

St Colm's High School (Belfast) and Christ the Redeemer Primary School Case Study

Introduction

Christ the Redeemer Primary School is a Catholic maintained primary school in Lagmore, Belfast. Its catchment areas are Lagmore, Poleglass and Twinbrook. St Colm's High School is one of the schools that many pupils from Christ the Redeemer Primary School transfer to at the end of Year 7. St Colm's High School is a Catholic maintained post-primary school in Twinbrook, Belfast. St Colm's has seven feeder primary schools, including Christ the Redeemer Primary School.

Ways of working together

The school leadership teams and teachers in both schools recognise the importance of working together to ensure that pupils experience a successful transition. Both schools collaborate to plan and develop ways to support pupils to settle in to St Colm's.



The head of ICT from St Colm's and a computer technician visit a Year 7 teacher from Christ the Redeemer to discuss using iPads to enhance learning.

This includes developing effective communication between schools and with parents, and establishing structures that facilitate collaboration. Both schools focus on meeting the individual needs of pupils and preparing them for the changes they will face during transition. This approach helps to reduce the concerns that pupils and parents might have about transition.

Both schools have a co-ordinating teacher who is responsible for developing and managing collaborative initiatives. The principals in both schools thought this was essential to ensure successful collaboration. The teachers are in regular contact and hold formal monthly meetings. Typically, discussions are about pupils' progression in learning, their welfare and issues related to collaboration and transition.

Teachers from both schools work together to share their expertise and to plan and develop joint initiatives and activities. Through working together, primary and post-primary teachers have built good professional relationships based on trust, co-operation and respect. Teachers share their expertise by observing and discussing each other's lessons. They also work collaboratively to identify low achievers and underachievers to provide support and put early interventions in place.

Extended schools programme

St Colm's High School and Christ the Redeemer Primary School are part of a cluster group of schools funded by the Extended Schools' Programme. The co-ordinator of this cluster group meets with the primary schools throughout the year. The primary schools provide information about primary pupils' learning, particularly in literacy, numeracy and science. The schools also evaluate pupils' projected needs in these areas to facilitate their progression to post-primary. The co-ordinator channels this information to St Colm's.

The Extended Schools' Programme provides a platform for professional discussion, enabling schools to move forward with a shared vision for primary and post-primary pupils. It also provides funding to support some of the shared activities mentioned below.



Pupils from Christ the Redeemer share their learning with a Year 14 pupil from St Colm's.

Sharing facilities and shared activities or events

Both schools have organised and taken part in a number of events and initiatives to promote more effective curriculum links. These include:

- Reading buddies – St Colm's senior boys visit Year 7 pupils in Christ the Redeemer Primary School to encourage boys' reading and to provide male role models for primary pupils.
- Use of science facilities – St Colm's makes its laboratories available for Christ the Redeemer Primary School pupils to engage in practical work.
- Art and drama workshops – Year 13 pupils from St Colm's help to deliver art and drama activities for pupils from Year 1 to Year 7.

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- Mini Olympics – St Colm’s makes its sports facilities available for pupils from Christ the Redeemer Primary School and St Colm’s PE students help to organise games for the primary pupils.
 - Christmas Fair – St Colm’s organises a Christmas event for primary pupils, including storytelling, craftwork, baking, visit Santa.
 - Mathematics Fun Days – teachers and pupils from St Colm’s plan and deliver a session of fun mathematics activities to motivate primary pupils and make mathematics enjoyable and challenging.

Sharing Information

The principals of both schools agreed that one of the most important elements in the transition process was to ensure that primary and post-primary schools shared pupil information effectively. From the primary principal’s perspective, this was about providing a full picture of each pupil: his or her background, ability, attitude and barriers to learning. The information includes assessment data. The primary vice-principal collates the information and passes it to the designated teacher in St Colm’s High School in the summer term. Post-primary teachers use this information for planning and providing learning and pastoral support.

Sharing and using assessment information

Christ the Redeemer Primary School shares a range of assessment data, including end of Key Stage 2 assessment outcomes, with St Colm’s High School. Teachers in Christ the Redeemer Primary School gather assessment evidence from a range of sources at the end of each seven-week cycle. This evidence includes teacher observation, formative assessments, pupils’ work books and interviews. Christ the Redeemer Primary School collates assessment information, including:

- end of Key Stage 2 statutory Levels of Progression in Communication and Using Mathematics;
- comments on pupil performance and progress in Areas of Learning and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities;
- National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) scores;
- Non-Reading Intelligence Test (NRIT) score;
- reading age;
- ongoing teacher-assessed levels; and
- percentage scores in class assessments.

Teachers in Christ the Redeemer Primary School use this information to help identify low achieving and underachieving pupils. They pass the information on to and discuss it with the head of Year 8 in St Colm’s.

In June, St Colm’s conducts baseline tests with transferring pupils. It compares, analyses and interprets the results alongside the information provided by Christ the Redeemer Primary School. St Colm’s uses its analysis of the results to identify pupils



who may be underperforming. The co-ordinating teacher at St Colm's discusses their analysis with the teacher from Christ the Redeemer. This ensures that teachers from both schools agree on their judgements about each pupil.

As part of the transition process, senior teachers at St Colm's hold interviews with parents of Year 8 pupils who have recently transferred from primary school. Teachers see these interviews as an important opportunity to engage and start to build relationships with parents and to encourage them to become involved with the school and their children's learning. The interviews allow parents to discuss with teachers any issues they may have about transition, the school and their children's welfare and learning. Teachers also use the interviews to outline what the school expects from their children in terms of school routines, the curriculum, homework policy etc. Teachers also reinforce the important role that parents play in supporting their children's education.

During the interviews, teachers discuss the results of baseline tests that St Colm's carried out. Where St Colm's has identified pupils requiring additional learning support, for example in specific aspects of literacy and/or numeracy, teachers discuss the type and nature of the support offered.

Curriculum planning and sharing best practice

The principals and teachers from both schools are keen to ensure that the Year 8 curriculum builds on the primary curriculum. There is a particular focus on supporting improvements in literacy and numeracy. This involves a lead teacher from St Colm's and the head of English and the literacy and numeracy co-ordinators from Christ the Redeemer.

The teachers work together to plan progression in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum from Year 7 to Year 8. They review their schemes of work to identify links, possible overlap and unnecessary repetition.

Teachers from both schools plan lessons together. They also team teach lessons to mixed classes of primary and post-primary pupils and regularly observe each other's lessons in their respective schools. This makes teachers from both schools more aware of the connections between the Year 7 and Year 8 curriculum and different approaches to teaching and learning.

The principal from St Colm's and other teachers involved in using ICT acknowledge Christ the Redeemer Primary School's expertise in using ICT to enhance learning. The head of mathematics and mathematics teachers from St Colm's are working closely with a Year 7 teacher in Christ the Redeemer Primary School who introduced iPads into his teaching and learning with Year 7 pupils. This teacher and the head of mathematics are planning ways of using iPads with pupils in St Colm's. Teachers from both schools view this initiative as a way of motivating pupils and making lessons more interactive.



St Colm's Head of ICT talks with Christ the Redeemer pupils about using iPads for learning.

Working together to enhance pastoral provision

The principal and staff of Christ the Redeemer Primary School said that throughout primary schooling they have come to know their pupils personally and as individuals. The principal, teachers and pupils have developed strong connections and built good relationships with each other. The principal and teachers hope that they have enabled all their pupils to develop as individuals and as learners. They trust that St Colm's will continue to support their pupils to develop and grow as young people.

Christ the Redeemer Primary School and St Colm's High School value the important role that parents play in supporting their children's education. Both schools place a strong emphasis on pastoral provision and developing links and building good relationships with parents. School principals and teachers see this as particularly important during the transition process.

In Christ the Redeemer Primary School, the Year 7 teacher is in regular contact with parents. The principal and teacher encourage parents to meet with them to discuss their concerns, especially about the transition process. They provide clear information about the transition process and about the changes pupils will face in post-primary school, including changes in the curriculum, school routines and homework. The principal and teacher reassure parents about their children's safety and well-being.

St Colm's induction programme begins when teachers visit Year 7 pupils early in the academic year. The teacher in charge of the induction programme in St Colm's is also the head of Year 8 and is therefore in a good position to monitor and evaluate pupils' transition. The post-primary school co-ordinates with the primary school to organise open nights for Year 7 pupils. They follow this up later in the year with parental interviews, once St Colm's has carried out baseline testing of pupils in English and mathematics.

During the summer, St Colm's tells parents which class their child will be in when he or she transfers from Christ the Redeemer Primary School. To help incoming Year 8 pupils to get to know one another, St Colm's organises a summer scheme in the first two



weeks of August. This is funded by the Extended Schools' Programme. At the end of August, all Year 8 pupils take part in a two-hour induction. This helps them to become more familiar with the school.

Staff at St Colm's and Christ the Redeemer schools work with pupils to find more out about their interests, strengths and areas for development. The conversation begins in primary school and continues in Year 8. Teachers take the time to find out what pupils like and what they are good at, for example music, drama, poetry or sport. They share this information with all staff at St Colm's. The information is used to encourage pupils to develop their interests, abilities and skills through their involvement in school clubs and both curricular and extracurricular activities.

The head of year and form tutors mentor Year 8 pupils. During the first few weeks of term St Colm's also operates a buddy system. This involves assigning prefects to each Year 8 class to help pupils to feel safe and to adjust to school life. Other induction initiatives include bowling, visits to the Grand Opera House and taking part in Young Enterprise events and Translink's safety day as an entire year group. These events provide more opportunities for Year 8 pupils to get to know others in their year group.

Pupil views about the transition process

The principal and teachers at St Colm's encourage pupils to share their views on school related issues that affect them. This includes their transition experience. Teachers discuss the transition experience with Year 8 pupils and gather written feedback from them. Here are some of the pupils' views about their transition experience:

'At first I was emotional because the thought of leaving all my friends worried me. But as time passed the fear went away. Although I was extremely nervous I was also thrilled to be getting into my dream school.'

'I was a bit nervous moving from my primary school to St Colm's because I thought I wasn't going to fit in and would never know where the classes were.'

'My primary school helped me to prepare for going to St Colm's by telling me about the timetable and if I had any problems to tell someone.'

'In my primary school my teacher talked about going to the new school. This made me think everything would be OK as I sort of knew what it would be like.'

'When I went to the open night, the summer scheme and the open day I knew that St Colm's was the school for me.'

'I liked it the day the teacher from St Colm's took our class.'

'The summer scheme prepared me for this school. It helped me to get to know people before I started.'



Christ the Redeemer pupils enjoying their learning using iPads.

The Future

The principals and staff in both schools are committed to maintaining and developing their existing collegial approach. Both schools have a strong focus on working together to support teachers' professional development. Improving the ways in which they use and share information to support progression in learning is another focus for development.

All staff in both schools plan to meet and participate in training in the autumn term. The training will consider ways that teachers can work together to tackle boys' performance and underachievement.

The principals and teachers from both schools also work collaboratively to develop their links with parents and the wider community. St Colm's invites parents of pupils in Year 8 to attend sessions on Parent Power. This is about emphasising the important role that parents have in supporting their children's learning. Parents discuss what they can do to support their children's learning, focusing on revision and study practices. The school will host another session where an organisation called Amazing Brains will show parents how to become involved in their children's education and the benefits that this creates.