the Transition Information Sessions (TIS) demonstration project. The evaluation was carried out over a two-year period, from June 2006 to February 2008.

This report presents the findings from the second year of the evaluation, which ran from April 2007 to February 2008. The introduction first provides some background to the demonstration project before explaining the evaluation methodology, and the aspects that were specific to year two. The remaining report sections are then described in turn.

1.1 Background to the TIS demonstration project

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) launched a national demonstration project in June 2006, to test the delivery of Transition Information Sessions (TIS) to parents of pupils starting primary and secondary school. The sessions form part of the parenting support offer within the Extended Schools prospectus, *Access to opportunities and services for all*. Within this offer, the aims of Transition Information Sessions are:

- to lay the foundations of effective home-school partnerships;
- to give all parents - mothers, fathers and other carers – information, ideas and an opportunity for discussion about parenting issues, including how to keep their child safe, happy and learning; and
- to sign-post parents to local and national sources of information, advice and support.

In 2006-07 - the first year of the project, nine local authorities were funded to support their local schools to develop and deliver TIS sessions. This required planning and recruitment of up to 50 schools and 6-12 facilitators per local authority. Local authorities and schools received ongoing support for the delivery of local TIS sessions, including a package of training for their nominated session facilitators.

The DCSF commissioned The Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) as national contractors to oversee the project, following a competitive tendering process. FPI developed a framework and materials for TIS sessions and offered consultancy support to local authorities and schools. Parenting UK was commissioned to design and deliver the training for local authority facilitators, which was delivered to local authority nominees at two regional events.

1.1.1 The framework and materials

In 2006-07 The Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) developed a toolkit of materials for TIS which local authorities and schools can draw upon as they develop their sessions. This includes the following:

- presentations suitable to transition at Reception and secondary school;
- handouts for parents giving information on specific topics, such as keeping healthy, tackling bullying; and
- additional materials for schools on specific topics they may wish to cover in more depth, such as child development, how to be a more involved father, the effect of family conflict on children / young people .
- demonstration project local authorities nominated people with experience of work with parents to train as TIS facilitators, such as learning mentors, SENCOs, and family learning practitioners. Training involved explaining the aims and models of delivery for TIS and introducing the toolkit.

To view these materials go to:

www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/extendedschools/teachernetgovukcoreoffer ; or
www.familyandparenting.org/startingschoolproject

The main four phases of the delivery cycle for sessions can be described as:

- consultation with parents, including groups less likely to be actively engaged with their child's school and learning, including fathers, non-resident parents and some BME community parents;
- planning, including content of the session, ensuring accessibility and tackling any barriers to engagement, work with external partners, publicising and marketing;
- delivery - making it happen on the day; and
- evaluation, including participants' views, what went well, what could be better next time, who wasn't there who should have been and how can they be involved next time.

Feedback from the Training and Development Agency (TDA) suggests that the majority of schools offer some parenting support, including information sessions for parents. As part of their offer of extended services, all schools are expected to offer access to a range of parenting support by 2010 according to need / demand based on consultation. This will include access to:

- parenting programmes using structured, evidence-based programmes, as well as more informal opportunities for parents to engage with the school and each other;
- family learning sessions to allow children to learn with their fathers and mothers;
- information sessions for fathers and mothers at the beginning of primary and secondary phases;
- information about nationally and locally available sources of information, advice and support (the LA should already provide this).

Such parenting support can be offered directly by the school, or may be provided through an existing provider in the local community or collaboration between schools.

1.2 How do Transition Information Sessions look in practice?

Sessions are offered to each new cohort of parents with a child entering a new school setting. Session content is shaped by local preference and need but with a focus on how parents can keep their child safe, happy and learning. Session duration might be expected to be around one hour with some additional time for refreshments and informal chat. All sessions should signpost parents to local and national services that are there to support them and sessions will often directly involve such service providers - in planning, delivery and providing materials. Format and delivery will be designed to attract and engage with the audience, including parents less frequently involved in school events.

1.2.1 The second year of the project: 2007-08

Year two of the demonstration project ran from January 2007 to March 2008. A further eleven local authorities were funded to take part, alongside those that also took part in year one. The full list of 20 authorities participating in the second year is as follows:

1. Blackburn with Darwen	11. Lewisham
2. Bolton	12. Luton
3. Brighton and Hove	13. Northamptonshire
4. Calderdale	14. North Lincolnshire
5. Cambridgeshire	15. North Somerset
6. Croydon	16. Redbridge
7. Essex	17. Sheffield
8. Gateshead	18. Telford and Wrekin
9. Hampshire	19. Trafford
10. Leeds	20. Worcestershire

As with year one, local authorities were funded to recruit up to 50 schools and 6-12 facilitators each, and to oversee the local planning and delivery of TIS sessions. 4 Children were commissioned to revise the facilitator training programme, which was delivered to local authority nominees at two regional training events.

The second year of the demonstration project represented a time of change for the schools and local authorities that took part. From a position of TIS being relatively untested at the start of the project, some 360 primary and secondary schools had delivered sessions by March 2007. In addition to their work with the 20 demonstration project local authorities, in 2007-08 FPI and 4Children were commissioned by DCSF to offer all local authorities action planning and training for TIS facilitators drawing upon materials and models of TIS delivery developed within the demonstration project

The second year of the programme also corresponded with momentum for national policy developments around the families and parenting agenda. Further clarification was provided about local authorities' core offer for Parenting Support¹, whilst *Every Parent Matters* set-out the Government's strategic priorities for parent information services, including details of the Parent Know-How programme for telephony and new media services². As one respondent identified, these developments meant that '*...people could see things starting to fit together on the ground*'.

Two of the TIS demonstration local authorities were also funded as part of the Parent Support Adviser (PSA) pilot programme. The PSA pilots were funded over a similar timescale to TIS, from September 2006 to August 2008, with the aim of supporting local authorities to remodel their schools' workforce for parental engagement³. Where TIS and PSA were run together, it was possible to identify some areas of potential overlap through the TIS evaluation. The findings are discussed further in sections two and three.

1.3 The national evaluation

The two principal **aims** of the evaluation were:

- 1. To assess the effectiveness of the processes of planning and delivering Transition Information Sessions; and,**
- 2. To establish the impact of the Transition Information Sessions on parents and schools who took part.**

The evaluation required the following elements:

- a formative approach; to steer all local authorities in developing TIS sessions that better meet the aims of building home/school partnerships, giving information about keeping children safe, happy and learning with a chance for discussion; and signposting to local and national sources of information, advice and support; and
- a summative one; to draw together the evidence from the 20 local authorities during the demonstration phase and to conclude upon the effectiveness and impact of the project.

The evaluation methodology combined both quantitative and qualitative methods within an overarching framework, applied for each of 2006-07 and 2007-08.

The approach was to track the development of the TIS demonstration project through the different stages of the project 'cycle'; from planning and recruit of parents and facilitators, to delivering the sessions. This enabled a modelling of the inputs and outputs at each stage of the process, to identify the resulting outcomes and impacts for parents and schools. This continuity in the evaluation was important, given the devolved approach to the sessions, and the degree of local variation within the project.

¹ DCSF (2006) *Parenting support: guidance for local authorities in England*

² DCSF (2007) *Every Parent Matters*. DCSF Publications: Nottingham.

³ DCSF (2007) *The Parent Support Adviser Pilot: The first interim report from the evaluation*

1.3.1 Year one methodology

The focus of year one of the evaluation (June 2006 to March 2007) was to complete an entire 'cycle' of evaluation for the demonstration local authorities, and to set in place the mechanisms for tracking the impact of the project in the medium-term. The year one methodology comprised the following tasks:

- a baseline survey of parents (n=1,641) - administered at the TIS sessions
- a follow-up postal survey at three / four months, to test against the baseline (n=100)
- observational research, covering the two TIS regional training events
- case study research in six local authorities, to capture the key differences in local approaches for planning and delivering TIS, and including
 - observations of session delivery,
 - depth interviews with staff, and
 - telephone interviews with parents
- analysis and reporting - a synthesis of the data to produce the year one report.

The year one report is published at:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR850.pdf>

1.3.2 Year two methodology

The second year of the evaluation was carried out during the period from April 2007 to February 2008. The evaluation in year two comprised three main elements, as follows:

- follow-up and tracking of a cross-section of local authorities, schools and parents that participated in year one; to measure impact and outcomes over time. This was achieved through a mix of
 - telephone interviews with school and partner staff who took part last year; and
 - a postal 'tracker' survey of parents who opted-in to be re-contacted (n=110).
- a repeat 'cycle' of evaluation for the 20 local authorities – a mix of those who took part in year one and those who were new to the project in the second year, to assess their effectiveness and enable a comparison with year one, and to establish the extent to which the 'lessons learned' from year one informed the year two planning.
- the tasks included:
 - telephone interviews with half (10) of the TIS coordinators
 - a second baseline survey of parents (n=2,483)
 - a follow-up postal survey at two months, to measure against the baseline (n=197)
 - case study research in a further six local authorities, again comprising session observations, staff and partner depth interviews, and parent telephone interviews.

A more detailed method statement is provided at Annex two.

1.4 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is structured as follows:

- **Section two** considers the planning of the demonstration project in year two, including the strategic planning processes at local authority and school levels, the parent recruitment arrangements, and the effectiveness of measures to engage 'hard to reach' parents.
- **Section three** provides an outline of how the TIS sessions were delivered in the second year. A profile is first provided of the sessions in year two, and compared with the equivalent for year one. This is followed by a more detailed consideration of the methods of delivery and facilitation that were found to be the most effective.
- **Section four** presents the evidence for the impact and outcomes from the demonstration project. The achievements in the second year of the project are first summarised. This is followed by comparison of the year one and two findings, in relation to each of the aims of TIS.
- **Section five** draws together the evidence from the previous sections of the report, to conclude on the impact and effectiveness of the demonstration project and to outline a number of recommendations for the DCSF, local authorities and schools.

A series of charts are provided in Annex One, to provide more detailed information from the year two parent survey; a more detailed method statement is provided at Annex Two, the year one typologies for the main delivery models are presented at Annex Three, whilst a list of the participating schools in the evaluation is presented at Annex Four.

2.0 Planning sessions and engaging parents

This section of the report considers the success of the 20 demonstration project local authorities in planning TIS sessions, during the second year. The strategic planning stage is first reviewed, with attention to the 'effective planning' criteria from year one. The section then explores how local publicity and recruitment was managed for TIS, and the effectiveness of actions taken to raise the participation of 'hard to reach' parents.

2.1 The project timeframe in year two

The overall TIS programme in year two broadly followed that in year one, but with some rolling-back of the initial planning stages to ensure a faster start. As in the first year, support was provided to the demonstration local authorities by the Family and Parenting Institute, including facilitating local planning events, a consolidated bank of TIS materials, and a Web-based discussion forum. In addition to their work with the 20 demonstration project local authorities, in 2007-08 FPI and 4Children were commissioned by DCSF to offer all local authorities action planning and training for TIS facilitators, drawing upon materials and models of TIS delivery developed within the demonstration project.

The interviews with local authority coordinators showed that the *timescales for planning* were much improved in year two, as follows:

- most of the demonstration local authorities started the process in January or February 2007, prior to the delivery of the sessions on a rolling basis between June 2007 and February 2008;
- only a small number of the 11 local authorities who joined the demonstration project in the second year encountered difficulties with getting TIS off the ground. This included one authority where TIS sessions had still not been planned by December 2007; and
- local authorities generally reported a higher uptake by schools than in the previous year, with most claiming to be close to target numbers when the last of the evaluation interviews took place¹.

Notwithstanding the extra planning time, the overall phasing of TIS sessions did not change significantly from year one. Only a minority of schools delivered sessions during the summer term. This is perhaps surprising, given that there was a demand from some local authorities to provide extra planning time for this very purpose. A main factor seems to be that many schools used their extra planning time to extend the consultation process with parents. This was sometimes found to push back the delivery of the sessions, because it took longer to source the expertise or information that the parents requested. The aim was to reap the benefits later-on, by meeting parents' expectations more effectively. This issue is considered further in section three.

¹ January 2008

2.2 Local strategic planning

As with year one, the TIS local authorities and schools identified a number of common factors for effective strategic planning. These were found to include the following:

- clarity of local aims;
- effective publicity and branding; and
- strong leadership from within the local authority.

Many of the established approaches from year one were used again, such as:

- holding an initial 'open' planning meeting to enable a wide cross-section of schools and *external organisations* to hear about the project. These organisations were local and national organisations, whose services might usefully be signposted to parents as part of a TIS session. Such organisations varied considerably from session to session, but included for example - Connexions, Family Learning Service, Children's Information Service, Youth Service, and third sector organisations.
- establishing local multi-agency planning teams; and
- embedding TIS within wider arrangements for Extended Schools, Children's Trusts and Local Area Agreements (LAAs).

The 11 local authorities who joined the demonstration project in year two were generally pro-active in drawing-upon the findings from the project in year one. A variety of information sources were used for this purpose, including the FPI 'lessons learned' report, the ECOTEC national evaluation report, and networking with the other TIS local authorities. A wide range of approaches were taken again in year two, to engage parents who might be considered 'hard to reach'. These are discussed further at section 2.7.

There were, however, a number of changes in emphasis from the first year of the programme that affected how the sessions were planned. Whilst not common to all of the demonstration local authorities, the following headings help summarise *what was distinctive about the TIS demonstration project during year two*.

2.2.1 More defined links with other local programmes and strategies

The confidence of local authorities and schools was generally higher in the second year, to take ownership of TIS in and shape it in specific ways. The TIS coordinators who were interviewed for the evaluation each described a particular niche for the demonstration project that was specific to their local area. So, for example, TIS was tailored locally:

- to run alongside, or in conjunction with local Parent Support Adviser (PSA) pilots in schools (North Somerset, Worcestershire and Northampton);
- to complement the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme, with the aim of boosting parental engagement (Cambridgeshire);
- to run in partnership with the Family Learning Service (Brighton and Hove); and
- to encourage uptake and support for parent-led support groups in schools, such as through the Effective Parent Partnership (EPPa) programme (Essex)

Local authorities had increasingly dovetailed TIS with consultation around their local Parenting Strategy and Extended Schools. A minority of local authorities stalled in taking the programme forward, where these kinds of strategic links were not set in place.

2.2.2 Expanded local authority performance management

There was widespread recognition of the time commitments for TIS in the first year, and a greater number of local authorities used some of their TIS grant to help resource a central support function in year two. This funding was used in a variety of ways, including supporting a full time TIS coordinator post and for additional performance management activities. One local authority used part of their grant to roll-out parent questionnaires for all of their sessions, to provide a snapshot of TIS at whole county level. In other instances, TIS funding was used to enable an extended programme of local facilitator training.

2.2.3 A greater focus on accountability and value for money

A number of additional measures were taken to ensure better value for money for TIS in year two. This followed concerns by some local authorities that disproportionate funding went towards 'one off' events last year, sometimes without any tangible evidence for the outcomes. To address this situation, several local authorities required schools to produce action plans in year two, showing what they aimed to achieve, and how parents would be consulted. One local authority also asked schools to demonstrate that they had taken follow-up work into account within their TIS budget.

A 'light touch' approach was recognised as important. Schools were not declined their TIS funding, but some were asked to provide extra information where the activities could not immediately be seen as parent-centred, such as where there were few arrangements for consulting parents or making available signposting information. The quality assurance process was thought to have been beneficial in supporting schools to set challenging objectives for TIS, which could be used in future years.

2.2.4 More ambitious TIS formats, with a wider view of ‘transitions’

It was not uncommon for schools to plan TIS on a rolling basis in year two, with a consultative event in the summer or early autumn term, followed by a series of themed workshops to sustain parents’ interest. These developments signalled a move away from a ‘single event’ format, in recognition of the lessons learned from year one about effective follow-up with parents. The differences between the baseline positions of individual schools for parental engagement were perhaps further underlined in year two. Schools with more established structures often used TIS to rapidly enhance other aspects of their parental engagement work, as is considered further in section four (impact on schools).

There was considerable interest amongst local authorities and schools, in exploring whether TIS might be extended to cover other key transition points in future. A ‘key stage’ oriented model was raised as a possibility on numerous occasions, whereby TIS might culminate in sessions for parents of pupils aged 16 preparing to leave school. At the other end of scale, there was additional partnership working in some local authorities with nurseries and Children’s Centres – often through locality or district teams - with a focus on early engagement. These developments showed an interest in TIS as a vehicle for the sustained engagement of parents to support transitions throughout the 0-19 phase.

2.2.5 Impact of the TIS capacity-building programme

It was evident from the interviews that there was more networking between local areas than in year one, as awareness of TIS was raised amongst non-demonstration local authorities. This networking was supported by the FPI capacity-building programme of action planning and training, alongside informal contacts; such as those made at the training events. A number of the demonstration local authorities also reported having organised regional TIS networks, to share good practice in a more structured way. Some local authorities were unsure as to how this type of knowledge exchange would be maintained after 2008.

2.2.6 Disseminating good practice developed in the demonstration projects to all schools and local authorities

The interviews and case studies in year two were set against the backdrop of the dissemination to all local authorities of the models and materials for TIS, developed within the demonstration project. Local TIS coordinators expressed concerns that the future of the practice developed in the demonstration project schools was unclear at the time the fieldwork was completed. The emphasis was to transfer knowledge to as many schools as possible, as quickly as possible, so that they would be in a position to plan and deliver TIS sessions in 2008-09 drawing upon learning from the demonstration project. Several of the local authorities were in the process of developing local TIS ‘toolkits’ as a legacy of the demonstration project, by compiling examples of local materials to hand-over to schools.

Of these key issues for year two, the most pressing was perhaps the need to ensure that TIS available to all parents by 2010, through the extended schools programme, would meet the quality of sessions within the demonstration project. The local TIS teams were at the stage of considering how the programme might be funded through Local Area Agreements and Extended Services budgets, but with some uncertainty over whether such funding would provide for a support function to recruit and train facilitators in the future. We return to this issue in section five of the report, where the key messages for the future of TIS as an offer to all parents are considered in greater detail.

2.3 The TIS training programme

The TIS facilitator training was updated in year two, after feedback in year one showed that some revision was required. The DCSF commissioned 4 Children to revise the programme, using a modular approach to suit facilitators' varied professional backgrounds. As in year one, the training was delivered at two regional events, each of which took place over a two-day period. The demonstration local authorities each nominated staff to attend.

Although there were mixed views about the training programme, the overall feedback about the regional training events was more positive than in year one. By holding the events at an earlier stage in the year and providing a more flexible agenda, local authorities were able to reflect the training outcomes within their local TIS Action Plans. This was not found to be the case in year one, when the training came too late in the project to make any adjustments to how each local authority supported their facilitators.

The differences between 'facilitation' and 'delivery' skills were generally thought to have been made clearer in the updated programme, and practitioners were able to select those parts of the training of the greatest relevance to them. The sharing of practical examples and experiences was particularly well received, including where role-play or photographs were used to illustrate successful TIS sessions from year one.

2.4 Local training arrangements

The relationship of the regional training events to locality training shifted during the second year of the project. The interviews showed that a number of the local authorities opted to run their own TIS training 'in-house', often using materials from year one as the basis for this. A process was described through which staff would return from the regional events and cascade the information to their wider team. The local training might address more specific protocols for working with local schools and external organisations, and provide the facilitators with information to assist them with sign-posting parents to local services.

Workforce reform was high on the policy agenda during year two, and a number of the local authorities were in the process of developing new professional roles for working with parents. Two of the demonstration local authorities ran their TIS project alongside a Parent Support Adviser (PSA) pilot. These two local authorities progressed at very different rates during the second year of the project, making it difficult to compare how they had aligned TIS and PSA. Even so, the interviews suggested a good level of overlap between PSA and the requirements for facilitating TIS sessions.

One of the two local authorities that ran TIS and PSA took the approach of dovetailing the local training programme for staff undertaking parental engagement in local schools. The following case study explains how this was achieved.

Case study: Joint training and development for TIS and PSA

North Somerset

The local authority joined the TIS demonstration project in wave two. Funding had already been secured for a PSA pilot, and 25 PSAs were based in schools by the time TIS commenced, with a further number of schools serviced on a cluster basis. The local authority opted to run TIS and PSA together, as part of a wider capacity-building programme for all local schools.

To achieve this, three strands were designed for staffing TIS sessions:

- Joint training for TIS facilitators and PSAs, within the PSA framework;
- Capacity building for schools to identify another (non-PSA) member of staff to take on some responsibilities for the future organisation of sessions; and
- The involvement of other agencies in delivering the sessions, on a need-by-need basis. They included, for example, the local SEN Service, Police, and Southwest Grid for Learning.

The mix of training proved largely successful for meeting the needs of schools and parents. The local authority found that because the training was PSA-led, even those schools without PSAs benefited from the 'PSA ethos' when planning their sessions. It was considered important to give schools flexibility to draw upon a variety of expertise, within a common quality framework.

2.5 School-level planning

The interviews and survey data showed that the planning of TIS sessions at school level was just as individualised as during year one. Schools were moving from a varied baseline for parental engagement, and TIS often coincided with wider school-level issues that affected the level of priority afforded to the project. Changes in school leadership, inspection status, and restructuring were all found to exert an influence on the sessions.

At a broad level, the school interviews reflected the sharper *quality assurance* by the local authorities in year two, but with a more devolved approach to the actual *planning and delivery* of sessions. In some instances, it appeared that the two went hand-in-hand, as the initial bidding requirement helped to align schools' priorities with TIS, which in turn made it possible to give schools more autonomy in developing the sessions. This was described in terms of a handover process for TIS, in recognition that the sessions will need to become part of schools' core activities after April 2008. Even so, some schools were found to require substantial ongoing support from the facilitators to plan their sessions.

As with year one, there was no single model for planning TIS sessions, and schools took a variety of approaches according to the timing, size, format and participants. Some of the steps that schools routinely identified as important were as follows:

- An internal meeting within the school, to involve appropriate staff and scope-out ideas;
- Presenting ideas to Head teacher, for initial backing;
- Reviewing other school policies and practices for parental engagement (such as SEF), to identify where TIS might achieve the greatest contribution;
- Consulting with parents, to identify their detailed information and support needs;
- Canvassing local organisations providing information, advice and support for parents, sourcing information from local services;
- Logistical planning and delivery; and
- Follow-up.

The TIS demonstration schools included some that previously had very few structured arrangements to engage parents in their child's transition,, and others that were already offering a wide variety of activities. This included induction evenings, reading with children, parenting classes, home visits, parent assemblies and family learning provision. Where schools were already running these activities, a niche was commonly described for TIS in terms of the 'workshop' format. Some schools saw an opportunity to engage smaller groups of parents in discussion about topics that were relevant to them and their children's' learning, where these types of group sessions were not previously offered. This included the approach of delivering an initial information session, followed by several themed workshops in response to the issues that parents most wanted to discuss. Examples included curriculum topics, healthy eating, internet safety and arts or creative activities.

The additional planning time for TIS was found to have made possible a wider range of formats in year two of the project. Although many schools ran a single event, other sessions were planned more as a series of mini-consultations. It was not uncommon for schools that took part in year one to raise awareness at a much earlier stage in the year. This included the use of open days and induction processes in the summer term as the first point of contact, so that consultation was done well in advance of delivering the sessions in the autumn.

Figure 2.1 contrasts some of the approaches that were taken.

Figure 2.1 Some planning models for TIS in year two

	Summer term	Autumn term	Spring term
Example 1: <i>Early TIS as a pre-start informational event for parents</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mail-out to parents of new intake • Main information session (June) 		
Example 2: <i>Two-stage TIS: summer pre-publicity and main session in autumn</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness-raising at introductory session (July) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reminders at parent and tutor meetings (Oct) • Main TIS session (November) 	
Example 3: <i>Consultation and themed workshops, without main event</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-publicity at induction (June) • Parent survey, to inform workshop design (July) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Series of five workshops (September to December) 	
Example 4: <i>Extended TIS: early consultation, main event and themed workshops</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-publicity at new parents' evening (June) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main information session (September) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half-termly family workshops (Ongoing)
Example 5: <i>Later TIS: running into spring term to sustain engagement</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation at open day for Reception year (October) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Series of four workshops (November to January)

As Figure 2.1 shows, the schools were able to take TIS in one of any different number of directions. There were numerous examples of schools that sought to anchor TIS to more sustained forms of parental engagement, such as committees and family learning groups.

Continuation planning emerged as a further issue for schools in the second year of the project. In some instances, it was possible for the evaluators follow-up with schools that had taken part in year one, to explore how they had set place arrangements to run sessions again the following year. It was found that, where TIS was successfully embedded in year one, schools were often able to run with the project with less time consuming preparation in the second year. These schools sometimes benefited from having in place tried-and-tested procedures, examples of session materials, and contact lists for local services.

This continuity was by no means guaranteed simply by running a TIS session, however. There were some examples where the staff tasked with planning TIS in year two had very little information about what had taken place the previous year. One school representative even described having to 'start from scratch', because all of the individuals from the first TIS had since left the school. Particular barriers to continuity were identified in the following situations:

- where the session was planned and overseen by a small number of staff within the school, without senior backing - this made TIS very vulnerable to staff turnover;
- where the purpose of the original session was unclear, meaning that staff and parents were later unable to distinguish TIS from any number of other induction events; and
- where little or no documentation was kept from the original TIS event, so that staff conducting future sessions had no examples, materials, or feedback to refer to.

On balance, there was a greater awareness of the need to make TIS sustainable in year two, due to the demonstration project coming to an end in April 2008. Schools were routinely found to be putting measures in place to enable the delivery of future sessions without a lot of external support. This included the development of 'parent handbooks' and purchase of re-usable equipment, such as workshop materials and displays.

Although most respondents thought it was feasible to continue with the sessions without the additional consultancy support and specific grant made available for the demonstration project, some concerns were expressed about quality. The amount of planning time was often said to be high, and staff thought it unlikely they would be able to offer this again without supply cover. It was thought that the 'extra touches' provided by the project funding could make all the difference when marketing the sessions. This included items such as:

- sessional costs for external staff;
- healthy eating displays; and
- suitable equipment for (parent-oriented) maths or science workshops.

This was one area where senior backing within the school was considered important, to increase the chances of budget allocation. A number of schools planned to seek local business sponsorship, or to pool funds on a cluster basis to cover some of the costs. It was recognised that where one activity was prioritised this had consequences for others.

2.6 Recruiting parents

As with year one, the interviews showed that recruitment for TIS could be time consuming and that a mix of different approaches often secured the greatest chance of encouraging parents to attend. Such methods typically included a combination of the following:

- written invitations sent home with children;
- reminders by post;
- informal discussion in the playground / by the school gates (primary); and
- one-to-one follow-up by school staff.

A further set of practical measures for pitching the session were said to include:

- engaging parents through activities that also involve their children;
- creating a personalised message – "what *your* child will be doing at the school";
- organising a series of events at different times, to suit different working patterns; and
- involving local playgroups in raising-awareness, at primary stage.

2.7 Engaging 'hard to reach' parents

The year one evaluation found that schools were rarely able to evidence whether '**hard to reach**' parents had been engaged. The interviews showed disagreement over how 'hard to reach' is best defined, and a lack of reliable methods for recording attendance at TIS sessions. Respondents to the evaluation were in agreement that TIS might need to include greater use of community outreach.

The year two evaluation data shows varied progress against this year one position. Starting with the first issue of defining 'hard to reach' parents, the year two interviews showed that definitions tended to be very locally specific - pertaining to those parents who might not otherwise engage with their child's school. In the context of TIS, a general distinction was identified between:

- **Hard to reach groups or communities**, for whom common issues - such as cultural or linguistic, pose a specific challenge for engaging with the school and vice-versa; and,
- **Hard to reach individual families**, who might face any number of barriers to engagement with their child's school, or be reluctant to engage.

Although not mutually exclusive, there were some key differences between how local authorities and schools approached parental engagement along these lines.

A number of the TIS demonstration local authorities used the mapping and consultation data from their Parenting Strategies to more clearly define the needs of specific **hard to reach groups**. TIS coordinators thought this sometimes helped to understand families' needs and to target more effectively. This was particularly the case at district or cluster level, where quite clearly defined 'geographical communities' (such as very deprived neighbourhoods) were targeted. It was sometimes possible to identify organisations offering information, advice and support for parents that already provided outreach in these areas, to assist with recruitment. In one local authority, links were made with Neighbourhood Managers, for example, because of their routine contact with many of the parents who are considered hard to reach by schools.

A further approach to reach hard to reach groups of parents was to set up local multi-agency planning groups, to bring additional expertise to the local TIS project. In North Lincolnshire, links were made with the Diversity Team within the local authority, as part of a cross-authority strategy to support large numbers of newly arrived families from Eastern Europe. In other local authorities, capacity was strengthened by increasing the level of third sector involvement, to draw-in community organisations with language expertise or more specialist parenting support skills.

Nevertheless, the measures to engage specific communities were often at a relatively early stage of development during the demonstration project. Some respondents identified deep-rooted cultural issues that were simply beyond the scope of TIS to address in its current format. In Cambridgeshire, for example, one local authority manager outlined the challenges faced in some very rural parts of the county, where parental engagement in formal education is historically very low. It was recognised that reinforcing initiatives would be required to bring about change, with TIS being just one part of the solution.

Steps to engage individual **hard to reach families** were routinely conducted on a school-by-school basis, drawing upon the knowledge held by staff such as Home-School Liaison Workers and Learning Mentors. These staff were often found to have prior relationships with parents who might not be in regular contact with the school, and were well placed to identify those parents who might need extra support to attend. Some local authorities performed an 'enabling' role for schools to support these key members of staff, by making extra funding available. Examples included the following:

- In Calderdale, a decision was made to keep part of the demonstration project TIS grant as funding for schools to draw upon specifically for conducting home visits. This was thought to have helped make targeted recruitment possible with individual parents, where schools would otherwise lack the capacity to release busy staff for this purpose;
- In Trafford, the SEN / Family Support Team was recruited to the TIS partnership, to provide an available resource for schools wanting to support parents of children with additional needs.

At the level of working with individual families, some *key differences emerged between primary and secondary schools*:

- Primaries with a co-located nursery commonly reported being at an advantage with identifying 'hard to reach' parents. This was because many of the parents were already known to school staff from their child's nursery stage, and there was a better insight to the support needs of the wider family.
- For primaries with a wider intake, parents' support needs could be more of an unknown factor. One respondent from a primary school described how it was necessary to mail-shot local Children's Centres and nurseries to recruit potential parents. The scope for identifying 'hard to reach' was diminished in this situation. Some of the local authorities aimed to address this issue at a more strategic level, by linking with Early Years teams to enable earlier identification. This

was a relatively new development for year two, and it was too early to gauge the level of success at the time of the evaluation.

- The schools that participated in a cluster-based TIS model reported mixed success with engaging individual hard to reach families. Although this model made it easier to organise extra workshops at more flexible times (see section three), sessions that were run on a cross-school basis were sometimes perceived as less personalised. This was thought to skew attendance towards the keenest parents who would be prepared to attend most activities run by the school. In contrast, harder to reach parents were thought to require more – not less – personalisation around the needs of their child.
- At secondary stage, engagement was commonly led by 'whole school' protocols. So, for example, targeted families would receive an invitation letter, with a follow-up telephone call from the pastoral care team. However, time was often needed for issues to arise during the school year, before specific families came to the attention of pastoral care staff. This meant that it could be challenging for staff to know which parents to target in advance of delivering the initial TIS session. Some schools thought that earlier awareness-raising with feeder primary schools was one way of providing extra time to engage with parents of the new intake before their child started at secondary school.

A further set of issues were encountered for *Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)*. Although there were fewer of these schools within the project, the year two findings suggested that parents could have very specific informational needs that were atypical of primary and secondary TIS sessions. Key considerations were that:

- For PRUs in particular, the interviews showed that parents of children who had recently started were often the least likely to engage due to a lack of confidence about the new environment. This made one-to-one follow-up particularly important; and
- It was not uncommon for Special Schools and PRUs to open-up TIS to parents of all year groups, due to the lower numbers of pupils on roll.

Where progress was made in engaging hard to reach parents, ***schools' evidence*** was largely anecdotal. As with year one, schools infrequently kept records of parental attendance at the sessions, and there was an onus on the knowledge of staff to identify parents with whom there had not been prior contact. This was considerably more difficult to achieve for secondary schools, where the sessions were typically much larger with fewer opportunities to identify and engage parents on an individual basis.

The interviews with school and external staff did show an *observed* change in the profile of parents attending some TIS sessions, compared with more routine school events:

- These changes were often the most apparent, where the school's intake was said to include a fair proportion of parents who were 'hard to reach' on the basis of social disadvantage, but where the structures for parental engagement were previously under-developed. Here, the role of TIS was described in terms of better aligning the schools' approach with the needs of the

local community. Changes were thought to be more noticeable, because the school was moving from a position of very low prior consultation, and could therefore achieve results fairly quickly.

- The interviews suggested that schools in more affluent areas with an established group of regularly attending parents were often less likely to observe changes as a result of TIS. Local organisations engaging in the sessions sometimes expressed frustration that the same parents attended most of the activities that were run by the school. Here, the challenge was described in terms of adjusting patterns of engagement that might not meet the needs of the widest range of parents, rather than a lack of infrastructure per se. This often represented a more gradual process of culture change within the school.

In summary, the year two evaluation data suggests that progress for most schools was on a 'drip-drip' basis rather than radical change. As identified previously, recruitment for TIS sessions could be time intensive, and often doubly so for hard to reach parents. Feedback for the evaluation was generally upbeat about the potential future role for TIS alongside other initiatives, but with a need to extend the present format to help achieve this.

3.0 Delivering the sessions

This section provides an overview of the delivery of Transition Information Sessions (TIS) in year two. It provides information on the profile of sessions delivered and explores issues concerning effective delivery, including examining the role of facilitators at the sessions. This section draws on evidence from the survey of schools, observations of sessions and interviews with LA and schools staff, local organisations offering information advice and support for parents who were involved in delivery, and parents.

3.1 A profile of TIS sessions in year two

As with year one, no detailed national monitoring of individual TIS sessions was undertaken, so it was not possible to give a detailed statistical breakdown for *all* sessions. As part of the evaluation process, however, a short data pro-forma ran alongside the parent survey to capture further details from a sample of schools. The information included:

- Type of session (primary or secondary)
- Timing and duration
- Location / venue and layout
- Staffing arrangements
- Numbers of parents (total and m / f)
- Brief details of the topics that were covered

The pro-forma was completed by the facilitators on a voluntary basis. In total, 109 completed pro-formas were returned for TIS sessions in year two. This sample is of sufficient size to enable some commentary on the profile of sessions delivered, in the absence of a formal monitoring requirement for all sessions. The remainder of this section presents the findings from this analysis, to consider the timing, location and staffing arrangements for sessions in year two. A similar exercise was completed in year one, allowing comparisons of the profile of sessions in each year. Evidence from other strands of the evaluation is also integrated where appropriate.

3.1.1 The timing of the sessions during school terms

In year two, two thirds of the TIS sessions were delivered in the autumn term, with the majority taking place in November. This was the case for both primary and secondary, and also largely reflects the pattern of delivery in year one. Around three quarters of parents who took part in TIS in the autumn term considered this to be the most appropriate timing. This reinforces the year one evidence, which suggested that sessions in October and November were best received because they avoided the busy September month but were still early enough to address parents' immediate concerns about transition.

A small number of sessions in year two took place in June and July. All of these were from local authorities that also took part in year one, and reported being able to progress more quickly to delivery stage this year. The timing was sometimes found to be in response to schools' preferences. Insufficient numbers of schools completed in the summer term to provide a like-for-like comparison with the autumn sessions, but the survey indicates that parents who took part earlier were no less likely to respond positively.

3.1.2 The timing of the sessions during the school day

In year two, there was a mix of primary TIS sessions taking place at different points of the day, although the majority were held around lunchtime or in the afternoon. As in year one, this was often a deliberate strategy to time sessions around drop-off or collection points, or reflecting the demographic of the local community.

In year two it is noticeable that all secondary sessions from the survey sample were held in the evening, from 6pm onwards. The interviews with facilitators and school staff show that the choice of this timing was in recognition that a significant proportion of parents of secondary school aged children were working during the day and would find it difficult to attend at this time.

3.1.3 The duration of sessions

The majority of sessions held in year two were reported to have lasted between one and two hours. This was the same as in year one. The majority of parents surveyed (90%) felt the length of the sessions was just right. There was feedback from parent interviews, however, that some sessions overran. This was particularly the case in sessions that pursued a presentation format, where individual presenters took longer than planned. More positively, however, other sessions overran as parents had lots of questions and school staff and externals were happy to continue to ensure all questions were answered.

3.1.4 The location / venue for sessions

Based on the survey data, the sessions were almost exclusively school-based in year two, with the exception of a small number of very large awareness-raising events in the summer. The interviews showed that, in some areas, the shift to school-based sessions was in direct response to the lessons learned in year one, when community venues received a lower turnout from parents. This issue was also previously documented within other research. For example, the Parent Information Point (PIP) pilot project took a similar approach to offer information sessions to parents, including representatives from external organisations, and presenting information on child development topics. The evaluation of the pilot also showed that community venues were less positively received by parents, and tended to result in a lower turnout¹. The combined evidence indicates that community venues are not usually the most appropriate format for delivering the main TIS session, although this does not preclude follow-up activities taking place at venues other than the school.

¹ Bhabra S and Ghate D (2004) *Parent Information Point: Evaluation of the Pilot Phase*. London: NFPI.

Interviews with staff and facilitators did reveal that a small number of sessions were held in community venues, however. This was typically where a cluster of schools came together to deliver a session. There were found to be mixed results from this approach. An example was where feeder primaries formed a planning group, to design a session collaboratively. One of the Head teachers described how the schools benefited from being able to pool resources, but it proved challenging to agree on topics that met every schools' needs, and this resulted in a more 'generic' format. In hindsight, it was thought that parents would have preferred more information that was specific to their child's school.

Where sessions were school-based, it is evident that most schools opted to use the school hall. This was commonly said to have been to allow for a larger audience, or to create sufficient space for a marketplace set-up where other organisations were in attendance. There were also examples of sessions utilising other school buildings, which were said to include classrooms, multipurpose rooms, libraries, and former caretakers' houses. This was often a deliberate strategy, with some of the reasons identified as follows:

- to provide a more neutral venue, that would not be off-putting for parents who might have negative experiences of their own education;
- to sub-divide larger groups of parents into more manageable groups, for the purpose of workshops or discussion;
- to enable children's work to be showcased as part of TIS;
- to incorporate an ICT element to the session; and
- to combine the session with parents getting familiar with the school site and it's facilities, such as where a tour was provided

The issue of *physical space* for parental engagement emerged as a theme in a number of the interviews with school staff. Schools that held activities with parents on a more regular basis had found this to be a key issue, and identified a priority for schools to factor TIS into their timetabling when organising follow-up activities with parents.

3.1.5 Staffing arrangements

The staffing arrangements for sessions varied significantly across individual sessions, regarding the profile of school staff, facilitators and external organisations present at the sessions.

As with year one, there was a clear trend for schools' senior management (particularly Head teachers and Deputy Heads) to be highly represented at sessions. This commonly received strong positive feedback from parents, who drew confidence from being able to ask questions of the school at all levels. The survey data showed that a diverse cross-section of other school staff also attended TIS sessions, ranging from teaching assistants to learning mentors, catering staff and school nurses. Facilitators reported some difficulties with engaging school staff in the planning and delivery process for a small number of sessions, which raised concerns about sustainability.

Local authority facilitators also attended a high proportion of sessions, but not all, reflecting their differing role in planning and enabling and delivering sessions. The role of facilitators is examined further in Section 3.3.

3.1.6 Topics covered

The topics covered in year two represent similar coverage to year one, as might be expected given the same theme of 'transitions' and continued use of a central bank of TIS materials that were developed for the programme. Key findings include that:

- 'Settling in to school' was a central theme to most TIS sessions, covering issues ranging from staffing and procedures, to school policies and signposting to additional school based or external educational support.
- Although broadly similar topics were covered in primary and secondary school sessions, the specific content of presentations or workshops were tailored to the different age groups. Both primary and secondary sessions covered topics concerning parental support for child development, for example, but topics such as internet safety, drugs awareness and sex education were more prevalent at secondary stage.
- Primary sessions more routinely covered social and personal development themes, whereas secondary sessions tended to be (but were not always) more curriculum-led.

63% of parents responding to the survey were satisfied with the range of topics that were covered at the session. Parents reported different preferences on an individual basis, of course, and this affected the personal outcomes that were achieved. This theme is picked up further in Section 4.

3.1.7 Written materials and handouts

The interviews showed that a variety of written material was used at the sessions. Schools routinely combined the TIS resources with local examples, and it was not uncommon for schools to use some of their TIS demonstration project grant to develop a handbook or similar as a resource that could be updated and used again in future years.

As in year one, parents' experiences of the written materials varied considerably. At secondary stage in particular, it often proved challenging to offer a resource pack that met the needs of all parents, given the potentially more diverse range of topics to cover.

Parents often described high expectations of written materials, and practical resources and toolkits were often favoured over 'off-the-shelf' information packs. It was not always feasible for schools to meet these expectations within the timescale of the project, and some central pooling of resources is one way that duplication of effort might be avoided.

The mix of written information at the sessions was often said to include signposting information provided by external organisations. Although this could be mutually beneficial, where schools were able to offer a wider range of information to parents, some concerns were raised over quality assurance. Some TIS coordinators were taking steps to produce a directory or similar, listing

information about local services for their TIS project. Care was taken by local authorities to avoid liability (this can be achieved by use of a “disclaimer” to make the point that the person providing the list does not make any representation about the quality of services offered by providers on the list; parents should check for themselves; look at inspection reports etc). Contacting local Family Information Services (FIS) was sometimes reported to be a first point of collating this type of information.

The survey data from years one and two give some indication of the *extent to which written materials were used* by the parents. The findings seem promising at year two stage, in that a quarter of parents who responded to the survey said they had referred back to the handouts in the months following the sessions. Parents from primary schools were twice as likely to have referred back to written handouts within the timescale, with the figures standing at 30% and 14% respectively.

The tracker survey from year one sheds some further light on the durability of the written information from the sessions, over the course of the school year. It was found that:

- Around a third of parents had used the written information they were given, with 40% not having made any use, and 22% not recalling any handouts. Of those who did not recall the handouts, some did not recall the session.
- The main reported use was as a reference for facts and guidance, as and when it was needed. The subject matter varied widely, but healthy eating and lifestyles topics were recurrent. Some parents reported a diminishing need to draw upon the TIS materials as they became more confident, and / or sourced other information during the year.
- Fewer parents had used the contact details to get in touch with staff from the school (12%). In most of these cases, contact was made with school staff for curriculum or timetable related issues. One parent contacted a health visitor, and another followed-up an opportunity to become a parent governor.
- Parents from secondary schools were less likely to report having been given anything to read. They were also (15%) less likely to have made any use of the written information, even where it was received.

Promisingly, the incidence of parents reporting that they *accessed the internet* for further information as a result of attending a TIS session more than doubled between the year one and year two surveys (from 11% to 24%). This suggests some combination of:

- more effective awareness-raising of Internet-based sources during the second year of the project; and / or
- the expanded availability of internet-based information services.

The interviews in year two certainly suggest that parents were more routinely provided with examples of web-sites with further practical information, and that these were often viewed following the session.

Drawing together the survey data from years one and two, it is apparent that the written materials and handouts added some value to the TIS sessions. That a quarter of parents viewed the handouts in the period immediately after the TIS sessions shows that they had the potential to reinforce the key messages, although there is clearly room for improvement to boost levels of uptake. The year one survey also shows that parents sometimes had occasion to refer to written information during the school year, although the quality and relevance of information at secondary stage is a key issue to address.

3.1.8 Session attendance

The year one evaluation showed that the numbers of parents attending sessions were highly variable, and that some schools encountered a very poor turnout. The low level of participation by fathers was a particular issue. The year one survey found that male participants were under-represented at 1:3 for the sessions overall, although the difference was less pronounced for secondary sessions. These findings raised some questions about the effectiveness of recruitment in year one, and whether new approaches were needed.

The picture is slightly more promising in year two, based on a sample of 105 sessions from the survey. A year-on-year comparison shows that:

- For primaries, the average (mean) attendance was 24 in year two compared to 17 in year one. Numbers of parents ranged from 3 to 120. The largest sessions were cluster-based, and drew upon parents from the intake of several different primaries.
- For secondary, the average (mean) attendance was 93 in year two, compared to 63 in year one. Numbers of parents ranged from 17 to 350 (again for collaborative events).

The survey data shows that the average (mean) attendance for year two was very similar to year one for primary sessions, but had improved noticeably for secondary sessions. Here, the margin of difference was around one third. The interviews suggest that this reflects both the additional time for recruitment in the second year, the ability to draw upon examples of secondary sessions from last year, and more widespread use of pre-publicity.

As the statistics demonstrate, however, there was wide variation in attendance levels again. This is perhaps disappointing, given that the overall level of parental *consultation* was reported to have been more sustained in year two of the pilot project. The interviews suggest that attendance at TIS sessions could be unpredictable, however, and was not always in direct proportion to how successful the schools had been in asking parents what they wanted. Factors such as family engagements, weather conditions, or TV schedules were sometimes thought to have had a knock-on effect on parent numbers.

As in year one, the *very* low turnout at some sessions cannot be entirely accounted for by differences in sizes of intakes. This is reinforced by the facilitator interviews, which showed that some schools underestimated the groundwork that was required for parental engagement. Further dissemination of effective recruitment strategies between schools and local authorities is one possible way to underline this message in future years.

The survey data also provides an opportunity to review the monitoring characteristics of parents who took part in TIS in year two. In line with the findings from year one:

- just over three quarters (76%) of parents who attended sessions were female, 17% male, and 6% did not answer the question
- a higher proportion of fathers and male carers (24%) attended secondary sessions; and
- the ethnicity of the parents attending sessions broadly reflected the national population, based on a validity cross-check with the 2001 Population Census.

These findings cover familiar territory from year one. There were examples of individual schools that reported a high turnout of male carers, but these were often found to be schools where the staff reported a longstanding tradition of high male attendance.

The findings certainly concur with other sources of research and evaluation. The PIP pilot evaluation found that male attendance was lower at the sessions, and concluded that further efforts were required to reach fathers¹. Furthermore, a recent assessment of the market for parental and family support services (2006) concluded that the sector was '*...widely acknowledged to be reaching only limited numbers of fathers and BME groups*'².

Turning around such patterns of engagement was thought to be a time consuming process, if a necessary one. Several respondents thought that linking TIS to school-based activities for fathers and sons was one way to drive-up numbers, but that such a focus would be too restrictive for the initial TIS session itself.

3.2 Models of delivery in year two

The year one report identified a series of core models or 'types' that emerged from the interview and survey work. These were intended to help illustrate which approaches worked best for achieving certain types of aims with TIS, and are presented in full at Annex Three of this report.

In year two, a number of the schools that took part last year adapted or extended the models that were used, in response to issues raised concerning the venue, format, timing and feedback from sessions. The following considers each of the core models in turn, and what was different about them in the second year.

¹ Ibid. , pp.71

² PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (2006) *The Market for Parental and Family Support Services*, pp.2

Model 1: Presentation and networking

Imparting information on set topics or themes, followed by the opportunity for questions, discussion and networking opportunity with parent and staff.

A number of schools who delivered a session based on the presentation and networking model in year one responded to feedback in year two by reducing the formal presentation elements and increasing the opportunities for parents to have one to one conversations with teachers or external organisations, moving towards the marketplace model. This change was made in recognition that parents were less likely to ask questions in a group setting. The interviews showed that parents often responded favourably to these changes.

Model 2: Activity or theatre-based

Interactive model that explores one or more themes by way of practical exercises, scenarios or theatre. Parents have the opportunity to provide the content.

The use of community arts and theatre achieved a very positive response from parents in year one. Staff who were interviewed often expressed surprise that parents were willing to participate in the role plays, whilst parents themselves identified how this was an important means of sharing ideas and strategies on a peer group basis.

In year two, the same partnership model was used in Lewisham to deliver theatre-style sessions, but with adjustments made in response to low attendance in year one. The results were quite dramatic, as the following case study helps to illustrate.

Case study: Designing TIS around the needs of parents and schools

Lewisham

A core team of Extended Services, Make Believe Arts and the Children's Society planned and delivered the TIS sessions in Lewisham primary schools. In year one, the sessions were delivered at community venues. While parents engaged with the theatre format, the use of neutral venues was found to result in poor attendance. The schools had less ownership of the sessions, and fewer staff were represented per school. This made it difficult to arrange further sessions,, because there was less clarity about the issues that were specific to each individual school.

In year two, the planning team adjusted the model. The same theatre and arts format was used, but the sessions were delivered on a school-by-school basis over an intensive period in June / July. The attendance was much higher. The feedback showed that parents and school staff participated as equals in the theatre activities, which built familiarity and confidence. The partners, including Make Believe Arts and the Children's Society were able to create a united 'multi agency' feel to the sessions, and to showcase their services. Since the session took place, parents have contacted the Children's Society directly for information packs and advice.

In year two, a greater number of local authorities and schools used this type of interactive approach to tackle challenging topics. This included an 'anti-bullying magician' in Bolton for example, who dealt with how parents can identify and deal with the signs of bullying at school in an engaging way, and one session that adopted the style of a TV politics show as a method of engaging parents in a panel debate about issues affecting the school.

Model 3: Multi-agency marketplace or carousel

A showcase of schools and other local organisations, by way of exhibition stands, or a 'carousel' format, where parents have 5 minutes of one-to-one time with each external organisation that was represented at the session.

In year one, marketplace sessions were widely considered to offer an effective method where schools sought to bring the 'signposting' elements of TIS to the fore. Many of the sessions that achieved strong levels of involvement by external organisations with a shared agenda of supporting parents had taken this approach, because it provided a tangible reason for these organisations to attend and meet with parents directly.

The marketplace model was widely implemented again in year two, but some changes were made where year one local authorities and schools had consulted parents and reviewed the feedback. Some of the key issues to emerge in the first year were that:

- parents had not always been aware of the role of other organisations who attended the sessions, because the presentation and stalls were not sufficiently integrated; and
- the prospect of browsing partner stalls made parents feel self-conscious; particularly where the session attendance was low and partners sometimes outnumbered parents.

To help address these issues in year two, some schools had taken the following actions:

- introducing more activities for children and parents to complete together as they browsed the different information stalls; and where space allowed,
- altering the layout of the venue to allow parents to sit and talk to the organisations attending rather than simply pick up leaflets or browse information sources.

The carousel approach was repeated again with considerable success in year two. In Essex, where the model was extensively piloted in year one, the format was reported to have received a positive response from parents who might be considered 'hard to reach'.

Model 4: Piggy-back TIS

TIS session is run to coincide with other fixed dates in the school calendar, for example as part of a parents' evening, with the aim of accessing a captive audience for TIS.

The use of the 'piggy back' model was sometimes in response to facilitator and school concerns about low attendance at TIS, which was well documented in year one. Some schools took the view that this was correlated with parents already having attended an open day or parents' evening, and the session falling too soon afterwards. Running the two sets of events together was therefore a strategy to boost attendance for each of them.

As with year one, a drawback to this model was the risk that the TIS session could be pushed to the background. The interviews suggest that this was sometimes the case again, as parents did not always engage with the TIS activities because the one-to-one tutor time was of greater importance. Some facilitators thought that organising a TIS session around a pupil-centred event was unhelpful for encouraging schools to make the sessions more genuinely parent-centred.

Model 5: Consultative event, plus workshops

Extended format, so that initial TIS event is run as a consultation session in the summer term, followed by a series of workshops on topics identified by parents at the initial event.

In year two, the extended timeframe for TIS meant that it was possible for schools to trial a further model - that of using the initial session as a springboard for linked workshops or taster sessions. The model aimed to address a concern that was raised by some during year one, that TIS should be viewed as an ongoing process, rather than a single event.

The interviews in year two showed both strengths and drawbacks to the approach. It was evident that parents valued being consulted on what the workshop topics would be. Having a roll-on / roll-off format also meant that parental choice was often improved - parents were sometimes able to select only those topics that were relevant to them rather than sitting through sections of the presentations that were '*a turn off*'. In practice, however, the level of attendance at the extra workshops was sometimes very low.

The survey evidence suggests that it was mainly primary schools that used this model, and one area for attention is perhaps to further explore a secondary version. Some secondary staff considered that a series of smaller sessions was the only viable way to increase the level of parent-teacher and parent-parent contact time that is possible via TIS.

3.2.1 Crosscutting success factors

As in year one, local authorities and schools took TIS in a number of different directions according to local priorities and this was actively encouraged as the demonstration project was drawing to a close and local authorities and their schools would be taking the work forward independently of the project. Despite the variety of TIS formats, however, a number of common success factors emerged for delivering effective sessions. These are as follows:

- **Clarity of purpose and message:** the year two interviews showed that the most successful sessions were often those that distilled the TIS topics into two or three key messages, and selected delivery models that were most appropriate to achieve these aims. In contrast, overly ambitious sessions risked swamping the parents with factual information and reduced the discussion time.
- **Ownership by the school:** school backing and ownership was reported to be a key success factor in both primary and secondary TIS sessions. Even in situations where facilitators and partners took a lead role in planning or delivery, school staff often provided the 'anchor' point for the wider TIS topics and helped to relate them to the arrangements for their specific school.
- **Active involvement of external organisations and other agencies with a shared agenda of supporting parents:** as in year one, successful sessions were often a marriage of school and community expertise. Where schools had seen the benefits of this involvement in year one, some chose to extend the range of these organisations/agencies involved session in year two. This included, for example, local councillors, the fire service, road safety teams, libraries, and Jobcentre Plus. This approach was thought to have widened the overall range of information that was available to parents.
- **Involvement of external organisations-** for some local authorities and schools, this proved the most time-consuming aspect of the planning, whereas for others multi-agency TIS sessions were arranged fairly quickly. The professional background, knowledge and contacts of the local authority facilitators were found to be important in this respect. The facilitators came from a diverse range of backgrounds, including voluntary sector, social care, and enterprise. This sometimes helped to draw-in fresh expertise. For example, one of the TIS Coordinators was from a Business Links background and reported how this had helped to achieve support (and sponsorship) for the TIS sessions from local employers.
- **Getting the practicalities right:** the interviews highlighted that even if the content was pitched effectively, this could be undermined by practical barriers to parents attending the sessions. Examples included where sessions conflicted with parents' work schedules and made it more difficult to attend, or where parents were told they could bring young children but the session length proved inappropriate. Parents generally welcomed where schools had consulted on their access and support arrangements. These were found to include crèche, catering or transport facilities as appropriate.
- **Opportunities for informal networking:** parents usually said that they welcomed the opportunity to mix with other parents, staff and organisations or agencies supporting parents. Facilitators and school staff also acknowledged that providing opportunities for informal networking sometimes overcame the reluctance of some parents to ask questions in a group setting, and gave an opportunity for parents to ask questions.

- **Effective use of parental feedback:** many of the schools that delivered sessions in year one found that it was difficult to get feedback from parents after the sessions, and that sharing of such feedback with parents was an area of weakness. In year two, a number of schools sought to address these issues by building feedback into the format of the sessions, and using appropriate mechanisms to overcome potential difficulties parents may experience in completing traditional feedback forms.

The following case study provides an example of parental consultation in one local area.

Case study: New methods of parental consultation and feedback

Essex

To overcome difficulties in gathering parent feedback using paper based questionnaires, one local authority made use of hand-held voting mobiles in year two. This system was used to canvas parent's opinions, and made it possible to compare them with other parent audiences elsewhere within the local authority. The approach allowed feedback to be gathered and analysed relatively quickly, so that parents' views of the early sessions informed the continuing programme of sessions in schools.

3.3 Facilitation and support at the sessions

A key strand of delivery of TIS sessions in year one and two was the recruitment and training of facilitators to support the planning and delivery of TIS sessions.

The nature of the facilitator role was found to vary considerably in year two, depending on number of factors. The main ones were said to include:

- **The level of facilitator involvement requested by the school:** this guided the extent to which the facilitators' inputs were lighter or heavier in touch. Facilitators sometimes described a balance between allowing schools to take the lead if they wanted to, and prompting them if the original purpose of TIS seemed to have been lost. Conversely, some schools were said to need extra prompting, to take ownership of the session.
- **School / facilitator ratios:** at a capacity level, this influenced how much time the facilitators could allot to each school. Where caseloads were larger, it was sometimes possible to provide support at a cluster level. Where school staff and facilitators had received some local training together, it was sometimes clearer in advance how the division of roles would be managed at the sessions.
- **The proposed format of the session:** whether the session was marketplace, presentation-based, or other formats, also affected the balance of organisation, facilitation and direct delivery that was required. Where facilitators did have a more active role, this sometimes helped to balance the school-led parts of the session, although these inputs could be confusing for

parents if not fully joined-up. Facilitators with a background of working with adults were welcomed by staff whose professional experience was entirely child-focussed, whilst the involvement of facilitators from Extended Services Teams was sometimes reported to have been effective when fielding more specific questions from parents about local service provision.

- **The professional background** of the facilitator guided their approach, experience, resources and ethos. Some local authorities consciously sought to train a wider pool of facilitators in year two, so that these differences in background enriched the skills mix for the local TIS sessions. The profile of facilitators in year two included parent volunteers and staff with a social care background, for example, alongside the strongly early years, adult learning and family learning profile that was reported during year one.

These findings reinforce the need for locally-focussed training which fits with the move away from the regional training events in year two. A number of Local Authorities had clearly taken this on board and were working towards developing a quality facilitator workforce with a view to offering support beyond 2008.

4.0 Impact and outcomes

This section of the report reviews the impact and outcomes from TIS, drawing on the survey and interview data from year two, and the follow-up that was conducted with schools and parents who took part in year one. The section considers the evidence for each of the main intended outcomes from TIS in turn.

4.1 Laying the foundations for effective home-school partnerships

In year one, a combination of survey data and interviews showed that most parents who took part in TIS had gained some level of confidence about what to expect for their child's time at their new school. Parents routinely said they felt more familiar with the school environment and staff and TIS sessions were rated as one of the most useful types of support for transitions, along with school open days and one-to-one tutor time.

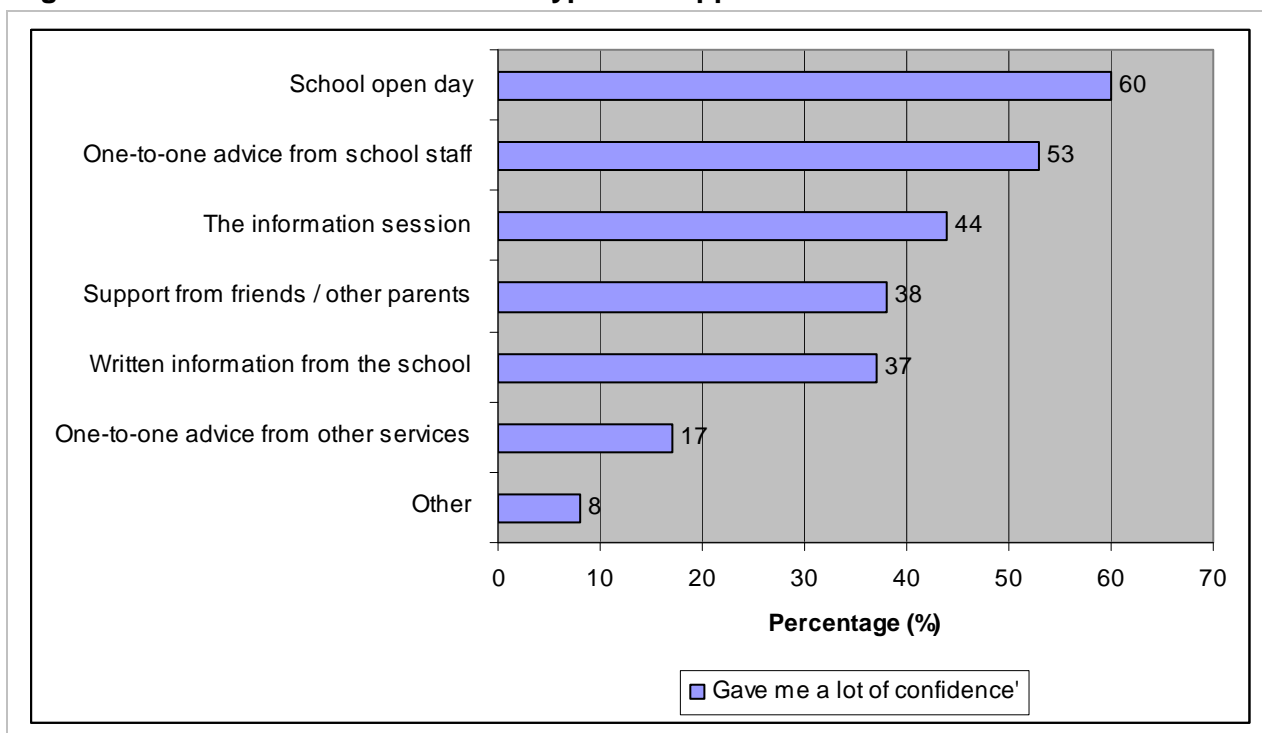
The year one survey findings also suggested that parents at secondary sessions and male carers were less likely to report gains in confidence. Furthermore, the timeliness of follow-up by schools was found to influence perceptions of the sessions. A lack of follow-up was cited as one of the main reasons for schools losing parents' initial trust.

At final reporting stage, it is possible to further clarify these findings. The remainder of this section presents the year two evidence, drawing comparisons with the data from year one.

4.1.1 Parental outcomes in years one and two: crosscheck

The year two parent survey took a similar approach to year one, by asking parents to rate how important the TIS session was in helping their child to move to primary or secondary school, alongside other types of support. As in year one, the survey was conducted with parents who agreed to be re-contacted at an interval of two to three months after the session. The findings are presented at Figure 4.1, overleaf.

Figure 4.1 Parents' views of different types of support for transition



n=110

As the chart illustrates, parents again rated TIS as an important source of school-based support for transitions. In both years, the sessions were considered more important than written guidance and one-to-one advice from other services, but less important than open days and one-to-one advice from school staff. The proportion of parents who rated TIS as a 'very important' type of support for transitions increased slightly in the second year.

The 'other' factors helping with transition in year two were specified as:

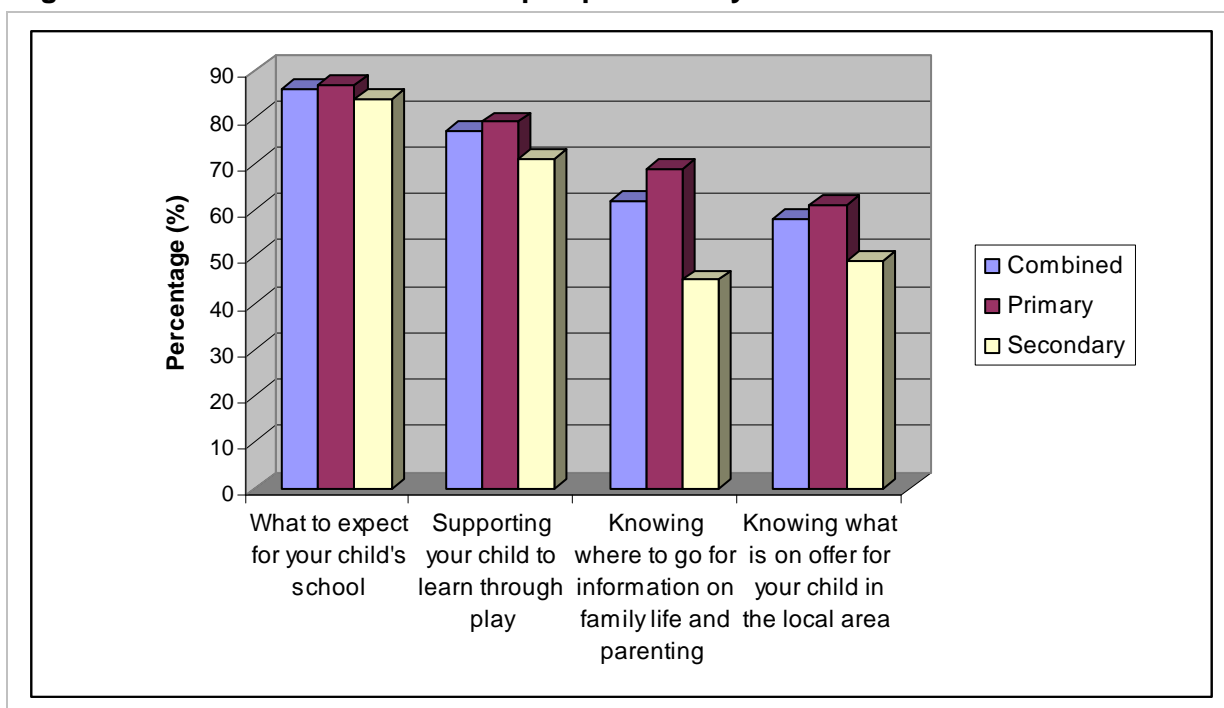
- Having children at the school already;
- The school-nursery link; and
- After school clubs.

These findings tally with last years' survey. Parents reported benefits from having other children at the school already, and therefore being familiar with staff and procedures. Indeed, it was the parents *without* another child at the school who reported gaining the most confidence from TIS overall in both years. This can be explained by their lower prior knowledge of the school and greater need to establish relationships with staff.

The interviews with parents in year two also showed that parents' confidence was often given a boost where they had attended summer camps, workshops or open days prior to starting at the new school. Not all parents had been able to attend these events, however, and TIS was often welcomed as an extra opportunity to meet with staff and other parents.

The year two survey data makes it possible to further clarify the year one findings - that lower confidence gains were reported by parents who took part in *secondary* sessions in year one. Figure 4.2, below, presents the data for those parents who reported positive outcomes from the sessions in relation to the survey criteria. The percentages are based on the combined categories 'gave me a lot of confidence' and 'was very helpful in places'.

Figure 4.2 How the TIS sessions helped parents in year two



n= 197

As the chart illustrates, the survey in year two reinforces that parents at secondary sessions reported lower confidence gains from TIS. It is apparent, however, that the margin of difference was lower for school-related outcomes and higher for those outcomes relating to the wider sign-posting and referral role of TIS. The theme is picked up in further detail throughout this section of the report.

The year two survey makes it possible to explore whether *male carers* reported lower confidence gains from TIS, as per year one. The survey produced mixed results on this issue. Women were more likely to say that they gained a lot of confidence from TIS in relation to knowing what to expect for their child and supporting them to learn. In contrast, the confidence gains for women and men were very similar in relation to knowing what is on offer within the local area. The starkest difference, however, is in relation to knowing where to go for information on family life or parenting. Here, proportionately far fewer men reported that the session had helped them at all.

These findings suggest that lower gains by male carers continued to be an issue to some extent in year two. The interview evidence shows that, for some male carers, the sessions were experienced as being female-oriented and that this made them less comfortable to engage in discussion around the TIS topics. It is also clear that a wider range of written information for fathers and male carers would be beneficial, for use at the sessions.

4.1.2 Developing home-school partnerships

The year two evaluation data largely supports the year one findings, with regard to laying the foundations for home-school partnerships.

School staff who were interviewed in year two consistently reported that TIS helped to establish a dialogue with parents. Whilst most schools were already said to provide meetings or events as part of their induction process, these were commonly found to be more 'administrative' in their purpose. The demonstration project provided an opportunity and extra funding for schools to engage parents of the new intake in an informal setting. Prior consultation with parents was thought to be an important start point. Staff found that sessions needed to reflect what parents wanted rather than what schools thought they ought to know.

Parents commonly reported being more aware of the support available within the school and knowing who to approach if concerns arose, as a result of attending TIS sessions. Indeed, 'having confidence in the school' was ranked as the second most important way in which TIS helped parents, within the year two survey. It was not uncommon for parents to say they would be more likely to contact their school to ask questions or request information, as a result of taking part in TIS sessions.

Parents often said that they needed to feel confident and well informed before being prepared to ask questions of the school, and that TIS had played a role in this. There were often two-way benefits, as the following Head teacher quotes illustrate.

'[TIS] has led to an improved flow of information... and with a better understanding of school life, parents can ask better questions of the school'

(Head teacher, primary school, Hampshire)

'It's hard to say, because every cohort is different. But certainly the children who are in year one – there is more of a cohesion in the class, and more parental involvement'

(Head teacher, primary school, Calderdale)

Some of the schools were successful in using one or more of the TIS topics as the basis for a more structured debate around 'whole school' issues. This included sessions that engaged parents in discussion about attendance or behaviour. Where an inclusive approach was taken to address these topics, it was often found that TIS achieved parents' backing where previous attempts (such as letters sent home) were unsuccessful. At year two stage, it was possible to gauge the distance

travelled by some of the schools that had a positive response in year one. The following case study provides an example.

Case study: Gaining parental support for 'whole school' issues

Wavell School, Hampshire

The school has specialist status for IT, and there is a high level of use of computers by pupils on a daily basis. Problems were encountered in the past with unacceptable use of the internet by pupils, so the school aimed to boost parents' know how via TIS, to support with compliance.

The Deputy Head teacher, who also has a lead role for parental engagement, took the lead in planning TIS in year one. The 'wired-up-world' and 'safer internet' TIS materials were mix-and-matched with home-grown school materials, including a curriculum handbook for parents. The safer internet theme was delivered in workshop format, as part of a TIS marketplace event.

The post-session feedback forms showed that parents found the internet safety theme particularly useful, which led to some parents contacting the school for more information. The school does a variety of evaluative work with parents, which has shown the current year 8 parents to be more internet-aware than last years' intake. The school has recorded fewer breaches of internet safety for pupils from the TIS cohort.

For other schools, TIS provided an opportunity to repair poor relationships, where parental engagement had reached a low point. The funding and local authority support provided through the demonstration project helped to launch a new approach. The following case study illustrates how this was achieved, for one primary school.

Case study: TIS as a platform for re-engaging with parents

The Head teacher saw an opportunity to get involved with TIS in year one, to help bring the school closer to the local community. The school wanted to revisit how it worked with parents, to ensure a better balance in terms of conveying good and bad news about issues such as behaviour and attendance. A role was identified for TIS to help 'start afresh' with the new intake.

The Head teacher oversaw the planning for TIS, alongside the facilitator. Parents had previously raised questions about after school activities and childcare, so it was decided to include information about these topics at the session. This was followed-up with a short childcare survey.

In the year following the session, enrolments for IT classes and workshops have risen sharply, with the highest uptake coming from parents who attended TIS. The Learning Mentor has also reported very positive relationships with parents from the year group. The Head teacher hopes that the foundations have been laid for a positive culture of parental engagement in future years.

School staff who were interviewed in year two tended to be pragmatic about the time required to fully establish effective home-school partnerships. A typical view was that TIS had a role to play by "*starting things on a positive note*", but that sustained engagement could take many years to achieve. To maximise the impact of the sessions, schools often focussed on joining-up TIS with other activities, events and courses for parents.

4.1.3 Extent of follow-up by schools

A key point of clarification from year one was whether the initial sessions resulted in follow-up action by the schools during the course of the year; whether that be organising further information sessions, reviewing school procedures in light of concerns raised by parents, or organising new activities at the request of parents - such as coffee mornings or parents groups. The feedback in year one suggested that parents' initial enthusiasm could soon be lost if the school was not seen to respond to issues that were raised at the session.

As explained in section 1.2, the tracker survey from of the first year of the project is one of a number of sources of evidence for exploring how follow-up was managed by schools. The tracker provides a fairly small-scale snapshot of parents (n=110), and is by no means a wholly representative one for all TIS sessions nationally. However it has the advantage of capturing any actions that were taken by schools throughout the year. Based on those parents who responded to the survey, it appears that follow up was by no means routine. The key findings were that:

- Less than a quarter of parents reported being aware of any follow-up to the original TIS session by their child's school, during the school year. Where action was taken, this was nearly always to schedule additional meetings or workshops at the request of parents. The topics ranged from additional information about supporting learning in the home, to internet safety, maths and literacy.
- Forms of action other than further events were a significant minority within the survey. Just three parents reported being aware of changes to school policies as a result of the TIS session. There was also one example of a new committee set-up; and
- Parents of children at primary schools were twice as likely as their secondary counterparts to report follow-up having taken place by the school (33% to 16% respectively). Given that almost all of the follow-up action was to run extra sessions on parents' behalf, this suggests a much lower propensity for secondary schools to provide such extra sessions.

The survey reinforces some of the concerns that were expressed in year one, that sessions often lacked clarity about the 'next steps'. It also illustrates the greater barriers faced by secondary schools, in scheduling follow-up for much larger groups of parents.

Although it is too early to draw a direct comparison with year two, the interviews suggest that local authorities and schools were aware of the shortcomings from the first year of the programme and that extra steps were more commonly taken to schedule follow-up.

Whilst it would be inappropriate to suggest that extra TIS sessions are necessary (or feasible) for all schools in the demonstration project, keeping momentum from the initial session remains one of the main areas for attention by schools. TIS was conceived as a partnership between schools, parents and other organisations there to support them, and it is arguable that this partnership is best developed through a range of ongoing activities and provision - including access to extended services. Indeed, the benefits of embedding parent information within a wider - 'whole school' - approach for parental engagement are well documented from previous research and practice¹.

¹ Bastiani, J., 1995. *Taking a few risks, learning from each other - teachers, parents and pupils*.

4.2 Providing information, ideas and opportunities for discussion

The year one survey and interviews showed that parents valued the opportunity to meet with other parents, and routinely kept in touch with those whom they met at the sessions. Parents often reported greater confidence, skills and ideas for supporting their children to learn at home as a result of taking part in TIS. These outcomes were most commonly reported where the sessions were delivered in partnership with adult or family learning professionals and took a practical 'workshop' approach.

There was also promising evidence in year one that TIS led parents to contact their school to enquire about clubs and activities - particularly at secondary stage. TIS did not seem to have generated much interest in parent committees or other decision-making forums within the available timescale.

The evaluation data in year two largely reinforces these findings, as discussed below.

4.2.1 Knowledge and awareness of school issues

Parents who took part in TIS in year two commonly reported feeling better prepared for their child's time at the school, as a result of attending the session. 86% of parents who answered the question within the year two survey said that TIS had helped them with knowing what to expect¹. The opportunity to meet with a cross-section of school staff and representatives from other service providers, finding out about pastoral care arrangements, and learning about teaching methods were all cited as factors that gave parents reassurance.

School staff also noticed differences in parents' levels of knowledge about the school. The evidence was often anecdotal, such as reception staff noticing fewer anxious parents contacting the school during the first week of term after a successful summer TIS session. There were also examples where schools had done some tracking of parents from the year one TIS cohort, and found them to be '*better informed*' about school issues. Schools that conducted some form of annual questionnaire with parents were often the best placed to observe these changes, as they could compare year-on-year data.

The year two survey showed that an increased awareness of schools' activities, events and clubs was an important aspect of parents being better informed about school life. Of those who answered the question within the year two survey, 23% parents had made enquiries about clubs or activities for their child; whilst 17% contacted the school for more information. These types of follow-up action were also evident within the parent interviews.

For some parents of children with special needs, the enhanced level of information provided by TIS was sometimes found to have made a real difference in the level of support available. Where extra challenges were faced around transitions, TIS was more likely to be perceived as a lifeline than an opportunity to learn about new ideas, as the following example illustrates.

¹ Based on the combined categories: 'gave me a lot of confidence' and 'was helpful in places'.

Case study: TIS supporting families with special needs

One parent of a child with SEN described how she had real concerns about her child's transition to secondary school; because previous information events tended to be too 'mainstream' in focus and made assumptions about what parents needed to know. In contrast, the TIS session was found to offer a wide range of sign-posting information and an opportunity for one-to-one discussion with the SENCO. The parent also learned that the library and sports facilities at the school were for public access.

Since attending the session, the parent has established a routine of meeting her son at the library every week, to use the computers for homework. She has also encouraged her son to sign-up for as many after school clubs as possible, to help improve his social skills. The TIS session was thought to have considerably eased her concerns about transition.

Although most parents reported having gained some additional knowledge or new ideas from TIS, the sessions did not meet the needs of all those who attended. The interviews suggest that responses were quite personalised, with parents attending the same session and having very different outcomes. This included where information about 'healthy eating' was considered patronising by some and a source of new ideas for others. There were, however, examples of *whole sessions* that received a consistently negative response. The factors were commonly found to include that:

- the aims were poorly communicated, such as where parents were recruited to learn about supporting their children's learning and received general information instead;
- the turnout from school was poor, giving an impression of low priority by the school, and preventing the (much valued) opportunity to meet with school staff;
- the 'pitch' of the session was inappropriate, whether too low / too technical; and
- the facilitator lacked knowledge of issues that were specific to the individual school.

4.2.2 Supporting children's learning in the home

The year two interviews showed that schools and parents alike saw TIS as an opportunity to share ideas and practices about supporting children to learn in the home. This was perhaps even more widely reported than in year one. Indeed, parents who responded to the survey in year two ranked 'supporting children to learn in the home' the highest of all of the ways in which TIS helped them. 77% of parents who responded to the survey reported some increased confidence in this respect.

The interviews showed that parents were regularly enthused by the TIS workshop activities, and often sought to apply them in a home setting. Examples included changes to homework routines or home reading practices and the use of phonics. As in year one, these changes were often described as being relatively subtle. Parents frequently approached any ideas they had been given in a critical way, rather than implementing them as a matter of course.

Frustration was expressed by some parents, that the TIS activities were not always part of an ongoing programme. At times, it appeared that parents' expectations had been raised higher than schools had the capacity to respond to; such as where a creative and well-received TIS session turned out to be a one-off event. Other sessions were thought to have been too general, and did not match parents' interest in practical tools and examples.

Staff from primary schools more routinely said that they had run workshops on supporting learning in the home than staff from secondary schools, and they were usually better placed to observe any benefits. Having more routine contact with a smaller number of parents was thought to have helped with this. Where the sessions had been well received, school staff commonly described a change in how parents perceived their own role in relation to their child's learning. Primary teachers sometimes identified the following:

- parents were more willing to spontaneously share information about activities their child had been doing in the home - often on an informal basis;
- they were prepared to '*stand back more and encourage children to do things for themselves*'; and
- they were more aware of the importance of play. This was thought to have reduced parents' anxiety about the need to adopt more formal learning practices at home.

For primary and secondary sessions alike, parents were often reported to have expressed an interest in accessing books and resources after taking part in TIS sessions.

These findings are highly promising, given the documented evidence for the importance of 'at home' positive parenting in reinforcing children's learning and development, and the priority to develop a wider number of successful interventions to support this more spontaneous at home activity through school-promoted activities¹. They suggest that TIS has a positive contribution to play, in supporting parents in this capacity.

4.2.3 Making contact with other parents

As with year one, parents often cited the contact with other parents at the sessions as one of the most important outcomes. Parents who responded to the survey in year two ranked 'Talking to other parents' the second highest of all of the ways in which TIS helped them. Furthermore, a third of all parents who were re-contacted at an interval of three months said that they had kept in touch with other parents they met at the session. This is an overall improvement on year one, when a quarter of parents reported the same.

¹ DfES, 2003. *The Impact of Parental Involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a review of literature*. London: DfES Publications, RR433.

Stark differences were found again between the primary and secondary data. Whilst 44% of parents who attended primary TIS sessions reported having kept in touch with other parents, only 12% of parents who attended secondary sessions did so. It is significant that these findings correlate almost exactly with the year one tracker survey¹. The close match of these two datasets underlines the considerable challenges that are faced in supporting parents to interact effectively at larger secondary TIS sessions.

The year two parent interviews reinforce the survey evidence, in that **new social networks** were reported to be one of the main outcomes from parent interaction. Parents commonly expressed concerns about ‘not knowing anyone’ at their child’s new school, prior to their child starting there. This was especially the case where the family had recently moved from another area, or where the child was not allocated their first choice of school. Where an opportunity was provided for parents to network at the TIS session, this was often said to be an effective way to make initial contact.

In joining or creating new social networks, parents commonly expressed a priority to meet with other parents within their child’s social circle at the school. This was thought to provide a more meaningful basis for forming relationships with other parents. It was not always evident that this had been taken into account when planning the sessions, although some schools were aware of the issue.

Case study: Facilitating parent support networks

One secondary Head teacher gave the example of feedback by a parent who had agreed for her daughter to have a sleep-over at a friend’s house. The TIS session had provided the opportunity for the parent to meet with the parents of the other child, before the sleepover took place. This was said to have been reassuring, because it enabled the issue to be discussed directly.

This feedback gave the school the idea of organising tables by tutor group for next year. It is hoped that this will help to break-down the anonymity of running a larger secondary session.

A further outcome from parental interaction was to **share experiences, knowledge and ideas**. Parents routinely said that they valued their peers’ child-rearing expertise, and wanted to make the most of TIS to discuss shared issues or concerns about child development. Indeed, some identified that other parents (not school staff) would be their first point of call, in the event that they needed practical support for parenting issues. It was sometimes thought that schools had underestimated the importance of the knowledge that parents brought to the TIS sessions.

¹ The tracker showed that, of those parents who took part in TIS sessions and were followed-up at an interval of one year; almost a third (28%) said they had kept in touch with others whom they met at the session. 40% of parents from primary TIS sessions kept in touch, whilst only 10% of parents from secondary sessions did so.

School staff were indeed less likely to describe parent networks as a main outcome from TIS, although the importance of discussion was widely recognised. Some staff thought that parents 'debating' topics was one of the main ways in which TIS stood out from other parent events. It was thought that this sometimes helped to shed new light on school issues. Other staff noticed the importance of parent discussion as a basis for 'collective learning', which was thought to be a good start point for involving parents in their children's education more widely.

4.3 Signposting to information, advice and support

The evidence for effective sign-posting was one area where the evaluation showed mixed results in year one. Whilst the majority of parents within the survey reported some level of increased confidence about knowing what services were on offer for their child within the local area, the interviews found wide variations in the level and quality of information provided. Other local organisations or agencies with a shared agenda of supporting parents were not consistently involved in planning or running sessions, and this was sometimes thought to have posed a barrier to effective signposting.

4.3.1 Sign-posting and referral

The TIS demonstration project aimed to make a positive contribution towards signposting and referral for parents. As explained in the 'definitions' section at the start of this report, a distinction can be made between these two terms. The definitions used by the evaluators in the context of the TIS demonstration project were as follows:

- *signposting* - the actions taken by schools and other organisations to raise parents' awareness of local and national sources of information and support for family life and parenting; and
- *referral* - the incidence of parents being put in direct contact with specific services, such as to make an appointment or seek individual support. Referrals were made by schools, external organisations, and self-referrals

The year two survey data reinforces the findings in year one with regard to **signposting**. Of those who responded, 58% of parents reported that the sessions helped them with knowing what is on offer for their child in the local area¹, whilst 62% responded the same in relation to 'knowing where to go for information on family life and parenting'. As with year one, parents' confidence was lower for secondary sessions, for both criteria.

These data can be interpreted in different ways. At one level, it is promising that approaching two thirds of parents from primary TIS sessions and half from secondary sessions reported having found out more about locally available services as a result of the project. When compared with the data for parents feeling more prepared for their child's time at school and supporting their learning, however, the signposting element of TIS shows lower impact with parents overall. That 10% of

¹ Based on the combined categories: 'gave me a lot of confidence' and 'was helpful in places'

parents reported TIS ‘didn’t help at all’ with knowing what is on offer within the local area indicates that the *quality* of the signposting information was sometimes an issue, in addition to its relative importance.

The interview data suggests that the actual **numbers of referrals** to wider support services as a result of TIS were relatively modest. As in year one, accurate measurement was not possible due to the confidentiality of data collected, but most school and partner staff described a ‘*drip, drip*’ referral process from TIS rather than larger numbers. Referrals were mainly said to have taken place following the session; either via the school, or parents self-presenting. Referrals were less commonly said to have been made ‘on the spot’ at the TIS sessions, although some (anecdotal) examples were said to include:

- where parents signed-up to SPOT or Positive Parenting classes;
- new registrations for family learning provision; and
- where TIS enabled the referral of children to counselling services and nurture groups.

The survey data from both years reinforces this overall picture. Table 4.1 identifies the percentage of parents who said that they accessed other local services or sought further information as a result of TIS at the three available survey points - the year one cohort at three and twelve month intervals, and the year two cohort at three intervals.

Table 4.1 Actions taken as a result of the TIS session

Action	Year one survey: at three months (n= 100)	Year one tracker: at one year (n= 110)	Year two survey: at three months (n= 197)
1. Contacted other local services	6%	6%	5%
2. Enrolled for adult education classes	6%	5%	5%
3. Contacted a helpline	3%	n/a	2%

The table shows a very close match between the proportions of parents who reported accessing wider support services as a result of TIS, at the three different survey points. This suggests that a figure of 5–6% is a reliable benchmark for the demonstration project as a whole. The conclusion that might be drawn from this is that TIS provided an important referral station for those parents who might not otherwise be sign-posted to wider services, but the numbers of parents expressing a need were found to be relatively low.

The tracker survey provides further information about the characteristics of those parents who accessed local services. Almost all of them were female and from primary TIS sessions. When prompted for further details about what was achieved from TIS, a number of individual success stories were highlighted. This included where parents had progressed into employment or training following opportunities that arose at the initial TIS session. One parent identified that, after

attending an IT taster at her child's school, she had progressed to achieve OCN accreditation at Levels 1 and 2 during the year.

4.3.2 Strengthening schools' extended services

Whilst the throughput of referrals from TIS appears to have been modest in year two, the interview evidence shows that further important steps were taken to develop schools' extended services through the project. There was a widespread emphasis on building relationships with local organisations supporting parents, and developing local networks.

Schools commonly reported having accessed new expertise through TIS, including specialist information about topics such as welfare benefits, managing money and parenting support. This was often thought to have strengthened their referral networks. Furthermore, some school staff reported greater confidence in knowing how to refer, and thought they would be more likely to do so because of having a named contact person. Schools frequently said that they had been offered partner time or resources on an 'in kind' basis for the TIS session, which provided a cost effective way to showcase local services.

Staff from the relevant organisations routinely described the main outcomes from TIS in terms of raising awareness of their service with schools and parents, in the event that it might be required in future. Some such staff described how meeting with parents on an informal basis helped to personalise the link with the organisation and make referrals less daunting. This was especially found to be the case for 'clinical' or 'youth justice' services, where TIS sometimes helped to challenge negative preconceptions. The following case studies show how positive relationships were built through TIS sessions.

Case studies: Improved partner access to schools and parents

Example 1: Education Support

The Education Support Team was invited to give informal presentations to local schools as part of the year one TIS project in Trafford. One of the Education Support Workers (ESWs) described how they already visited a local primary school on a fortnightly basis and had good relationships with staff, but usually had less contact with teachers lower down the school.

The ESW attended the TIS session at the school, and gave a presentation to explain their role. An information letter with contact details was designed to go alongside the presentation, and there was an opportunity to circulate with parents, teachers and other presenters on the day.

Since attending the session, the ESW has noticed that teachers lower down the school have asked for advice. It has generally been easier to approach parents during the year, because of being a 'familiar face' from the event. The ESW has also been invited by SENCOs to attend statementing meetings that involve behaviour and attendance. This did not happen before TIS.

Case studies: Improved partner access to schools and parents

Example 2: VCS involvement

A worker from a children's charity described how the organisation had been involved in TIS indirectly in year one, by providing information packs to hand-out at the sessions. This resulted in a fairly poor response from parents, with few referrals having been made.

More of the local schools opted to deliver a marketplace session in year two, which meant that the organisation had a stall and could meet with staff and parents directly. In the few months following the session, the organisation received a far better response in terms of referrals from the schools and self-referrals by parents. This was thought to have been largely due to having a physical presence at the sessions in the second year.

As with last year, some partner organisations reported having a more peripheral role at TIS sessions, which made it difficult to have any meaningful interaction with parents on the day. Some partner organisations had also found it difficult to re-contact local schools after the sessions, because their involvement had been mediated through Extended Services teams and they still lacked a named contact person at each school. Whilst the demonstration project developed TIS as a means of signposting to external organisations, the presence and roles of such organisations at TIS sessions is, of course, a matter of choice. It does appear, however, that schools did not always make the most of the opportunity to draw-in local services when the benefits of doing so are quite clear from the evaluation.

5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

This report has presented the evidence from year two of a national evaluation to establish the impact and effectiveness of the TIS demonstration project, and to identify key messages for the development of Transition Information Sessions in all local authorities, drawing upon the delivery models and content from the project. This offer is part of the parenting support that all schools are expected to make available to their parents by 2010.

This final section of the report draws together and concludes upon the findings from the second year of the evaluation. It first considers the main achievements in year two of the project, and summarises what was different from year one. Overall conclusions are then presented with regard to the impact and effectiveness of TIS during the demonstration phase. The report concludes by reviewing the key lessons for mainstreaming, and with a series of recommendations for the DCSF.

5.1 The project achievements in year two

The evaluation has shown that the project was largely successful in building upon the achievements from the first year, to widen access to TIS to a greater range and number of schools. A combination of the improved project timescale and the lessons learned from year one meant that the local authorities and schools were generally more effective at planning their sessions. Most local authorities reported being close to their target numbers of schools at the time the evaluation was completed. Only a few had encountered more serious difficulties, and were some way behind schedule to complete within the project timeframe.

It was evident that the TIS training programme for the 20 demonstration project local authorities had been superseded by developments at local level to some extent. Most local authorities had already started to integrate TIS within wider arrangements for workforce training and development, with a view towards the end of the demonstration project in April 2008. This included early steps to combine TIS and Parent Support Adviser (PSA) work.

The interview and survey evidence shows that many of the key issues to emerge in year two were very similar to the first year of the project. This is perhaps to be expected, given that the core aims and programme for TIS remained essentially unchanged. It would be fair to say, however, that those schools and local authorities taking part in both years of the project generally showed a progression in their approach for the second year.

In summary, the main strengths of the project in its second year were found to be:

- The adaptability of the TIS concept and materials to a diverse range of school types and circumstances;
- The development of viable delivery models, whose effectiveness is now established;
- The widespread acceptance of TIS by parents, as one of a number of types of support for transitions;

- The frequent contribution of TIS towards building parents' trust and confidence in their child's school, creating informal networks with other parents, and sharing ideas for supporting children's learning in the home;
- The considerable impact from TIS on schools, where it was targeted effectively, including on 'whole school' parental engagement policies and practices; and
- The role of TIS in extending schools' services.

The main areas for development were reported as:

- The greater challenges for planning and delivering TIS sessions at secondary stage, as a result of larger intakes, more dispersed parent populations, and less frequent opportunities for regular contact between staff and parents at the school;
- The varied parent numbers at TIS sessions, with some sessions again experiencing a low turnout and poor numbers of male carers in particular;
- The persistence of one-off TIS sessions that are not linked to other types of parental engagement within the school, and lack clear plans for running sessions again in future years;
- The varied quality and consistency of signposting information provided by schools; and
- The potential dilution of the local authority support for TIS when the project ends.

These issues are picked up again at sections 5.2 and 5.3, below, to explore the factors involved in further detail and to consider the implications for the national rollout.

5.2 The impact and effectiveness of the demonstration project

The national evaluation was commissioned to run over two years, with the aim of establishing the impact and effectiveness of the TIS demonstration project.

5.2.1 Effectiveness of the project design and development

Based on the evidence that was collected during both years of the evaluation, this report concludes that the demonstration project was largely successful in establishing TIS as a coherent part of the Extended Schools core offer for those schools that participated in the demonstration phase. At the start of year one of the project, the specific TIS concept and materials developed for the demonstration project were largely unknown and untested. Although many schools within the 20 demonstration project local authorities reported already having some kind of arrangements in place for supporting transitions, these were sometimes ad hoc and uncoordinated. Furthermore, the interview evidence suggests that such events were often - although not always - concerned with school induction and curriculum issues, and did not necessarily include a signposting element to them. Much of the evidence for planning and delivering sessions with this wider agenda was from smaller scale pilot activities, such as the Parent Information Point (PIP) project¹.

¹ Bhabra S and Ghate D (2004) *Parent Information Point: Evaluation of the Pilot Phase*. London: NFPI.

By the end of the first year of the project (March 2007), there was much greater clarity about the aims, models of delivery and success criteria of TIS, drawing upon the models and approaches that were developed as part of the demonstration project. Local authorities and schools routinely expressed greater confidence about the direction in which they wished to develop their sessions, whilst those local authorities and schools joining in the second year benefited from a wealth of practical information upon which to draw. Those aspects of the project's design that were found to assist the development of TIS were as follows;

- ***The two-year approach for the demonstration project*** - the decision to run the project in two waves proved effective for informing the successful introduction of TIS across all 20 of the demonstration project local authorities. The approach was found to minimise the risks of those projects that ran in year one, by providing a further year of adjustment and updating. It provided sufficient time for the concept of 'transitions' to be debated and worked-through at some length. It also provided a rolling start for those local authorities joining in year two; and,
- ***The flexibility of the TIS format and materials*** - despite some dissatisfaction at the specific content and mix of topics at year one stage, the evaluation suggests that schools and local authorities were generally able to mix-and-match local and national sources of information successfully. The flexibility of the TIS demonstration project criteria resulted in 20 quite distinctive projects, which often best reflected local priorities.

As discussed previously, the facilitator training programme was perhaps the least successful aspect of the support structure for the TIS demonstration project. Although receiving a better response in the second year, the evaluation suggests that a rolling programme of locality-based training and support is a more appropriate model.

5.2.2 Effectiveness and impact of the TIS sessions

The evaluation has shown that the TIS demonstration project was rapidly embedded at a local level, and was received positively by the majority of schools and parents who responded to the evaluation. Although not all sessions were experienced as effective by all participants, the demonstration phase has shown that there is a niche for TIS sessions of this type as one of a number of core school-based forms of support for transitions, which is distinct from school induction processes.

The more specific added value of TIS in respect of these other induction and transition arrangements was identified in terms of:

- The early and informal basis for dialogue with the school;
- The networking opportunity with parents and staff; and
- The broader agenda of children's' and families' wellbeing.

Those schools that reported the greatest success with TIS had routinely used it as a lever for other forms of parental engagement within the school. This was found to have helped to overcome many of the limitations of a single event - or series of events - and to sustain the initial momentum from the session. In year two in particular, there was a widening-out of how TIS was viewed, to explore further links both pre- and post-transition. Ultimately, many schools saw the future role of TIS as one of a series of transition points to sustain parental engagement throughout the school years; perhaps based around Key Stages.

The evidence from both years of the demonstration project suggests that the role of TIS in relation to signposting and referral was more complex. The survey and interview evidence showed that parents welcomed an opportunity to discuss their child's development in a wider context than school attainment. The involvement of external organisations at the sessions was generally welcomed as a means of accessing this wider information directly. The numbers of referrals generated as a result of TIS were thought to be low, however, and the survey evidence shows that parents were principally concerned with school-related information, relationships and networks.

These findings have implications for wider developments to parent information services. From the experiences of the demonstration project, it appears that TIS has a valuable role to play in relation to signposting and referral, but that the window provided by the sessions can be relatively time-limited, and that involvement of a range of external organisations at TIS sessions lacks some consistency on a school-to-school basis to provide a comprehensive overview of local provision. It is evident that other media and information outlets have a further role to play in raising parents' awareness of wider family support services.

In developing the role for TIS within the Extended Schools core offer, the **main strengths** of the demonstration project were as follows:

- ***The development of a number of viable models of delivery for TIS, whose effectiveness is now well established from two years of piloting and review*** – whilst no model emerged as being singularly the most effective from the evaluation, it was evident that some local authorities and schools repeatedly achieved positive outcomes from their chosen approach. The most consistently successful models used an informal and interactive approach to engage parents, including:
 - the use of arts and drama to role play parenting situations;
 - the 'carousel' format - to secure one-to-one contact between parents and partner agencies within a group setting; and
 - the 'marketplace' format - showcasing multi-agency services.

The effectiveness of individual models was often found to rest with the combination of staffing, planning and follow-up, rather than simply the method of delivery alone.

- ***The widespread importance attached to TIS by parents, as one of a number of types of support for transitions*** - that such a high proportion of parents rated the sessions as an important form of support in preparing them for their child's move to the new school is testimony to the latent demand for TIS. The sessions were consistently rated alongside one-to-one tutor time and open days as a first point of engagement for parents with their child's school. This supports the findings from previous research, which helped to establish parental demand for information at key transition points¹.
- ***The frequent contribution of TIS in achieving positive outcomes for parents*** - the data from both years of the evaluation showed that the sessions had consistently:
 - built parents' trust and confidence in their child's school;
 - created informal networks with other parents; and
 - facilitated the sharing of ideas for supporting children's learning in the home.

Parents regularly had high expectations of practical information about 'at home' learning practices, which schools had varying capacity to meet.

- ***The considerable impact from TIS on schools, where it was targeted effectively, including for 'whole school' parental engagement policies and practices*** - the tracking of schools that took part in year one TIS underlines the full potential of the sessions, where backed at Head teacher level with the aim of tackling 'burning issues' within the school. The evaluation showed examples of sessions that had been a catalyst for gaining parents' support and consensus for change (see section 4.2.2).
- ***The role of TIS in extending schools' services*** - the survey and interviews showed that schools were often put in contact with a more diverse range of services than they were previously aware of. The diverse professional background of the facilitators was found to have assisted this process. As a result, the multi-agency TIS sessions were sometimes able to tap into a variety of community, business, and third sector expertise.

Alongside the main project strengths, a number of **key challenges and areas for development** emerged during both years of the project. These were as follows:

- ***The greater challenges for planning and delivering TIS sessions at secondary stage, on a number of different fronts*** - the survey and interview evidence shows that a combination of larger intakes, fewer opportunities for routine parent-teacher contact, and a wider-ranging set of topics for transitions made it difficult for secondary schools to make their sessions parent-centred. These challenges contributed towards the lower success of secondaries in relation to:
 - recruiting parents;
 - sourcing appropriate written information;
 - providing opportunities for parent networking at the sessions; and
 - scheduling follow-up.

¹ National Family and Parenting Institute, 2001. *Listening to parents: their worries, their solutions*. London: NFPI.

Although some examples of highly effective secondary sessions were identified, the evaluation suggests that greater resource is associated with secondary TIS.

- ***The varied parent numbers at TIS sessions, with some sessions again experiencing a low turnout and poor numbers of male carers*** - as with year one, unpredictable group sizes and low levels of male attendance at primary TIS sessions were commonplace in year two. The interviews suggest that attendance was not always in direct proportion to how extensively parents were consulted, and that even well planned sessions could result in poor numbers. Even so, it is evident that messages about effective recruitment were not taken on board by all schools.
- ***The persistence of TIS sessions that are not linked to other types of parental engagement within the school, and lack clear plans for running sessions again in future years*** - as in year one, some year two sessions were delivered on a stand-alone basis, to a relatively small group of parents, and with no plans for follow-up action such as linking into other parental engagement activities. Given the lower reported impact from these types of sessions in year one, the findings suggest that they were unlikely to be sustainable. Some respondents thought that this situation was inevitable to some extent, and reflected the different levels of priority afforded to parental engagement within individual schools.
- ***The varied quality and consistency of signposting information provided by schools*** - as identified in section four, whilst some schools were pro-active in engaging external organisations and signposting to wider support services, others afforded this a lower priority. A lack of signposting information was sometimes reported to have been due to schools being unsure of how or where to access relevant sources.

In reviewing the main challenges outlined above, the report concludes that there are a number of practical actions that might be taken by the DCSF, local authorities and schools to improve the effectiveness of future TIS sessions. Equally, however, the demonstration project shows that certain challenges - namely the variable attendance at sessions and low numbers of male carers, reflect much wider trends within the market for parenting and family support services. It would be infeasible for TIS to provide a sole basis for bringing about change, and it is recommended that TIS is positioned alongside other related work to achieve the best possible outcomes.

These might include, for example:

- more targeted support for 'hard to reach' families;
- training for facilitators on how to boost fathers' and male carers' attendance;
- projects designed specifically for fathers and male carers;
- third sector provision; particularly with respect to community outreach; and
- other information channels for raising awareness of support services, including Family Information Services, I-Reporting in schools, and new media projects such as those currently being piloted through the Parent Know-How programme.

5.3 Key issues for introducing TIS in all local authorities

At the time of writing, there was much uncertainty amongst the demonstration local authorities on how they would continue to allocate funding to their TIS work following the end of the project; and the grant specifically attached to it. It was widely acknowledged that TIS sessions would be smaller scale in the 20 local authorities, in the absence of demonstration project funding from DCSF. The onus was thought to rest with schools to mainstream the sessions as part of development planning.

Other funding sources were also being explored to alongside this. They included:

- contributions from local business and enterprise;
- in-kind support from other organisations with a shared agenda of supporting families; and
- funding support via Local Area Agreements (LAAs) or joint commissioning budgets, where a case could be made strategically at local authority level.

The interviews showed that schools were generally confident about taking a greater proportion of the planning and coordination of TIS in-house following the end of the demonstration project, which had involved local authorities and also provided VCS support for developing the work. Although some schools were clearly in a position to do so, however, some risks were identified to the quality and consistency of the 'TIS' brand as developed through the demonstration project in 2006-07 and 2007-08, after the extra grant funding and support comes to an end. These risks were said to relate to the following:

- **Local authority staffing support** - the interviews showed that sessions were often the most effective, where they combined the specific knowledge of the school with the adult or family learning expertise of local authority staff. A reduced local authority dimension was thought to risk losing this valuable aspect of TIS. It was also thought that the future support needs of some schools might have been underestimated.
- **Project funding support** - the demonstration schools commonly described how a scaled-down version of TIS could be delivered without the project funding. This extra grant was sometimes thought to have made a real difference, however, by enabling high quality publicity and materials to be used. There were concerns that delivering sessions at low cost would be detrimental to the outcomes achieved for parents.

Some schools within the 20 demonstration local authorities also identified a potential risk of displacement after the project ended, because any funding for TIS would be at the expense of other parental engagement work. This would be counterproductive, given that the evaluation shows TIS sessions were often the most successful where they enhanced (rather than replaced) other types of school-based support for parents.

As TIS is introduced in all schools - based on the models of delivery and content exemplified in the demonstration project, local decisions will need to be made about the sort of support and infrastructure that is required to ensure delivery of local sessions that serve the needs of parents. The evaluation shows that there is a justification for schools to work collaborative in terms of shared resource.

In summary, the evaluation has shown that there is strong potential to mainstream the models that were developed during the TIS demonstration project, and a willingness of most schools to do so. To achieve this successfully, however, it is evident that further change management would be beneficial – at national and local levels, as part of the transition from demonstration to post-demonstration phase. The recommendations at section 5.4 suggest a number of ways in which this might be undertaken.

5.4 Recommendations

Following-on from the issues discussed in this section of the report, the evaluators have identified a number of specific recommendations. These are as follows:

- 1. For local authorities and schools to further examine the support arrangements for delivering TIS in secondary schools.** The evaluation highlighted the considerable challenges that were faced by secondary schools in planning and delivering TIS sessions. Where possible, it is recommended that local authorities explore practical options for overcoming these challenges. This might include working closely with ‘champion’ secondary schools that delivered successful sessions during the demonstration project, to learn from their experiences. It might also include planning TIS at an earlier stage in the school year, so that feeder primary schools can get involved in the initial awareness-raising with parents.
- 2. For local authorities and schools to ensure appropriate targeting for ‘hard to reach’ parents, with specific measures to engage and support fathers and male carers.** The evaluation showed that some local authorities and schools had greater success in engaging ‘hard to reach’ parents, where local needs were mapped-out in advance, and where appropriate links were made with third sector organisations. It is suggested that these approaches are adopted more widely and that there is training for facilitators on how to boost attendance by all fathers and male carers.
- 3. For local authorities and schools to consider the available options for sharing resources, to enable a continued support infrastructure for TIS,** drawing upon the findings from the evaluation, which showed that collaborative and cluster arrangements were sometimes beneficial to planning within the demonstration local authorities and schools.

4. **For local authorities and schools to review opportunities for linking TIS to other forms of parental engagement.** The evaluation showed that the sessions were often the most sustainable where they had been combined with other structures and provision for parental engagement, at school level. It is recommended that future TIS sessions take this approach into account, drawing on some of the good practice examples highlighted within the evaluation.
5. **For the DCSF to continue to support the collation and sharing of good practice for TIS, including through regional networking.** There was a strong demand for further networking opportunities at a local authority level, with a particular interest in opportunities to meet and share good practice. It is recommended that the DCSF considers how these arrangements can be encouraged and supported by the Training and Development Agency (TDA), and at Government Office level.
6. **For the DCSF to consider a review of TIS in relation to other parent information initiatives, to encourage greater joining-up.** The evaluation showed there was some uncertainty amongst TIS demonstration project local authorities and schools, about the available sources of local and national information on parenting and family support services. Given the range of activity that is taking place at present, including the delivering of Parent Know-How and enhancement of Family Information Services (FIS), it is recommended that the DCSF reviews the evidence from these different initiatives to identify more specific opportunities for joining-up with TIS.
7. **For the DCSF and partners to consider how schools might be supported to meet parental demand for resources and materials on the theme of 'at home' learning.** The survey in years one and two showed that parents wanted practical information and guidance about supporting their child's learning in the home, but that not all schools had access to resources or materials to meet this demand. It is recommended that the DCSF and partners review the available sources of information on this topic, for dissemination through regional / local networks for TIS. This recommendation might also be considered in the light of the Children's Plan, which announces proposals for a new personal tutor for every child, who will act as the main point of contact for parents¹.

¹ DCSF, 2008. *The Children's Plan; Building brighter futures - Summary*. London, pp.9.

Annex One: Year two parent survey data (selected)

Year two parent survey data (selected)

A1.1 Numbers of participants: primary

	Male attendance (per session)	Female attendance (per session)	Combined
Range	0 to 30	3 to 60	3 to 120
Average (mean)	4	17	24
Average (median)	3	24	32

A1.2 Numbers of participants: secondary

	Male attendance (per session)	Female attendance (per session)	Total group sizes
Range	4 to 70	13 to 200	17 to 350
Average (mean)	25	61	93
Average (median)	40	90	120

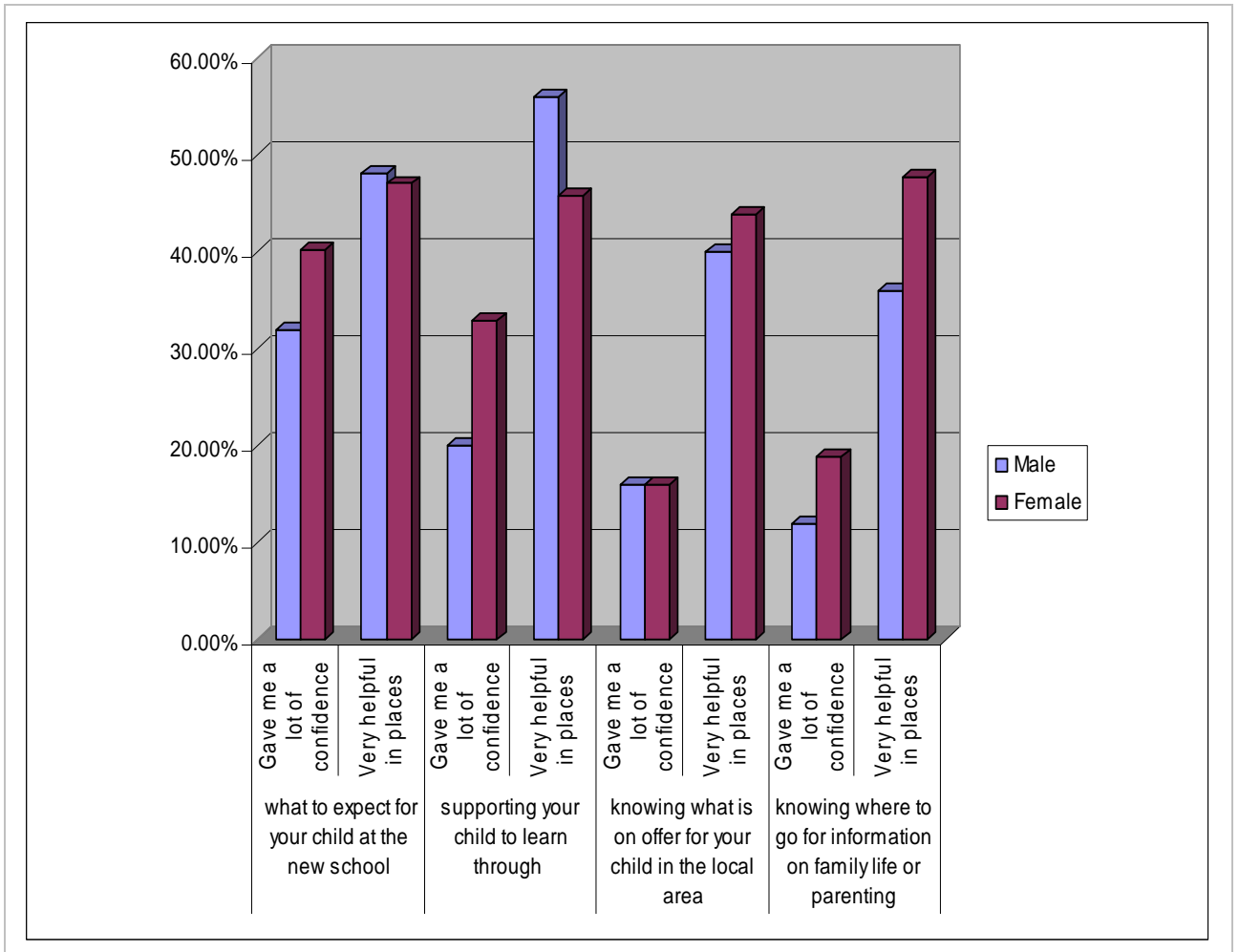
A1.3 Session topics

	Primary	Secondary
A. Most commonly used topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy eating • Settling into school • Parental roles in supporting children • Sign-posting information • Child development and milestones • Literacy and numeracy • Information about specific parts of curriculum (e.g. ICT, PSE, PE) • Bullying • Visit to classrooms • School protocols and procedures • SENCO • School structure • Emotional and social wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental roles for supporting children • Homework • School policies • Internet Safety • Every Child Matters • What children will learn • Healthy lifestyles • Bullying • Safety • Emotional support • Introduction to staff roles
C. Less commonly used topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour management • Libraries • Child Minding • Attendance • Safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signposting to help and support • Relationships and sex education • Information about foreign language lessons • Drugs awareness • Extra curricular activities
D. Rarely used topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult literacy and adult community learning • Physical activity • Oral Health • Parental Health • Safe use of the internet / wired-up world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special needs advice • The banding system • Pastoral support structures within the school • Gifted and talented programme

A1.4 How the session helped parents - primary and secondary

Did the session help you with...?	Primary			Secondary		
	Gave me a lot of confidence	Was very helpful in places	Combined	Gave me a lot of confidence	Was very helpful in places	Combined
1) What to expect for your child's school	40%	47%	87%	37%	47%	84%
2) Supporting your child to learn through play	34%	45%	79%	24%	47%	71%
3) Knowing where to go for information on family life and parenting	21%	48%	69%	8%	37%	45%
4) Knowing what is on offer for your child in the local area	17%	44%	61%	12%	37%	49%

A1.5 How the session helped parents - gender



n = 197

A1.6 Importance of TIS, alongside other types of support

How important was the following, in helping your child to settle in their new school?	Year two 'Gave me a lot of confidence'
School open day	60%
One-to-one advice from school staff	53%
The information session	44%
Support from friends / other parents	38%
Written information from the school	37%
One-to-one advice from other services	17%
Other	8%

n = 197

A1.7 Actions taken by parents, as a result of the sessions

Did you do any of these things, as a result of going to the session?	Year one (n=100)			Year two (n=197)		
	Combined	Primary	Secondary	Combined	Primary	Secondary
1) Keep in touch with other parents you met	25%	27%	23%	36%	44%	12%
2) Look for more topics on the internet	11%	10%	13%	24%	25%	21%
3) Make enquiries about clubs or activities for child	27%	23%	33%	23%	24%	22%
4) Contact the school for information	24%	22%	28%	17%	19%	12%
5) Join a parents group	5%	2%	10%	5%	4%	6%
6) Enrol for adult education classes	6%	7%	5%	5%	6%	2%
7) Contact other local services	6%	5%	8%	5%	6%	2%
8) Contact a helpline	3%	0%	8%	2%	2%	0%

Annex Two: Method Statement

Methodology

The evaluation methodology combined both quantitative and qualitative methods within a common framework, applied for each of 2006-07 and 2007-08.

The approach was to track the development of the pilots through the different stages of the project 'cycle'; from consultation, through planning, delivery and evaluation. This enabled a systematic modelling of the inputs and outputs at each stage of the process, to identify the resulting outcomes and impacts for parents and schools. This continuity was important, given the devolved approach to the sessions, and the variation between participant local authorities and schools.

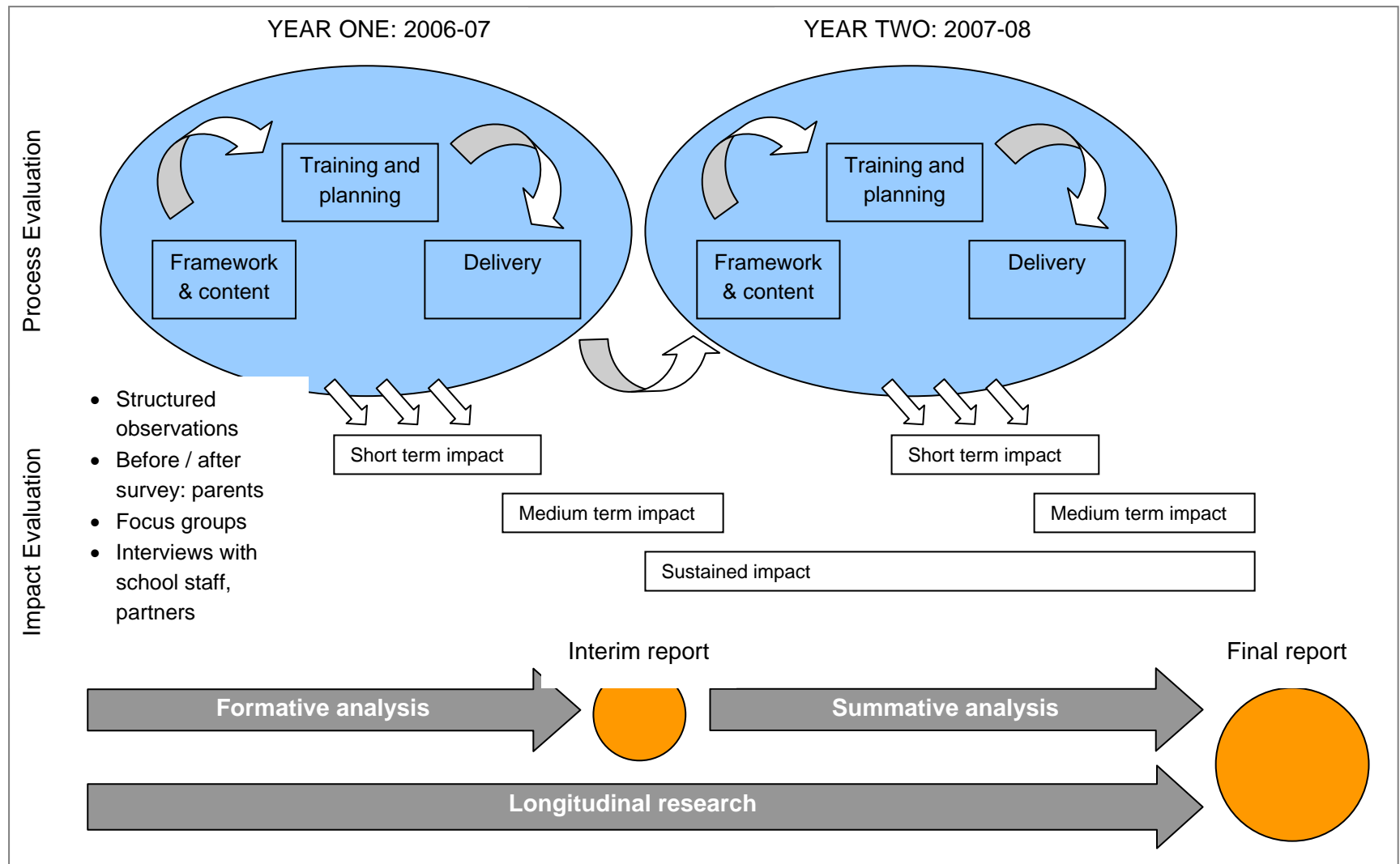
The focus of year one of the evaluation was to complete an entire 'cycle' of evaluation for the pilots, and to set in place the mechanisms for tracking the impact of the project in the medium-term.

This work was continued in year two, when the evaluation sub-divided between:

- i. Follow-up and tracking of a cross-section of local authorities, schools and parents that participated in year one; to measure the impact over time, and;
- ii. A repeat 'cycle' of evaluation for a further set of the pilots that come on board in the second year, to assess their effectiveness and enable a comparison with year one. This also enabled an assessment of the extent to which the 'lessons learned' from year one were fed back into the planning, and their level of impact.

The diagram overleaf presents the methodology. This shows how the two 'cycles' of evaluation inputs were structured, and the more longitudinal part of the project.

The evaluation framework



Year one methods and tasks

For the first year of the evaluation, the specific stages and methods were as follows:

- **Baseline survey of parents:** the survey was administered by the facilitators, immediately following the TIS sessions. The survey questionnaire included basic monitoring information and scaled self-evaluative questions relating to parents' confidence. 1,641 questionnaires were completed, from 100 schools and six LA areas.
- **Testing against the baseline:** a follow-up postal survey was conducted, at an interval of three to four months after the sessions took place. The purpose was to assess the actions taken by parents, and to measure distance travelled against the measures from the original baseline questionnaire. 100 questionnaires were returned.
- **Observational research:** structured observations were conducted at the two TIS training events for demonstration project facilitators, using a pro-forma designed to capture key factual and evaluative information about the training.
- **Case study research:** the case studies entailed more in-depth evaluative work in a cross-section of six local authorities, which were sampled to achieve an urban / rural and geographical mix, and a cross-section of different TIS delivery models. For each case study, the tasks comprised:
 - observations of local planning events: 6 completed;
 - observations of TIS sessions: 45 completed between ECOTEC and FPI, using a structured research pro-forma; and
 - depth interviews with parents and practitioners. The interviews were sampled using the survey data, to ensure a cross-section of TIS sessions with different characteristics. 82 were completed, comprising 22 school and external organisation representatives and 60 parents. The staff interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis, whilst the parent interviews were conducted by telephone, using the survey data as the basis for sampling. Semi-structured topic guides were used.
- **Analysis and reporting:** the year one analysis comprised gridding and thematic analysis of qualitative interview data, and SPSS factor analysis of codes survey data. The year one report compiled descriptive profiling data about the TIS cohort, and a number of validity checks were undertaken to compare the sample with national Census data. Alongside the main report, individual data tables were created for each of the schools that took part.

Year two methods and tasks

For the second year of the evaluation, the specific stages and methods were as follows:

- **Telephone interviews with local authority TIS coordinators:** interviews were conducted with half (10) of the project coordinators, to establish the local strategic context for TIS in year two, and priorities for introducing TIS in all schools using the model developed within the demonstration project. A structured topic guide was used for this purpose.
- **A baseline survey of parents:** an identical method was used to year one, with scaled outcomes questions designed to enable comparison between the cohorts in years one and two. The survey was administered at the sessions by the facilitators again. 2,483 questionnaires were completed, covering 116 schools.
- **Testing against the baseline:** a follow-up postal survey was conducted as per year one. This applied the same criteria for distance travelled and actions taken by parents, but at a shorter interval of two to three months. This reflected the delivery of the sessions taking place closer to reporting stage in year two. 197 questionnaires were returned.
- **Case study research:** the case study research again comprised in-depth evaluative work in six local authorities, which were sampled to achieve an urban / rural and geographical mix, and a cross-section of TIS delivery models. For each, the tasks were:
 - observations of TIS sessions: 10 completed, using a structured pro-forma;
 - depth interviews with parents and staff, using the survey data to sample according to school and session type. 96 interviews were completed, comprising 38 representatives from schools and external organisations and 58 parents. A semi-structured topic guide was used for this purpose, adapted from the first year.
- **Tracker survey:** a short postal survey was administered to parents who took part in the evaluation in year one, to explore the outcomes 'one year later'. The survey included a mix of open and closed questions, based on the original year one survey questionnaire. 110 parents responded, out of 700 year one parents who opted to be re-contacted.
- **Analysis and reporting:** the qualitative interview data from the fieldwork was tabulated and manual content analysis was applied, to compare the views of respondents at local authority and school levels. The coded survey data was analysed in SPSS to explore project trends. The data was combined with the quantitative survey evidence to form the basis of reporting.

Annex Three: Models of delivery

Models of delivery

Model	Description	Benefits and drawbacks
Presentation & networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imparting information on set topics or themes, followed by discussion • Varying length and formality of the presentation, and who delivers it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good level of control over the volume of information that is covered – ensures that key messages heard by all. • Presentation format can make it difficult to involve young children. Less time for one-to-one contact.
Activity or theatre based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive TIS that explores one or more themes by way of practical exercises, scenarios or theatre. • Parents provide much of the content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relates TIS topics to real life situations. Encourages sharing of experiences. Fewer demands on basic skills. • Activity format less suited to covering many topics. High level of facilitator skill needed to ensure participation.
Multi-agency marketplace or carousel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A showcase of schools' and partners services. Either by way of stands, or a 'carousel' format: parents get 5 minutes with each partner in rotation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opens-up the session; enables direct partner-to-parent contact. Potentially strong for sign-posting and referral. • Risk of the TIS being polarised between the 'school section' and 'partner section', unless planned together.
Piggy-back TIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session runs in overlap with other fixed dates in the school calendar. • A 'drop off the kids and stay-on' format, or as part of parents' evening. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A chance to make contact with a larger number of parents. Encourages parent-child-school interaction. • More opportunistic; risks the session being pushed to the background. Less dedicated time for TIS topics.

Annex Four: Schools participating in the year two evaluation

Schools participating in the year two evaluation

School	Local authority
Anton Infants	Hampshire
Ashton-under-Hill First School	Worcestershire
Audley Infants	Blackburn
Backwell School	North Somerset
Bay House School	Hampshire
Baytree Community Special School	North Somerset
Bewdley Primary School	Worcestershire
Birdwell Primary School	North Somerset
Blackburn the Redeemer	Blackburn
Blackminster Middle School	Worcestershire
Brightlingsea Infants	Essex
Brightside School	Essex
Brigshaw High School & Language College	Leeds
Brinkley Grove	Essex
Brookhouse Primary	Blackburn
Byron School	Croydon
Castlefields Infants School	Calderdale
Catshill Middle School	Worcestershire
Cedars Infant School	Blackburn
Cherry Orchard Primary School	Worcestershire
Cherrywood Community Primary School	Hampshire
Childeric Primary School	Lewisham
Christ Church (Pellan) CE (VC) Primary School	Calderdale
Churwell Primary School	Leeds
Clevedon Community School	North Somerset
Cowplain Secondary College	Hampshire
Cranham Primary School	Worcestershire
East Ardsley Primary	Leeds
Fairhouse Infants	Essex
Fawley Infants School	Hampshire
Fleet Infants	Hampshire
Forest Dale	Croydon
Franche Community Primary School	Worcestershire
Glebe Infants	North Somerset
Gorse Hill Community Primary School	Worcestershire
Greetland Primary School	Calderdale
Hadleigh Infants and Nursery School	Essex
Hamford Primary School	Essex
Harper Green	Bolton
Hipperholme & Lightcliffe High School	Calderdale
Holland Park	Essex
Holly Trees Primary	Essex
Holy Trinity CEP	Blackburn
Horndean Technology College	Hampshire
John Bunyan Nursery & Infant School	Essex
Lickhill Primary School	Worcestershire

School	Local authority
Ling Bob	Calderdale
Liss Infants	Hampshire
Locking Primary School	North Somerset
Lord Street Primary	Bolton
Lyppard Grange Primary School	Worcestershire
Markland Hill CP School	Bolton (20)
Mead Vale Primary School	North Somerset
Meadows First School	Worcestershire
Mendip Green First School	North Somerset
Mengham	Hampshire
Mill Rythe	Hampshire
Milldene Primary School Tiptree	Essex
Northlands Infants	Essex
Oak Farm Community School	Hampshire
Oakwood Infants	Hampshire
Oldbury Park Primary School	Worcestershire
Oldmixon School	North Somerset
Our Lady of Perpetual Succour R.C. Primary School	Blackburn
Park Primary	Hampshire
Park View	Hampshire
Pennington Infants	Hampshire
Perins School	Hampshire
Perry Wood Primary School	Worcestershire
Pretty Gate Infants	Essex
Ranvilles Infant School	Hampshire
Riders Infants	Hampshire
Roachvale Primary	Essex
Roman Road Primary School	Gateshead
Rowlands Gill Primary School	Gateshead
Saville Park Junior & Infant School	Calderdale
Sidemoor First School	Worcestershire
Simon de Montfort Middle School A	Worcestershire
Simon de Montfort Middle School B	Worcestershire
St Thomas Moore	Essex
St. Aidens C of E Primary School	Blackburn
St. Andrews CE (VA) Infant School	Calderdale
St. Barnabas CE Primary School	Worcestershire
St. James CE Primary	Blackburn
St. James Hatcham Primary School	Lewisham
St. James Primary School	Blackburn
St. Marks V.A. Primary	North Somerset
St. Michael & All Angels	Calderdale
St. Paul C of E Primary School	Blackburn
St. Stephen's CE First School	Worcestershire
St. Teresa's Catholic Primary	Essex
St. Thomas C.E. Primary School	Blackburn
Stanley Road Primary School	Worcestershire
Stapleford Abbots Primary	Essex
Talavera Infant School	Hampshire

School	Local authority
Templars Infants	Essex
Tenbury High School	Worcestershire
Testwood Sports College	Hampshire
The Littletons CE First School	Worcestershire
The Valley Primary School	Bolton
The Westgate School	Hampshire
Thomas Hepburn Community Secondary School	Gateshead
Tibberton CE First School	Worcestershire
Tiptree Heath	Essex
Top 'o th' Brow	Bolton
Tower Hill Community School	Hampshire
Uphill Primary	North Somerset
Wallisdean Infants	Hampshire
Westlands First School	Worcestershire
Whickham School & Sports College	Gateshead
Wichford C of E Infant School	Essex
Woodingdean Primary	Brighton & Hove
Woodkirk High School	Leeds
Worle Community School	North Somerset
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