

# NEWBRIDGE JUNIOR TRANSITION PILOT PROJECT

## EVALUATION REPORT July 2014



Newbridge Family Resource Centre



For further information about the Newbridge Junior Transition Pilot Programme  
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## Background to the Project

- Children's Services Committees (CSCs) are an initiative of the Irish Government, under the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.
- The overall purpose of Children's Services Committees is securing better developmental outcomes for children through more effective integration of existing services and interventions at local level.
- This is achieved through the development of an integrated multi-agency 3-Year Action Plan.
- The inaugural meeting of Kildare Children's Services Committee (KCSC) took place in June 2010.
- Kildare CSC submitted its first plan in September 2011.
- Early school leaving was identified as one of the four priority issues to be addressed in the plan.
- The importance of support at the transition points in the education lifecycle i.e. primary to post-primary & pre-school to Junior Infants was highlighted.
- The value and benefit of supporting the transition from pre-school to primary school is evidenced in research e.g. (O'Kane, 2007) (O'Kane & Hayes, 2010)
- The importance of positive transitions is reflected in recent national policy and practice in relation to early years education i.e. Siolta National Standards (Transitions) & Aistear Guidelines for Good Practice.
- Kildare Children's Services Committee established a multi-agency Early School Leaving working group.
- It was agreed to pilot a Junior Transition Programme in a local area, involving schools, pre-schools and parents.

## Project Partners

- Kildare County Childcare Committee
- Scoil Mhuire Junior School, Newbridge, Co. Kildare
- Childsplay Crèche, Newbridge, Co. Kildare
- Rainbowrite Montessori, Newbridge, Co. Kildare
- Newbridge Family Resource Centre, Co. Kildare
- Kildare Children's Services Committee, Co. Kildare

## Purpose of the Project

- To support children, parents, preschools and schools with the transition of children from pre-school to Junior Infants.
- To strengthen the relationship between pre-schools and schools.
- To enhance communication between pre-schools and schools.
- To develop an effective and standardised way of transferring relevant information about children from pre-school & parents to teachers/school.
- To develop a way of identifying which children may need extra help to make transition.
- To encourage parents' involvement in their child's development.
- To identify ways of supporting parents & children to make a positive transition when they have been identified as needing additional support
- To evaluate the pilot, with a view to expansion based on positive findings.

## Description of the Process

- Scoil Mhuire Junior School was identified via the KCSC Early School Leaving working group as a potential partner for the project.

- The KCSC Coordinator met with the Home School Community Liaison Coordinator (HSCL) and the four Junior Infant teachers in November 2012 and they agreed to participate in the pilot project.
- The school identified the main feeder pre-schools.
- These pre-schools were contacted to invite them to participate in the project.
- Two of the pre-schools responded and agreed to join the project in November 2012, a third joined the group in January 2013.
- Regular meetings of the project partners took place from December 2012 to June 2013 (9 in total).

Over the course of these meetings:

- ▶ The experience of transition was discussed, including issues and challenges.
- ▶ The core skills/competencies that children need to make a positive transition into Junior Infants were identified and agreed.
- ▶ The information that is useful for schools to have from pre-schools was identified.
- ▶ The form used by the school to gather information from parents about incoming Junior Infants was reviewed and updated.
- ▶ The tools used by pre-schools e.g. developmental checklists & end-of-year reports were reviewed.
- ▶ Models used elsewhere in Ireland and overseas were reviewed e.g. EDI, Marte Meo School Readiness checklist, Child Snapshot form, All About Me Book
- ▶ The design, format and content of the information transfer tool i.e. the *I CAN Book* and accompanying *Guidance Notes* were discussed and agreed.
- ▶ The evaluation methodology was discussed and agreed.

## Description of the Project

- The Information Gathering Form for parents of incoming Junior Infants was reviewed and updated. The new version was used for the first time by parents of children starting Junior Infants in September 2013.
- The *I CAN Book* was developed.
- *Guidance Notes* to accompany the *I CAN Book* were developed to assist pre-schools in using the resource.
- The pre-schools introduced the *I CAN Book* and *Guidance Notes* to staff.
- The *I CAN Book* was then introduced to parents.
- The pre-schools completed the books for individual children in June 2013.
- The completed books were presented to the parents.
- Consent was sought to share the book with the school.
- Parents signed the relevant section of the book to indicate their consent.
- The books were photocopied by the school in black & white – 1 copy for the pre-school and 1 for the school. The original colour copy was given to the parent to keep.
- 42 books were transferred to the school in June 2013.
- The books were distributed to class teachers in mid-September 2013.
- The completed books were used by teachers as a reference point and information source as needed e.g. check in for individual children as a concern or issue arose.
- A presentation about the project was given as part of the Children's Services Committee National Networking event in Dublin on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2013.
- A presentation was made at the Early Childhood Ireland: *A Global Gathering for Early Childhood* international conference on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2013.
- An information session about the pilot project took place for pre-schools and primary schools in Co. Kildare on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014. 45 attended.

### The I CAN Book

- The purpose of the *I CAN Book* is to capture and document the skills the child has gained by the final term of pre-school.
- Young children are growing and learning all the time and the “*I CAN Book*” is intended to provide a brief snapshot of the child’s skills at a particular moment in time.
- The *I CAN Book* is intended to be used as a means of sharing the child’s achievements with the parent(s) and suggesting ways that the skills can be furthered enhanced by the parent and child together at home.
- With the consent of the parent, the *I CAN Book* is shared with the school in which the child is enrolled for Junior Infants. The school can use the *I CAN Book* as needed to support the child’s transition into Junior Infants.

### Evaluation Methodology

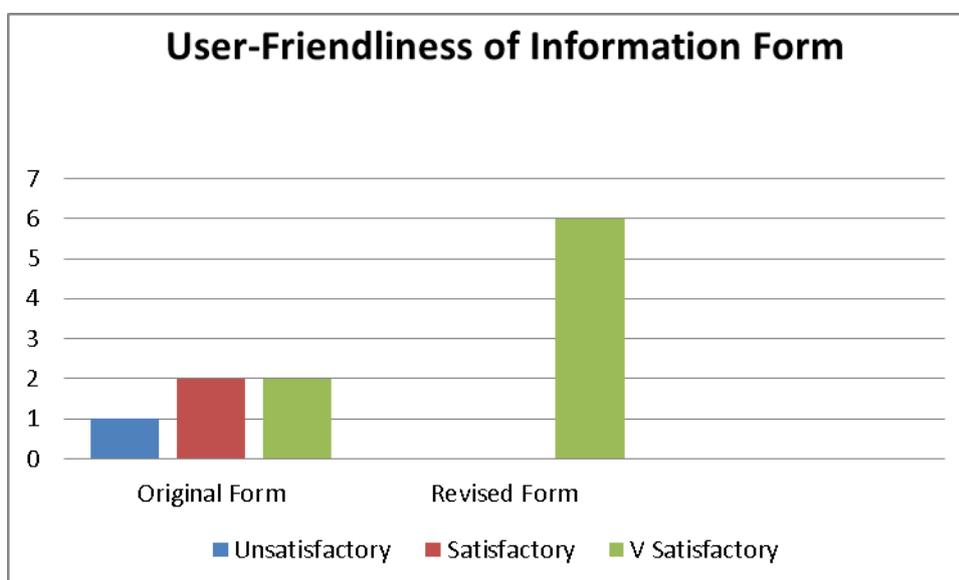
A range of methods were used to gather feedback in relation to the pilot project:

- 21 individual questionnaires were completed – pre-school staff (3), Junior Infant teachers (3), Principal (1), HSCL (1), KCCC staff member (1), parents (12).
- 1 Focus Group took place with representation from project partners (school, pre-school, KCCC)
- Phone contact was made with 2 pre-school representatives.
- One face-to-face meeting took place with representatives from 3 pre-schools.
- Feedback was invited from attendees at the information session hosted by the project partners for pre-schools & schools in Co. Kildare (45 attended).

### Evaluation Findings

#### Scoil Mhuire Junior Infant Information Form

- All respondents (N=6) rated the user-friendliness of the revised form as *Very Satisfactory*.



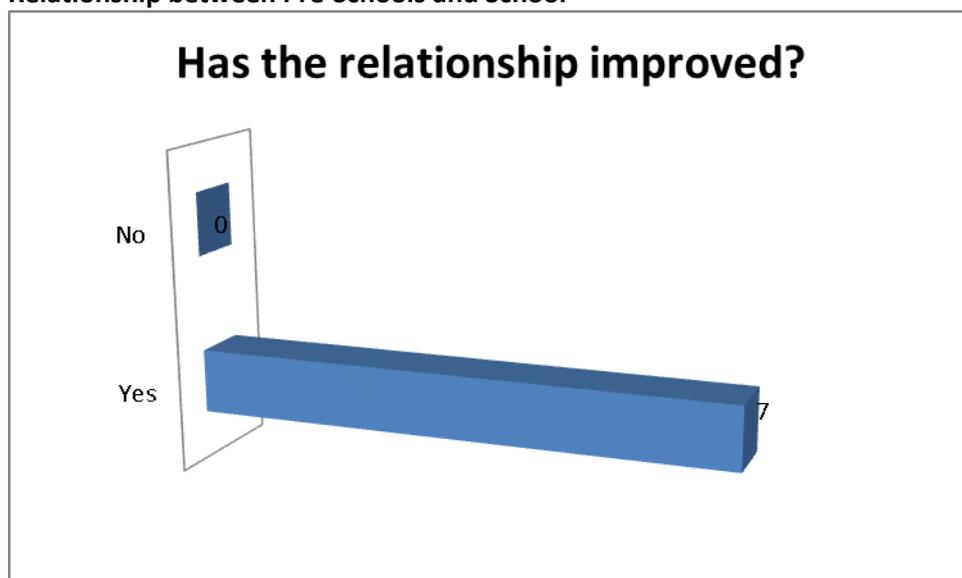
- All respondents indicated that the revised form was positively received by parents.

*The new form seems to be a lot easier for parents to complete – It has more prompts for questions relating to health problems etc.*

*All parts of form were completed compared to other years where some parts were left blank.*

Parents seemed to have filled more of the form out as noticed during the infant interviews in May.

#### Relationship between Pre-Schools and School



- All respondents (N=7) agreed that the relationship between the pre-schools and the school had improved as a result of involvement in the Junior Transition Programme process.

*I think the relationship with school is very good.*

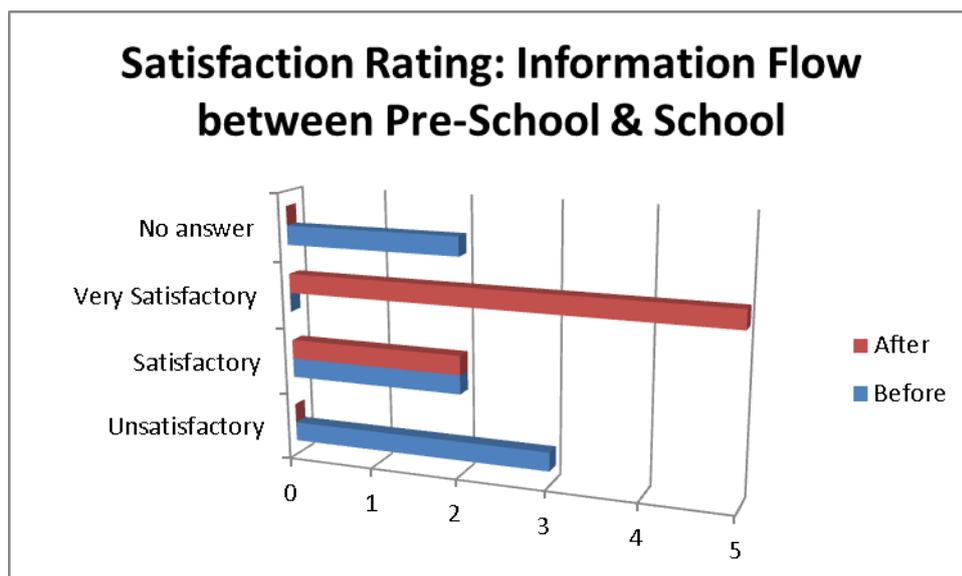
*I really enjoyed working with the school.*

*Having met the pre-schools during this process it will now be a lot easier for me to contact them if I need to in the next school year.*

*We now have a point of contact in the pre-school and I think this will be a huge benefit next year.*

*I think this whole process will strengthen the relationship between Scoil Mhuire and the 3 pre-schools involved.*

*This was an excellent initiative which greatly enhanced the relationships between preschool and our Junior infant teachers. It built relationship bridges which will be a great help to the children over the long term.*



- None of the respondents rated the flow of information before the Junior Transition programme as *Very Satisfactory*. 5 of the 7 respondents rated the flow of information as *Very Satisfactory* after the Junior Transition programme process.

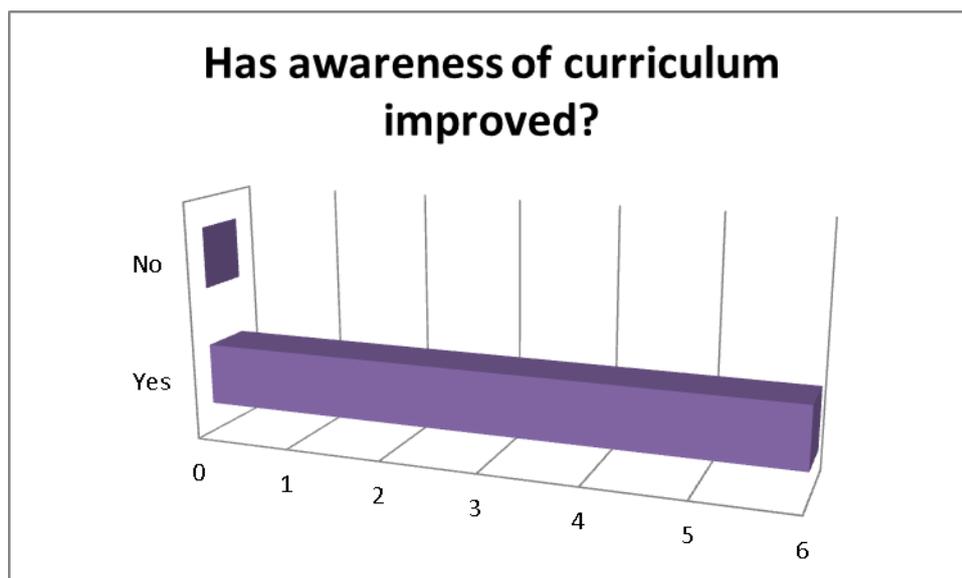
*There would have been little or no contact with the schools [before the pilot project].*

*While it has improved I feel it is in the infancy stages and more could be done to work on this.*

*There was none [communication with the pre-schools] unless we looked for information.*

*[Was] a little awkward when I might have had to phone a pre-school teacher about a child [before the pilot project]. Now I know some of the people that I am actually calling, which makes it easier.*

*For the pre schools that are involved [the flow of information] is excellent*



- All respondents (N=6) agreed that their awareness of the Pre-school/Junior Infant curriculum has improved as a result of involvement in the Junior Transition Programme process.

*I can see much more clearly what is expected of a child entering primary.*

*Before seeing the I CAN Book I had no awareness of the Pre-school curriculum*

*It seems to mirror our early infant curriculum – self care, self esteem, confidence, communication, fine and gross motor skills as well as building a positive relationship with parents.*

*It's good to know that some pre-schools feel under pressure to teach phonics and numeracy and its interesting to get the pre school teacher's perspective on their own curriculum as well as the infant curriculum.*

*I feel we really looked at what the preschool curriculum provides and what the primary schools expectations of the children are entering primary.*

*I feel the schools have a better picture of what we do in preschool and I have a better understanding of what is expected of a child entering primary school.*

*While I feel I have a better understanding [of the Junior Infant curriculum] I would love to learn more about it.*

#### **The I CAN Book & Guidance Notes**

- The *I CAN Book* is a useful tool for recording & transferring information about children's skills, achievements and areas that may need support.
- The *I CAN Book* is a useful tool in building the bridge between home, pre-school and school.
- The *I CAN Book* has the potential to be used as a tool to aid communication between teachers and parents e.g. at parent-teacher meetings.
- The *I CAN Book* enhances the level of comfort and confidence of pre-school services in sharing information with schools about individual children.
- The *I CAN Book* can be a useful aid to supporting a child's settling into school by teachers use of the information provided about child's likes and interests.

- The *I CAN Book* is a useful reference point for teachers when a concern arises about a child e.g. was the issue present at pre-school (longstanding) or recent. If recent, teachers can further consider whether it is due to the new environment or a change that may have occurred in the child's life over the summer period.

*A great tool to pass on to primary school.*

*It is an excellent tool to bridge the gap between 'Big School' and 'Play school' but also between parents and teachers. I think the I CAN Book has the potential to view the child on a more holistic basis with everyone working together for the greater good of the child at home, play school and big school.*

*The I CAN Books have highlighted many strengths and some challenges that the children have while also acting as a gateway into further communication with both parents and pre school teachers.*

- The *I CAN Book* is a useful tool for encouraging parents involvement in their child's development and education.

*It was a great tool to help parents understand their child development*

- The *I CAN Book* gives parents a chance to become aware of the child's achievements in pre-school and the skills the child is still working on.

*Parents were aware of child's abilities after reading book*

- The *I CAN Book* gives parents a chance to become aware of the skills needed to make a smooth transition into Junior Infants.

*It will be helpful to identify with the parent what skills are needed going into primary. Sometimes parents expect too much of their child re- writing skills etc.*

*Parents could see skill sets that the schools would like to have from the book.*

*Many parents could expect their children to read or write at the end of pre-school but this book shows clearly the important skills.*

- The *I CAN Book* gives parents a chance to gain an understanding of the benefits of the information being shared with the school.
- The *Guidance Notes* are helpful in completing the *I CAN Book*.
- The *I CAN Book* is user-friendly to complete.
- The *I CAN Book & Guidance Notes* are viewed positively by pre-school staff.

*It was clear and easy to use and all done in a very positive manner*

*It can give staff a sense of achievement to see how far the child has progressed through the year.*

*Staff were delighted to have something to work on and felt it was a positive move to promoting a link between preschools and primary school.*

*Also a lovely memento to give the child when leaving.*

*Staff enjoyed doing the books and taking time to think about each child's progress.*

*Staff were enthusiastic and felt it was a lovely way to show child's development is progressing.*

- Pre-School staff indicated that the *I CAN Book* was well received by parents.

*Parents were very proud of the book and were pleased to see very clearly and positively what their child can achieve.*

*Parents loved getting their child's book and looking to see if our opinion was same as theirs on their child's development.*

*Parents were happy and excited to see their child's level of development.*

#### Parent Feedback

- All 12 parents who gave feedback viewed the *I CAN Book* positively.

*The I CAN Book is a brilliant idea it gives parents knowledge of how their child is progressing which puts parents mind at ease.*

*It was really good to see what [my child] could do.*

*I think it's a good idea and helpful for the teachers to get to know the child.*

*I thought it was a good idea and very informative.*

*I thought the I CAN Book to be useful and helpful*

*Very good. Interesting to see how [my child] developed different skills*

- Parents found the *I CAN Book* gave a good insight into their child's skills, achievements and interests.

*It gives the parent an insight to what your child is like outside of home and their capabilities.*

*I like the I CAN Book because it show the ability of the child and his performances during their term in the pre-school.*

*I like that you know she worked well with other children*

*It was a help for me as a parent to know what we have to work on to improve.*

*It gives an insight on what you need to work on with your child during the summer before starting school. I also like the positives that other people see about your child.*

*I liked the book as it showed my child's strengths in different areas*

*I learnt things I didn't know about [my child].*

*I learned lots about [my child]. What he is like in school and what he is good at. I think the I CAN Book is great.*

*It was very personal to the child and covered social skills and developmental progress in learning abilities*

*I felt it gave the new teachers an idea of what the child was like and able for.*

*I found the I CAN Book very helpful in knowing how [my child] was doing and where he needed help on some things.*

*I found the book helpful in finding out what my child was able to do on her own with me not around.*

*Reading about things that he did in [pre] school and was good at because he never would talk about school when asked so it helped a lot.*

*The I CAN Book showed me the ability of my child which I didn't think he could do.*

## **Challenges**

There were some challenges identified in relation to the project:

- Reflecting the curricula of the early years sector in the document
- Ensuring the *I CAN Book* is positive experience for parents & children.
- Ensuring that the *I CAN Book* is used for it's intended purpose e.g. it is not an "entrance exam" for pre-school, a diagnostic tool or a quality measure for a pre-school service.
- Reflecting & meeting the needs of both education sectors i.e. early years & primary.
- Ensuring the text in the *Overall Comment* section of the *I CAN Book* is worded positively while also conveying any concerns or relevant areas to be addressed.
- Time constraints in introducing the book to staff and parents.
- Time consuming to complete a book for each child.
- Time constraints in going through completed book with parents.

## Parent Feedback

*When the book was gone through with me in crèche it felt very rushed*

*I love the idea of the I CAN Book but think the quality & reliability of the final book is dependent on time & effort put in by the crèche.*

- 1 parent expressed some anxiety in relation to the *I CAN Book*

*Although initially loving the idea of this book I found it more stressful than helpful when completed. I didn't agree with everything in it and was afraid my child would be labelled before he ever set foot in the classroom.*

*I found myself worrying coming up to September as to the impact the book would have on my child when he started school before ever anyone got to know "my baby". It felt a lot of the boxes "I am still working on this" were a negative against him & I felt the need nearly to defend him with things I wasn't happy with.*

## **Recommendations**

- Use the *I CAN Book* to identify the small number of children who will require extra support at school via an initial review of the books in June. Then a further review of the books can

take place after the teachers have observed and interacted with the children for a few weeks and thereafter the books can be used as a reference point as the need arises.

- Make Aistear more visible in language, approach & content of the *I CAN Book*.
- Allocate more time to go through completed book with parents.
- Provide an opportunity for parents to input into the *I CAN Book*.
- Introduce the *I CAN Book* to parents at the beginning of the pre-school year (September) so that they will have a clear picture from the outset of the skills that are being fostered over the course of the year.
- The *I CAN Book* may also be used as a self assessment tool for the child to help illustrate what the child found challenging in pre school but after a few months of maturing or in Junior Infants can now do e.g. the star can be changed/a gold star put in its place to illustrate that the child can now zip up their coat.
- *I CAN Book* could be used for ongoing monitoring of progress at pre-school e.g. check-in at Christmas as well as June.
- *I CAN Book* could be used for ongoing monitoring of progress in Junior Infants.
- Link *Fun Ideas for Home* section of the *I CAN Book* to Aistear Tip Sheets.
- Links to relevant websites and online resources can be included in the *Fun Ideas for Home* section.
- Include tips for parents under individual skills areas in *I CAN Book*.
- Junior Transition programme to include site visits i.e. pre-school staff visit Junior Infants and teachers visit pre-schools.
- Link to the work at national level in relation to supporting the transition from pre-school to primary e.g. via Early Childhood Ireland, NCCA, national network of CCCs.
- Link with Pre-School Officer from Tusla, the Child & Family Agency for feedback in relation to the *I CAN Book* & *Guidance Notes*.
- Expand the project to include more schools and pre-schools.
- Promote *I CAN Book* among primary schools to ensure that they are receptive to the idea of working with pre-schools in supporting the transition.

#### Parent Feedback

*I think parents should also have an input with crèche.*

*The time the teacher would spend to sit down with the parent should be allocated better not in the morning before the classes.*

*I like the layout but feel there needs to be more input from parents.*

*I would have liked to see it halfway through playschool and then again at the end of the year.*

*I would prefer if parents were given time to discuss things properly before being asked to sign.*

*Although I can see the pros of a teacher having this book before September, in my opinion I don't think they should be given before kids start school. Three months for a 4/5 year old is a long time & a lot can change in that time.*

*This is a great report to the primary school in advance to knowing the child. I would like to see all preschools doing this as the primary school teachers are overloaded if big classes of different students at different levels.*

*I think all pre-schools should use this going forward.*

**END**