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Transitions and progress: teachers' views of progress in attainment of pupils age 5-10

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Transitions and Progress: teachers' views of progress in attainment of pupils age 5-16

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Introduction

There has been a longstanding concern in England and Wales with the year on year progress made by pupils, but particularly at times of change, such as transfer[1] from primary to secondary school at age 11(Galton, Gray and Rudduck 1999), (Hargreaves and Galton 1999). In Coalton[2], a former mining town in the North of England, a five year UK government funded initiative known as Charter for Transition (Coldwell and Holland, 2001) has been put in place to try to overcome some of these difficulties and improve the learning opportunities for pupils aged 5-16. The programme takes place over a 5-year period in various stages (see methodology section), but in this paper we make use of data from the first two years. Thirty-seven schools, about one third of the districts' primary and secondary schools, had received support from the initiative. Charter for Transition initially had a focus on transition between different stages in learning and curriculum continuity, but became broader than this to accommodate new national strategies for the analysis of performance data at the level of individual pupils, schools, and the district. Therefore, the focus of the project's work became progress throughout compulsory schooling.

The school district is located in a relatively socially and economically deprived area (OFSTED, 2000) and in all of the national comparative measures for educational performance falls below national averages. The main industry of the

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[1] In this paper, we follow Galton et al's (1999) distinction between transfer (the movement of pupils from one school to another) and transition (the move from one year group to the next within a school)
[2] Coalton is a pseudonym

district was coal mining, but all the pits have closed in the past 15 years leading to high levels of unemployment. Educational attainment in the British coalfields between the ages 7 and 16 has been compared with other similar socially economic areas (entitlement to free school meals was the comparative indicator) by Gore and Smith (2001). They found that at age 5 attainment was at about the national average, but by 16 years performance was 7 to 10 per cent below the national average and at post-16, well below the national average.

In this paper, the research team examines the viewpoints of teachers from schools that were receiving additional support in their efforts to raise achievement in phase one and the pilot phase of the project about what they saw as the main benefits of this work. We present the beginnings of our exploration of teachers' judgements of this work, and what they saw as the difficulties with associating the project with pupil attainment.

Our research questions are:

1 What do teachers perceive to be the main benefits of involvement in the Charter for Transition project, and to what extent are these related to attainment?

2 What difficulties does the lack of confidence in the validity of attainment data cause for teachers in assessing the impact of the Charter for Transition project?

The focus of the study: research at the district level

Charter for Transition aimed to involve all schools in the Coalton district over the course of five years. From the fall of 1998 to spring 2000, a number of pilot projects were set up to try, to help the project team examine successful aspects of transition initiatives that could be shared. From summer 2000 to spring 2001 a third of Coalton schools took part in phase one of the programme, building

specific projects to fit each school with the support of the Charter for Transition team (see below for the aims of the projects, and see Chart 1 for the range of project focuses in phase one). From summer 2001 to spring 2002, the second third of Coalton schools took part in phase two of the programme, and from summer 2002 until summer 2003 the remaining third of schools will take part. The Charter for Transition project, originally set out to raise pupil attainment in pilot schools through development activities across four dimensions:

School dimension

To help schools promote progression in learning through:
- School and pupil target setting
-Transfer and transition arrangements
- Development of bridging projects between key stages

Pupil dimension

To help pupils in:
- Planning and managing their own learning
- Reviewing progress, setting targets and planning developments

Teacher dimension

To help teachers develop aspects of classroom practice through:
-'Progressive' schemes of work
- Assessment and recording developments
- Differentiation
- Tracking pupil progress.

Parent dimension

To help parents with Home School Partnerships through:
- Home-school contracts
- Developing skills of parents to support learning

The study from which this paper developed was commissioned to help the project team and their partners identify successful strategies and practices that appear to work in the context of the district's social-economic position in these four areas over the course of the project. It provides, at a local level, some insight

into the success of New Labour's "standards driven" policy to raise achievement. Schools and the pupils themselves will, it is hoped, benefit from our findings in both the short and longer term. Since the Charter for Transition project and our evaluative research is fundamentally about improving learning and teaching, we are optimistic that our findings will be valued. One of our ongoing tasks as the evaluative research proceeds, is to feed back our findings for the benefit of the new schools that are entering the programme, with a clear emphasis on identifying which strategies seem to work, and why. Subsequently, we relate these at all times to pupil achievement. Our cascade methodology (see methods section below) reflects this concern, by allowing for some flexibility to respond to emerging findings, changing priorities of the programme team and rapidly changing national and local policy priorities.

Measuring changing attainment in the UK context:
Problems, perspectives and validity issues

A recent review of the impact of school transitions and transfers on pupils' progression in the UK (Galton, Gray et al, 1999) informed the early stages of the Coalton Transition Project. The professional view of teachers reported in this study, was that transitions and transfers do make a difference to pupil progress. This view was supported by judgements from school inspectors and national testing, now established at age 5,7,11 and 16. However, there was no attempt to link these judgements to measurable changes in attainment. Although many of the findings in the above review refer to adjustment problems - to new teachers, school organisation, and friendship grouping - there are many others that relate to "curriculum continuity", for example projects bridging primary and secondary schools, summer schools, 'catch up' classes and teacher exchanges. A similar pattern has been reported by Schneider et al (1998), who found that educationally disadvantaged students moving from homogeneous elementary schools to integrated junior high schools may be at particular risk of anxiety, adjustment difficulties and academic problems. The views of pupils have also

been researched in UK secondary schools (Rudduck et al, 1996: p16 -170) in the context of school improvement. The researchers conclude that motivation can be enhanced through the focussing power of national assessment, but this does not work for all pupils. The researchers uncovered a hidden message to pupils in that it is only the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are easily measured that are really important.

The national assessment system in England and Wales is based on age-related assumptions about what pupils should know and be able to do and is fundamentally linear, which is reflected in the grade levels of the National Curriculum – about one grade level improvement for each 1.5 years of study. There is also an assumption that learning in English, mathematics and science (the subject areas that feature in national testing at the end of Key Stages) is essentially hierarchical. It is assumed the process of target setting (for individual pupils, classes, subject areas and schools) and national testing at the end of Key Stages will assist schools in raising standards. Additionally, the government has introduced national strategies for literacy and numeracy into primary schools and these are now being extended (with the addition of science) into the 11-14 age phase. It is too early to make judgements about the impact of these national schemes, but many teachers see them as a threat to professional autonomy.

There is currently much debate at national level about the alleged drop in performance of pupils when they transfer, particularly from lower primary to upper primary, or primary to secondary school. The usual explanation for this is repetition of previous work, some loss of excitement in learning methods, new work being less demanding and new organisational structures that give pupils a negative self-image. However, the validity of making judgements using the attainment data available is questionable.

Goldstein (2001) argues that there is a fundamental lack of objectivity in national test data. Firstly, the individual learning environments mean that pupils

understand tests differently and teachers may well stress aspects of content they think are most likely to appear on test papers. Secondly, the layout and format of test papers can affect responses (Foxman et al, 1990). Both teachers and pupils clearly interact with the testing instrument, which is difficult to account for. Pupils in some classes will be taught in the months before an assessment by a teacher who is knowledgeable about examination techniques and coaching and at the other extreme pupils may experience a temporary teacher who is less skilled or knowledgeable in testing. Indeed there may be rare occurrences when the teacher does no direct preparation for future testing.

The practice of using test results to make comparisons over time is also highly questionable, but it is at the heart of the value added movement. It is also generally accepted by schools who are steered by central government to make such comparisons. In fact they are provided with the means to do this using, for example, the Autumn Package[3]. Goldstein (2001) claims that it is not possible to determine if any change in test score is really due to the change in performance, or a change in the difficulty of the test. For example the test questions become public and cannot be reused. It is possible to pre-test items, but the evidence does not point to a high level of consistency (Quinlan and Scharachkin, 1999). Other critics, such as Gorard and Taylor (2002), argue that measures based on GCSE and A Levels[4] are suspect, since there a variety of subjects are taken, which means that compound measures (such as GCSE points scores[5]) are not necessarily comparable. Even within a subject, different syllabuses are followed in different schools.

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[3] See DfES (2001). This is a package of data received by schools each autumn that compares the attainment of pupils in a school with schools nationally and with similar schools (based on socio-economic factors).It also reports on school and national trends over 4 years.
[4] Qualifications taken nationally in England and Wales at age 16 and age 18 respectively in a variety of different subjects
[5] Each grade in each subject taken is awarded a number of pints, from 1 for a grade G, to 8 for A*. Therefore, for example, a student attaining grade As (worth 7 points) in 5 subjects and grade Bs (worth 6 points) in 3 subjects would receive a points score of 35 + 18 = 53

In addition, since different measures are used in different stages of education, attempts to predict performance of individuals as they move through the school system are made difficult (Gorard and Taylor 2002, p. 7). Black and Wiliam (1998a) discuss problems involved in making these comparisons over time. For example, level 5 in the national curriculum at age 11 is not the same as level 5 at age 14, as pupils have followed a different curriculum post-11. One way round this would be to set the same test at both ages. Black and Wiliam advocate making greater use of teacher assessments, moderated by a number of different tests taken by pupils at random, so that schools would be unsure of precisely what content they would be examined on.

The parallel formative assessment that would go hand in hand with national tests has changed considerably from that envisaged by the Task Force on Assessment and Testing thirteen years ago. The Task Force set up the framework for assessment for the National Curriculum in England and Wales, largely for reasons of time and cost. However, schools are required to make their own assessments of pupil attainment levels in English, mathematics and science at the end of each Key Stage (i.e. at 7, 11 and 14) and these are published alongside national data in the Autumn Package. In our experience, teachers rarely rely on internal assessment that is more representative of the wider learning experiences of pupils. Many schools, in our experience, simply use the questions of past Key Stage national tests, and present these to pupils as a pencil and paper examination. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is usually a high level of agreement between school and national test results. Although there is overwhelming evidence that effective formative assessment contributes to learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998b), there are indications that teachers feel obliged to restrict their judgements on pupils to the relatively narrow range of criteria and competences measured in national tests.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which organisation responsible for setting the tests, is clearly beginning to take some of the above criticisms of the

national testing system on board (Henry, 2002. QCA is planning to include more reasoning and investigative types of questions in mathematics and science tests, in order to encourage teachers to spend more time on these activities in class. This is to be welcomed as is the admission that there is currently widespread teaching to the test for 11 year olds. However, it is expected that to compensate for harder questions, the grade boundaries will be adjusted to maintain consistent standards.

This uncertainty about the value of test and other attainment data impacts on teachers in several ways. They are likely to be uncertain about the validity of testing in the first instance. Frequent articles about this have appeared in teachers newspapers and union publications in recent years). Teachers are unclear whether change over time is measuring 'real' improvement, and they are unwilling in many cases to trust assessment data provided by primary schools to predict future performance. On this last point, the deputy head of one of the secondary schools involved in the pilot phase of Charter for Transition told us *"Primary schools generally feel that secondary schools do not make the best use of data passed on to them. Key Stage 2 SATs suggest that 65% of our intake should be targeted for 5 GCSEs A-C. This is nonsense. Primary schools are teaching to the tests, and getting better at it each year, but the pupils do not seem to be improving on entry to the school".*

Methods

As outlined earlier, the delivery model used by the Charter for Transition project is complex, involving three phases and a pilot phase, each of which is being evaluated. The evaluation started in March 2001, so information from the pilot phase and phase one is being collected partially retrospectively. It is some of this data that is used in this paper.

To capture the developments within the project, we have used our own developmental 'cascade model' to conduct the evaluation. This uses a variety of types of data collection in each phase, allowing us to use analysis and perspectives from previous phases to inform the evaluation in later phases (see Figure 1 below). This also allows us to triangulate our findings, using these different forms of data. This enables us to explore the complexities of the project. a mixed methodology helps us understand what Greene et al (2001) call the *"complex, dynamic, and contextually diverse"* social phenomena we are looking at. We agree with them that we *"need to use all of our methodological expertise and skills in this endeavour for contemporary understanding of social issues*" (p25/26). To some extent, this approach also allows us to examine content-related validity by developing models. So in addition we can use the different methods to examine these models determine the correlation between them - see McMillan and Schumacher (1997) p237.

Figure 1: Graphical representation of the 'cascade model' methodology
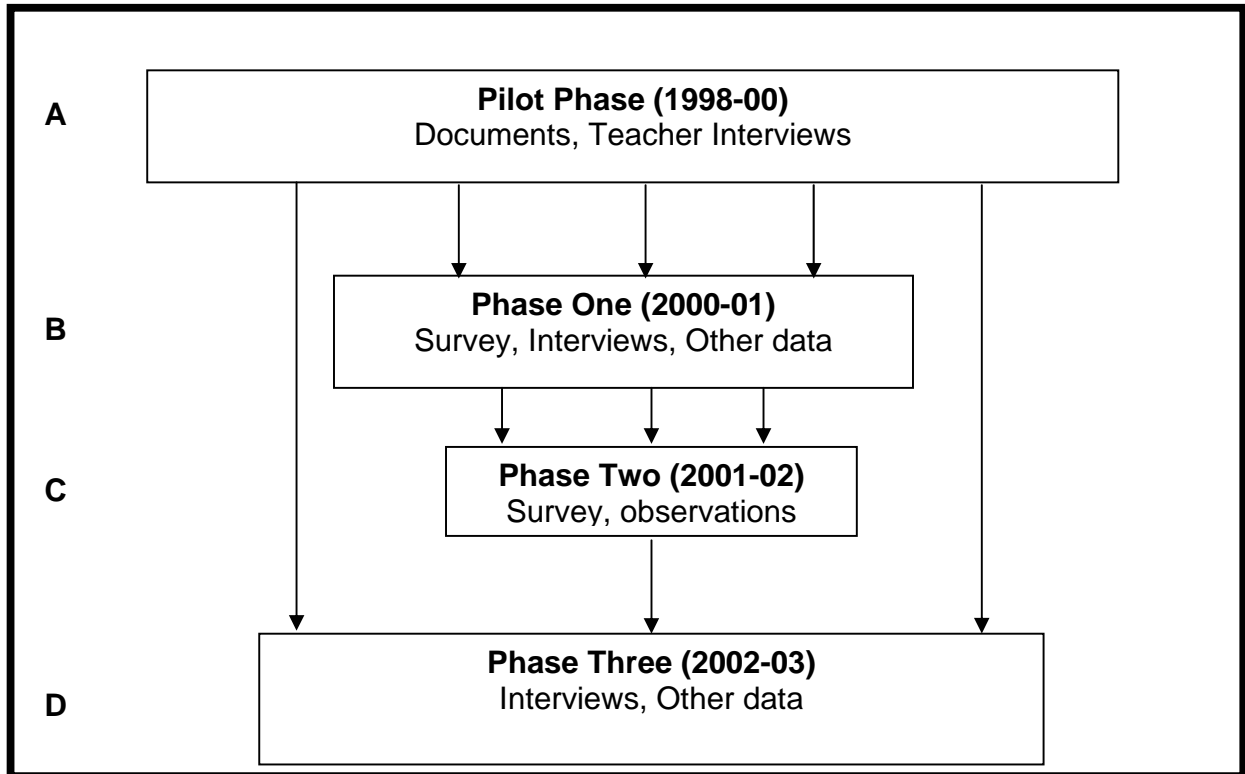
Figure 1 shows we are using a range of techniques including semi-structured interviews (mainly with teachers), observation, quantitative surveys of teachers, and other data (documentary evidence, published data such as test scores, school attendance and socio-economic data and internal school records).

Part of the study could be classified as Non Experimental Quantitative Research (Kerlinger ,1986): *"Non experimental research is systematic empirical enquiry in which the scientist does not have direct control of independent variables". (p348).* Recent attempts to classify non experimental quantitative research (Johnson, 2001) have proposed a two dimensional approach, the first being the primary "research objective" i.e. description, prediction and explanation, the second being is the "time dimension" i.e. cross sectional, longitudinal, and retrospective. While this leads to nine types of classification, we see elements of our methodology in

all of these. We have a longitudinal element in following the attainment (levels) of pupils from pilot and phase one schools. There is a cross sectional element, the survey of teachers responsible for individual school projects and a retrospective dimension, to study projects that had been in place for some. An independent evaluator, a former district inspector, has been involved with the project since its inception. This work provides an ongoing descriptive and explanatory dimension to the current work of the project team. There is a predictive dimension of our work, in that the individual school projects are all ultimately linked to increasing the attainment of pupils.

However, our approach clearly goes beyond this methodology model, since we take an interpretative multi-method approach, much of which involves the use of qualitative data. The multi-stage nature of the work, which uses a variety of methods to do different 'jobs', also has similarities with classifications of ways of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, our research so far has similarities with one of Morgan's (1998) four classifications - 'QUANT qual' - which involves a smaller follow-up qualitative study helping to illuminate results from a larger quantitative study. However, in the later stages of our mutli-phase project, we refocus on qualitative data. The complexity of our study cannot be captured by a 'principal method/complementary method' classification.

For the purposes of this paper, we used a limited amount of the data gathered as part of the evaluation. Centrally we use survey data from teachers in 25 of the 33 phase one schools. Qualitative information from semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of this group is used to draw out the meanings behind some of these findings. In addition, we us documentary sources kept by the Charter for Transition team and interviews with teachers in ten schools involved in the pilot phase. National and local comparative data (test results for each school at age 11 for the years 1996-2001) could not be gathered in time for this paper.

The sample we used for the questionnaire survey included 20 primary (elementary) schools and five secondary (high) schools. The response rate was 76%, a very respectable rate for a postal survey. The questionnaire contained multiple choice questions on three aspects of the transition programme: teaching and professional development; management and sustainability; and pupils' personal and academic development. Questions were developed from the pilot phase qualitative work, and questionnaires used by the national school inspection body.

We asked that senior teachers involved with the programme in each school would complete the questionnaire, and that, if possible, the questionnaire should be completed by more than one person to allow a 'school response' as far as possible. In the event, senior teachers did complete the questionnaire in all cases (head teachers were involved in 65% of cases) and more than one person did complete the questionnaire in a third of cases.

The interviews on which we draw to enable us to examine the simple patterns in the questionnaire data in more complexity took place just after the questionnaire survey was administered with senior teachers in six of the schools involved in phase one. The schedules were semi-structured and drew on issues from the questionnaire, as well as allowing broader discussions around the Charter for Transition projects and their place within the school.

Chart 1 shows the range of activities in which projects took part. Schools came up with the idea for each project and this was refined through discussion with the project team. It can be seen that none was related the home or parents. This is interesting, since at least one well-known British intervention project, Merttens (1995), demonstrated that shared parent-—child homework at a young age improved the likelihood of academic success amongst educationally disadvantaged children. Interviews revealed some local successes with parental involvement attributable to raised pupil attainment, but parental involvement was

seen to follow academic success rather than precede it, while home school contracts were no substitute for regular face to face contact with parents.

Chart 1: Phase one activities

Activity	Value
english	14
mathematics	14
science	9
developing abc criteria	19
data to inform planning	11
key stage plans	2
tracking pupils	18
developing assessment	13
target setting	17
transition within key stages	14
transition ks2-ks3	9
transition ks1-ks2	14
transition to ks1	8
home-school work	
promoting learning	11
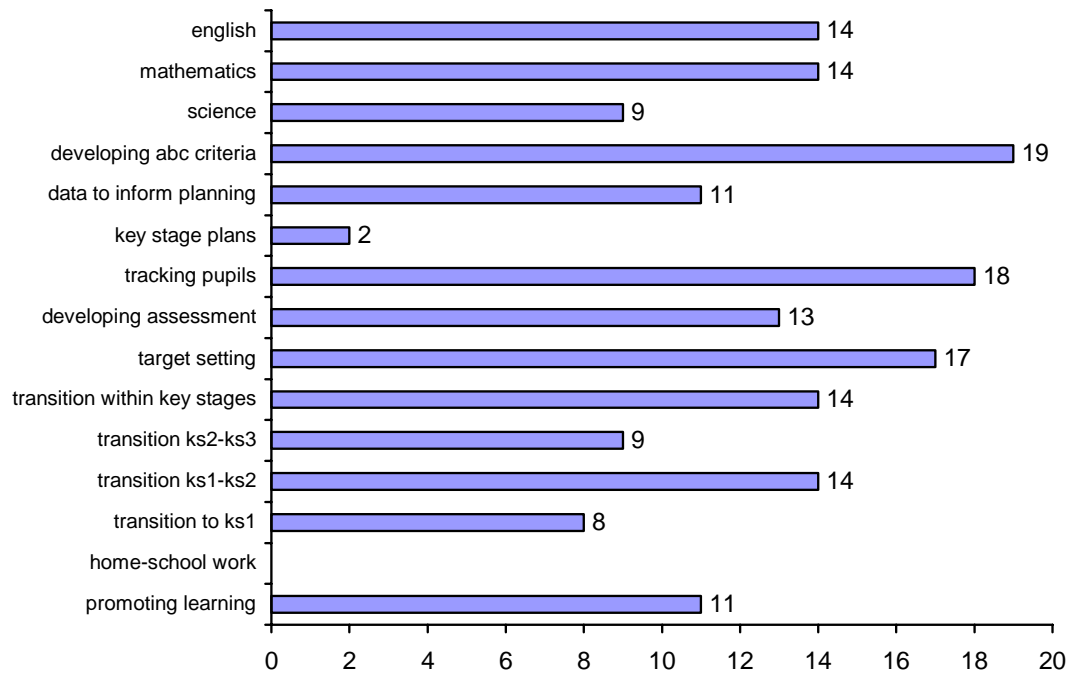
Findings: teachers' views on the impact of the project

1. Impact on teaching and professional development; and management and sustainability

Charts 2 and 3 contain data derived from sets of questions on these two aspects of the work done by Charter for Transition. The charts used are bar graphs, in which each bar represents the mean value for each statement across the sample. A mean value of 2.5 represents a neutral consensus (i.e. teachers are, on the whole, neither supportive nor in disagreement with the statement).

A value of less than 2.5 indicates that teachers are, on average, more positive about this response. The closer the value is to one, the stronger the agreement with this statement. A value of more than 2.5, on the other hand, indicates that teachers are, on average, in disagreement with this statement. The closer the value is to four, the stronger the disagreement with this statement.

We have shown this graphically, by marking the 'neutral consensus' value of 2.5 on Charts 2 and 3 with a broken line. If a statement has a bar that finishes to the left of this, it indicates that, on average, there was agreement with this statement. The further to the left, the stronger the agreement. If a bar finishes to the right of this line, however, it indicates disagreement, and the further to the right, the greater the disagreement. This is a simple approach that was adopted to allow us to examine simple patterns in the data, since the small sample size precludes us from using more complex analyses e.g. analysis based on factor analyses.

Chart 2: agreement with statements about teaching and professional development

Statement	Value
promoted a shared commitment to school improvement	1.6
helped in the identification of priorities for school development	1.9
enhanced teachers' planning skills	2.1
enhanced teachers' skills in providing differentiated learning opps	2
helped teachers with the setting of purposeful homework activities	2.4
increased understanding of how pupils' work will develop in following years	1.9
provided increased understanding of how to build upon prior work	1.7
helped in the development of pupils' social skills	2.4
helped teachers to improve the learning climate in classrooms	2
provided increased understanding of the potential for marking and verbal feedback	1.8
helped teachers develop higher level questioning skills	2.1
helped staff take positive steps to improve pupils' learning	1.7
contributed to the development of school policies	1.9
increased teachers' expectations of pupils' capabilities	1.8
provided increased understanding of the purpose of assessment	1.8
raised the level of professional discussion in the staffroom/department	1.7
increased professional expertise through observation	1.9
made teachers more aware of how pupils respond to learning opps	1.8
encouraged parents to become more involved with in their child's education	2.4
had a positive effect on staff working together in a team	1.8
helped with setting individual learning targets for pupils	1.8
helped school staff to understand how to interpret assessment data	1.6

In Chart 2, It can be seen that teachers are, on the whole, in at least some agreement with each of the statements. They agree most strongly that the phase one work has:
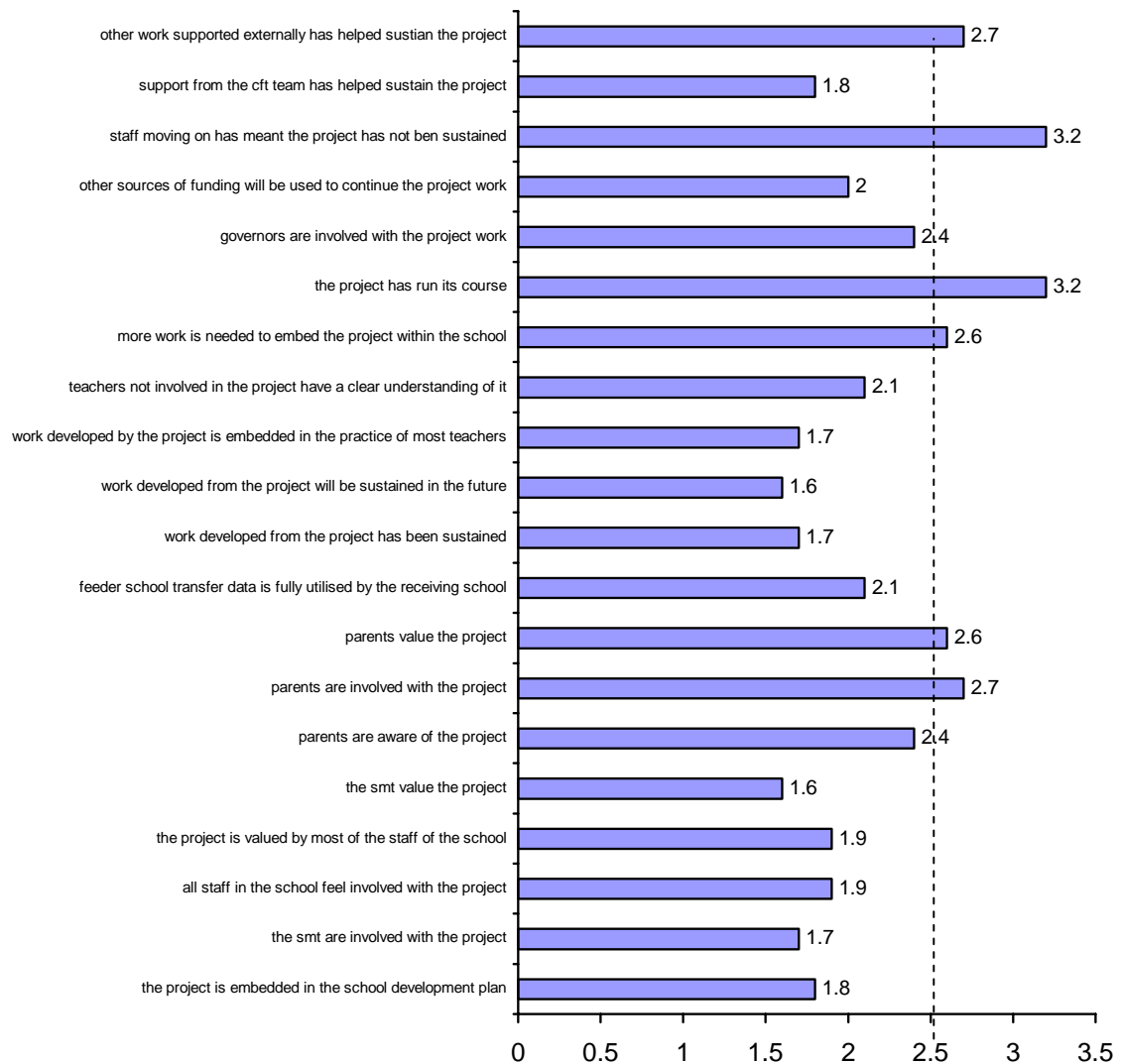
- provided a shared commitment to school improvement. One primary teacher commented '*the Charter project was a way of bonding as a team, of enabling staff to see the big picture of how their work was contextualised within overall improvement trends within the school'.*

- helped raise the level of professional discussion in the department/staffroom.

- helped staff take positive steps to improve pupils' learning.

- helped school staff understand how to interpret assessment data. Teacher comments on this included '*Staff now look at data for its meaning and limitations in relation to teaching and learning rather than feeling apprehensive or simply filing it away or ignoring it'.*

- provided increased understanding of how to build upon prior work. One teacher said '*now we can draw on a central bank of information, staff coordinators in schools can make more informed progress judgements from multiple data sources'* rather than simply relying on assessment data that is frequently unreliable (see previous context section).

Teachers were in far less agreement about whether it helped in the development of pupils' social skills or helped with setting purposeful homework activities. In addition, they did not agree strongly that it encouraged parents to be more involved with their children's education (which links to the statements about parents involvement and commitment to the work discussed in the analysis of Chart 3).

A comparison was made between the responses from primary and secondary schools. Some differences were found, although we must bear in mind that the number of secondary schools is small. Therefore the results should be treated with caution. The most important difference for the purposes of this paper, is that

for almost all of these statements, primary schools agreed more strongly with the statement than secondaries, although the differences were sometimes quite small. This indicates that, overall, primary schools felt that they benefited more from Charter for Transition, in terms of the areas of teaching and professional development which they were asked about. Interviews examined the apparently less positive secondary response to the project. It was found that this was largely related to the difficulty of generalising across a large secondary school, where changes frequently come at the departmental rather than whole school level. This was found by Harris (2001), who indicates that improvement in schools is most commonly discussed at whole-school or individual level, leaving out the vital missing link represented by the potential influence of a community of practice at departmental level.

Chart 3: agreement with statements about management and sustainability

Statement	Value
other work supported externally has helped sustian the project	2.7
support from the cft team has helped sustain the project	1.8
staff moving on has meant the project has not ben sustained	3.2
other sources of funding will be used to continue the project work	2
governors are involved with the project work	2.4
the project has run its course	3.2
more work is needed to embed the project within the school	2.6
teachers not involved in the project have a clear understanding of it	2.1
work developed by the project is embedded in the practice of most teachers	1.7
work developed from the project will be sustained in the future	1.6
work developed from the project has been sustained	1.7
feeder school transfer data is fully utilised by the receiving school	2.1
parents value the project	2.6
parents are involved with the project	2.7
parents are aware of the project	2.4
the smt value the project	1.6
the project is valued by most of the staff of the school	1.9
all staff in the school feel involved with the project	1.9
the smt are involved with the project	1.7
the project is embedded in the school development plan	1.8

Although it was difficult to thematically group findings in Chart 2, some patterns do emerge when we examine Chart 3. These areas are grouped under subheadings below.

Commitment of senior school managers

There was strong agreement that the SMT (senior management team) of each school valued and were involved with the project. This may partly reflect the fact

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the members of school SMTs tended to complete the questionnaires. However the interview analysis suggests that they were in fact heavily involved, particularly in primary schools. One primary teacher said that the project had actually created a more shared management structure in the school with '*four of my staff now having management responsibilities associated with Charter work'.*

Sustainability

There was strong agreement with several statements that referred to sustainability, including that 'work developed in the project is embedded in teachers' practice', 'work developed will be sustained in the future', and that 'work developed has been sustained'. There was also disagreement with statements that implied lack of sustainability, for example schools disagreed that the project had not been sustained due to staff leaving the school, that the project had run its course and that more work was needed to embed the project in the school. However, respondents disagreed that other external support had helped sustain the project. Rather, it was helped by support from the Charter for Transition team.

The 'enabling style' of the Charter team was viewed as being important by interviewees in this respect. The sustainability of many in-school developments that have been fostered as part of the charter for transition programme is not in doubt, as commitment to shared goals of perceived mutual benefit had been developed. These benefits included pupil tracking sheets and improved data interpretation. However, the sustainability of more cross-phase initiatives, bridging projects in particular, was in more doubt since this involved costs to cover teacher time.

Parental involvement

Schools disagreed that parents were involved with or valued the project, although this may be partly linked to the fact that there was little agreement that parents were aware of the project.

There were also some differences apparent in the responses of primary schools and secondary schools. We must again be cautious with the interpretation of these findings, since the number of secondary schools is very small. However, for this set of responses, it was again apparent that primary schools indicated in most responses that they saw more benefits to them compared with secondary schools, in terms of management and sustainability.
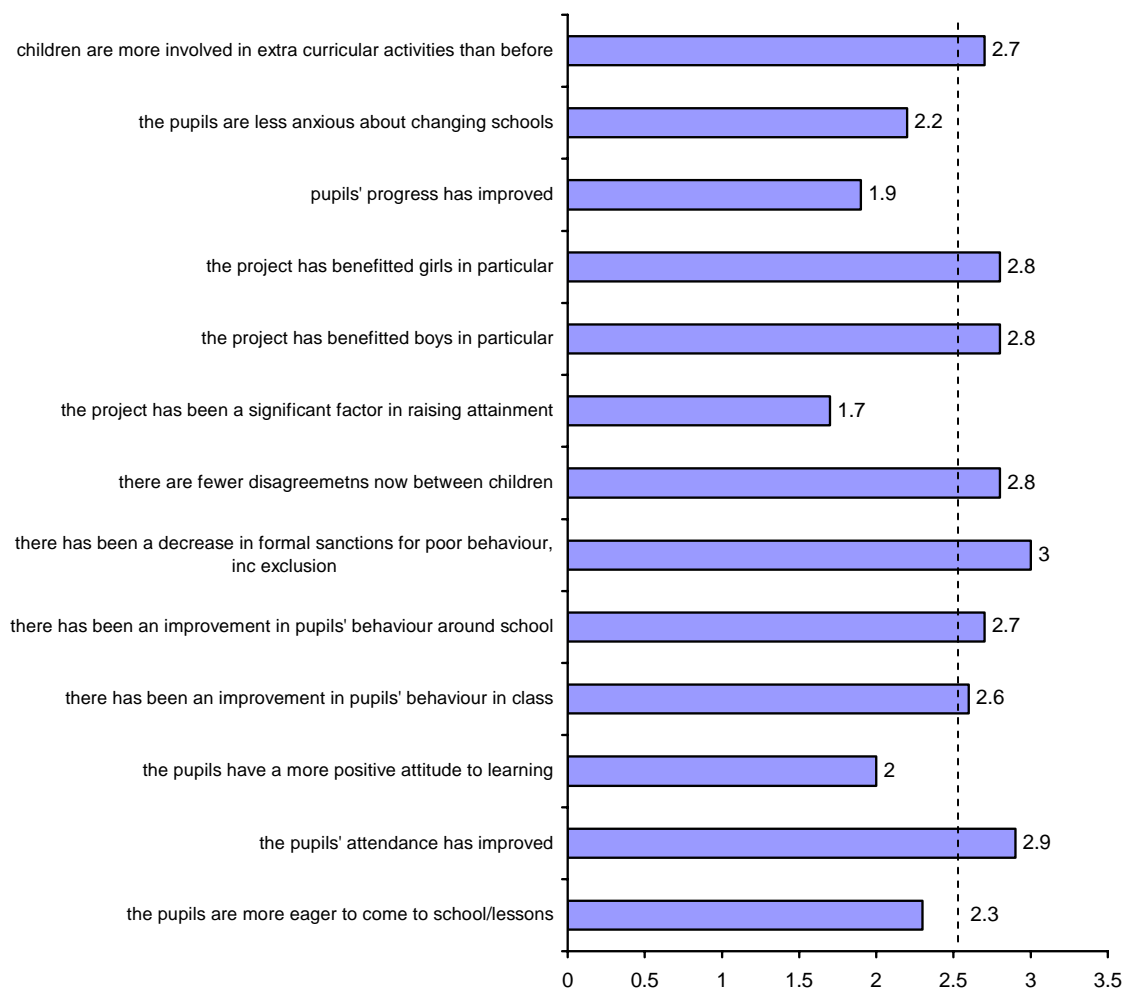
Primary schools disagreed (mean = 2.87) that more work is needed to embed the project within the school, whereas secondary schools agreed quite strongly with this statement (mean = 1.8). This appears to be a key indicator that primary schools were more confident about sustainability and internal management . A related indicator is that primary schools agreed albeit weakly that governors were involved with the project, whereas secondary schools disagreed (mean = 2.75).

Primary schools were very weakly in agreement with or neutral about the statement that feeder school data (information passed on by primary schools to the relevant secondary schools) is fully utilised by the receiving school (mean = 2.44), whereas secondary schools agreed strongly (mean = 1.6). This disagreement reflects ongoing differences in perception between primary and secondary schools concerning the use of transfer information. This is related strongly to the problems with making comparisons using this data noted by Gorard and Taylor, 2002. According to interview data, primary schools question whether the best use is made of documentation that is sent up to secondary schools. Secondary schools, on the other hand, would like pupils' best work to be

passed on to them to give evidence of achievement when the validity of test scores is questioned.

2.   Pupils' involvement

Chart 4: agreement with statements about pupils' development

Statement	Value
children are more involved in extra curricular activities than before	2.7
the pupils are less anxious about changing schools	2.2
pupils' progress has improved	1.9
the project has benefitted girls in particular	2.8
the project has benefitted boys in particular	2.8
the project has been a significant factor in raising attainment	1.7
there are fewer disagreemetns now between children	2.8
there has been a decrease in formal sanctions for poor behaviour, inc exclusion	3
there has been an improvement in pupils' behaviour around school	2.7
there has been an improvement in pupils' behaviour in class	2.6
the pupils have a more positive attitude to learning	2
the pupils' attendance has improved	2.9
the pupils are more eager to come to school/lessons	2.3

There are immediate and obvious differences between chart 4 and charts 2 and 3. In the first place, the questions were only answered by, on average, 40% of the schools. This reflects the fact that many schools felt that the project was not relevant to some of these aspects of pupils' experiences of schools mentioned in

these statements. However, the reluctance to answer these questions can also be taken as disagreement with them since, as some respondents legitimately argued, many of these issues were not intended to be addressed by Charter for Transition projects. As with Chart 3, it is possible to group certain aspects of Chart 4 under subheadings.

Attainment issues

The only statements that schools agreed with relatively strongly, were those that referred to attainment and progress. These statements were: pupils' progress had improved, the project had been a significant factor in raising attainment and the pupils had a more positive attitude to learning.

Behaviour and engagement with school in general

Schools disagreed with all statements that referred to improved behaviour. These statements included that that there were fewer disagreements between children, that there were improvements in behaviour in lessons or around school and that there had been a decrease in formal sanctions. Schools also disagreed that attendance had improved and that there was more involvement in extra-curricular activities as a result of phase one activities. In interviews, staff in schools noted that they felt that there were too many variables to usefully comment on general behaviour and engagement.

There were no real differences between primary and secondary schools in response to these questions.

Conclusion and Discussion

The clearest findings are that staff in the schools involved were very positive about the benefits of the Charter for Transition project to them in terms of teaching, management issues and professional development. They were clear

that they felt that the projects were sustainable and embedded in the school. This emphasis on management and professional development is related to the range of project focuses that were emphasised in Table 1.

However, when asked about the impact on pupils, teachers' responses were very different. In particular, although some teachers felt able to state that the projects had made a difference to pupil attainment, many could not. This despite the fact that, when asked in interviewers about the aims of the project, many teachers specified raising achievement. So what is going on here?

Some of the reasons for teachers' unwillingness to make claims about the impact of the project on attainment are clearly related to the problems with the validity of the attainment data itself, the process of measuring attainment, and the making of predictions and measuring change over time. This latter point tends to confirm the extensive review of research undertaken by Levin (1998), in which he found no evidence to substantiate the predictive validity in research related to performance standards. Our qualitative data shows that there is a clear lack of trust on the parts of secondary schools in the data received at the end of the primary phase. On the other side of the divide, primary schools do not trust that secondary schools will make full use of whatever information is passed upwards.

Finally, and just as importantly, as the individual projects progressed, schools realised that the focus tended to be more related to aspects of their work in developing systems to enhance teaching and planning. These systems included working on pinpointing progress in key subjects, and developing systems to track pupil progress over time. Schools find it difficult to link this kind of work directly to improvements in attainment, and if this does happen, our interview data and discussions with the Charter for Transition team suggest that changes will occur over a longer time period - a 'lag is expected'. If there are improvements, they are clearly going to involve aspects of classroom teaching. This point has been made recently by members of the school improvement movement, who are

beginning to move away from examining school systems or 'school effectiveness' towards the technologies of the classroom teacher or 'teacher effectiveness' (Muijs and Reynolds, 2001). The literature also suggests that the teacher factors necessary to raise achievement are not the same in classrooms in different socio-economic settings (Borich, 1996).

We are aware of some of the difficulties in reporting our ongoing research findings back to teachers. Kennedy's (1999) findings on this subject cast doubt on arguments for the superiority of any particular research genre, whether it be in terms of persuasiveness, relevance, or ability to influence practitioners' thinking. However, her research identifies that the most useful studies are those that address the relationship between teaching and learning, or enable teachers to form analogies between studies read and their own situation or practices. Briefing meetings for schools about to enter the Charter for Transition project do contain case study material which addresses these points. In addition, our interim reports and findings are being regularly fed back to schools.

There are further complications in Coalton. As we have outlined in a previous paper (Coldwell and Holland, 2001), Coalton has a raft of measures in place aimed at raising attainment. These include strategies to impact on literacy and numeracy, vocational education, study skills, parental engagement and projects for the gifted and talented. This creates challenges for schools, and challenges for the research team.

The next stage of our study will go on to try integrate the qualitative and attitudinal data gathered so far with a statistical analysis of some of the attainment data that is available over time, part of which will investigate this claim that attainment improvement will 'lag' behind changes in management and teacher development. Clearly, however, with the issues we have discussed in using the usual measures of attainment, we face another problem with validity and the use of this data.

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