

Evidence Request Bank

Development Project

Evidence into action: how project partners are using the evidence reviews

Evidence into action: West Lothian Council

West Lothian Council asked the Evidence Request Bank to provide review of evidence on *Transition to primary school*.

Why was the evidence report requested? To provide an evidence base for our Early Years Collaborative (EYC) improvement work within the area of transitions. We wanted to know more about the factors that affect children's transition to primary school, what can help in managing transitions, and what the barriers might be for services and families.

Specifically, in relation to the EYC stream 3 stretch aim that 90% of children should be meeting developmental milestones by the time they reach Primary 1: identify areas where we can make improvements and use the evidence as a basis for planning, testing, and documenting changes.

How has West Lothian Council used the evidence report? We have used the evidence to create a driver diagram demonstrating what drives successful transitions from nursery to primary school (see below). This will be used to create a series of tests of change to improve transition for children in West Lothian.

The evidence report and driver diagram have been circulated by the Scottish Government around the EYC networks as an example of good practice. They are also planned to be used as an example of using evidence for practice during EYC learning sessions.

We have held discussions with colleagues to reinforce the value of evidence-based practice, using this as an example.

What difference did having the evidence make? A complex literature on transitions was presented in a way which enabled us to immediately identify three things that practitioners can apply to their work and be confident that they are doing the important things.

We have been able to direct resources (time, staff etc.) to a number of change areas that are likely to be effective.

Our social policy team already values using evidence. However, this review has helped to improve the culture around evidence-informed practice with practitioners working around transitions by demonstrating how evidence can help them to do their work.

What worked well? Having an on-going dialogue with the Evidence Bank right from the initial team discussions over our knowledge gaps helped to refine our thinking about what was needed—this was a really critical step. Also useful was the user-friendly presentation, which eschewed academic jargon and instead offered clear, concise evidence on which to base our improvements and direct resources. The process and product have demonstrated the importance of considering evidence at all stages of planning and implementation.

What was challenging? Accommodating the time required to go through the evidence to action process within public services timescales.

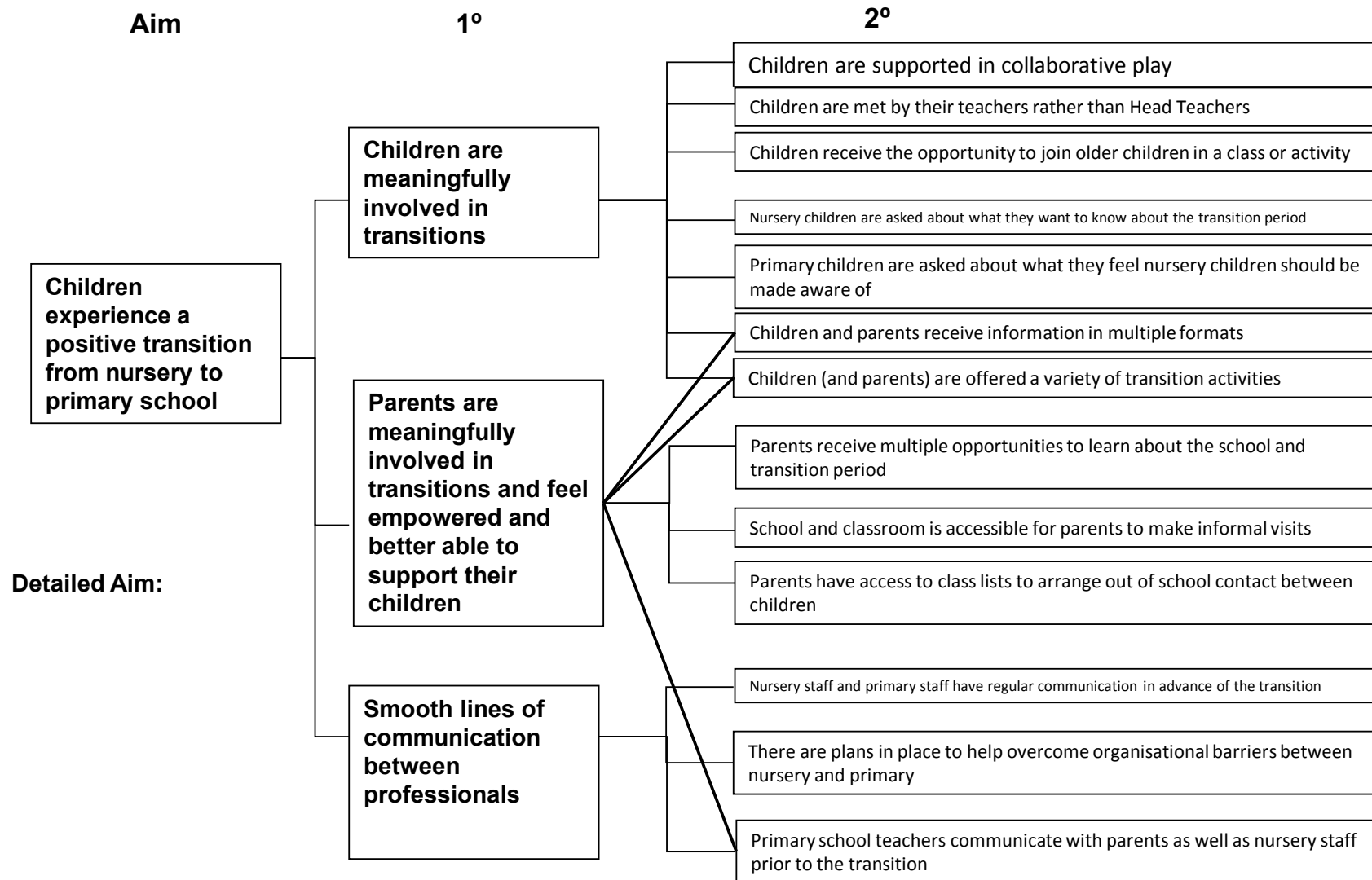
Transitions Driver

West Lothian Council Early Years Collaborative work on transitions

Driver diagram created from Evidence Request Bank evidence

review "Transition to primary school"

Theory of what drives positive transitions



Talking Points

- How do we respond to children's voices in transition i.e. children's desire for more play in school?
- How do we support friendship groups?
- What can be done to address children's concerns with regards to school systems e.g. behaviour policies?
- How can parents be more included in the transition process, with the time of the process being unlimited?
- When does dialogue on transition begin with children, parents and professionals?
- How do we create, and sustain, a listening culture?
- Who holds the power in transition? How is it shared?

Evidence into Action: Children in Scotland

Children in Scotland is planning to use the ERB evidence report *Family Households: How have family households in Scotland changed over 2001-2011?* as a springboard for debate and engagement with the children and families sector. Specifically, it will bring together key stakeholders to explore the implications of evidence relating to children in need of care and families affected by disability.

Children in Scotland is also sharing the *Family Households* and *Transitions to primary school* evidence reports through its training programme, magazine and website.

Evidence into action: Parenting Across Scotland

Parenting Across Scotland (PAS) requested a review of data about *Family households* in Scotland, looking at if or how they have changed between 2001 and 2011.

Why was the evidence report requested? Parenting across Scotland and its partners know that there is no such thing as an average or 'normal' family – each family is unique with its own strengths and challenges. In addition, services report that they are seeing changes in how families are constituted. We wanted to know what households look like in Scotland today, and how have they changed in recent years. We were also interested to know about any gaps in data, in other words, what information we do not know.

How has PAS used the evidence report? PAS held a seminar to disseminate and discuss the report, which was attended by over 60 practitioners, policy makers and others, mostly from the voluntary sector. The seminar enabled participants to hear about and respond to the main findings, and discuss implications for policy and practice.

PAS and its partners have also used the statistics in its policy work (for example, consultation responses) and will be updating the well-used *Facts about Families in Scotland* on the PAS website.

PAS is planning to bring particular findings and gaps in data to the attention of organisations with a specific remit, for example:

- sharing data on parental working patterns with Family Friendly Working Scotland;
- highlighting the lack of evidence on families affected by disability with disability organisations; and
- sharing data with civil servants developing good practice guidelines for childcare aspects of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

Responses to the findings at the seminar showed that while the evidence around, for example, Looked After Children (LAC) was surprising to some participants for whom LAC is not their main focus, to specialists working in the LAC field (e.g. CELCIS) it was not at all surprising since they are familiar with that data. In response to this PAS will communicate with experts to lever awareness raising among non-experts of LAC data and implications.

PAS will ask CELCIS to write an article for the PAS e-newsletter (which has a wide distribution among parenting practitioners in Scotland), explaining LAC definitions and offering explanations about what the evidence review says about trends in LAC data.

PAS will hold a discussion session with its partner organisations to reflect further on the findings and implications for policy and practice, use the findings as an evidence source to inform its work (for example, in responding to consultations), and continue to share the report throughout its newsletter, website and networks. PAS is also considering producing materials such as themed infographics and/or information sheets to share the findings more widely.

What difference did having the evidence report make? We now have clear information to inform our work and share with others both within our partnership and more widely. Up to date and accurate information about family households in Scotland will enable policy makers and services that aim to support families to plan and design services to meet families' needs more appropriately. Highlighting gaps in data will enable the children and families sector to consider the implications of this and how to address those gaps in knowledge.

What worked well? The evidence review took complex and wide ranging statistics and digested them into an easily understood and readable format, which will be of wide relevance to the children and families' policy sector. It was organised clearly into subject sections, allowing it to be used by a wide variety of audiences – specifically, several of the sections were clearly aligned to PAS partner subject interests.

Using data from two censuses allowed changes and emerging trends to be identified; it also gave the evidence a time validity given that there will not be a further census until 2021.

The evidence review also very clearly identified where there were gaps in data or evidence; this will be of great benefit in informing the need for future data collection, and identifying the need for research in specific areas.

We were able to take the evidence to a wide audience by holding a seminar.

What was challenging? The wide-ranging nature of the evidence we requested means that it was difficult to consider as a whole and might be better digested in smaller chunks. However, PAS is giving consideration to this through discussion with partner organisations and consideration of how to use specific sections of the report.

The evidence is challenging in policy terms since it raises difficult questions to address, and raises as many questions as it answers!

Previously the evidence to action work that PAS has engaged with has used evidence to inform practice. The nature of this evidence review and its analysis of trends and statistics is more relevant to policy rather than practice. How this data can be used to develop policy which then informs practice requires further consideration.