



Equity Case Studies

The Brigshaw Learning Partnership: Festival of Transition

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Making transition a process, not an event



At a glance

Context: Trust of 7 schools (ages 2–18) serving ex-mining communities east of Leeds (c.3,000 pupils)

Equity focus: Reducing disengagement and anxiety at key transition points, particularly Year 6–7

Key strategy: Trust-wide transition framework culminating in a two-week Festival of Transition

Who led it: Trust executive, primary and secondary headteachers, Community of Practice

What changed: Stronger continuity, reduced anxiety, improved engagement and belonging in Year 7



The challenge we were trying to solve

Brigshaw Learning Partnership serves largely monocultural, post-industrial communities shaped by economic decline and low mobility. While headline attainment was improving, leaders recognised a persistent drop-off in engagement, attendance and confidence at key transition points, particularly the move from primary to secondary school.

Transitions were experienced as abrupt rather than supported. Pupils reported anxiety and loss of belonging; parents often lacked confidence in the process; curriculum and cultural discontinuities compounded disadvantage, particularly for vulnerable learners. Leaders concluded that transition was not a peripheral issue but a critical equity moment where disadvantage could widen or be mitigated.



What we did

The trust reframed transition as a process rather than a single event. Working with the Reach Foundation, it developed a structured transition framework, symbolised and enacted through the annual Festival of Transition.

The Festival brings together pupils, families and staff across phases through curriculum bridging projects, extended visits, team-building activities, and explicit teaching of routines and expectations. Year 6 pupils experience learning in both their primary setting and the secondary school, supported by familiar staff, while parents are actively engaged through events, performances and targeted outreach.

This approach is reinforced by shared rituals, artefacts and language, and by post-transition follow-up in Year 7 to ensure pupils settle academically, socially and emotionally.



Why this mattered for equity

National and local data show that transition points disproportionately disadvantage pupils who are already vulnerable. Anxiety, curriculum gaps and loss of belonging can quickly translate into disengagement.

By prioritising continuity, repeated exposure and relationship-building, the Trust aimed to ensure that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds entered secondary school confident, prepared and known – rather than anonymous and at risk of slipping through the gaps.



Barriers and challenges

Early on, lack of alignment across schools posed a significant challenge. High levels of autonomy had led to differences in curriculum, expectations and practice, making cross-phase collaboration harder. Some staff initially viewed transition work as additional workload rather than core business.

These barriers were addressed through wider trust-wide alignment work, the creation of a Community of Practice, and clear framing of transition as central to outcomes rather than an add-on. Building organisational memory – documenting processes, artefacts and routines – was also essential, as no prior transition framework existed.



What made it work

The work sat within a clear strategic narrative: transition as central to the Trust's mission. Leadership was distributed through a Community of Practice spanning primary and secondary phases, building shared ownership and sustainability.

Attention to detail mattered. Rituals, artefacts and naming (the “Festival of Transition”) created coherence and meaning, while evidence from relevant research helped secure buy-in.



What changed

Pupils report reduced anxiety and stronger feelings of belonging. Parents express greater confidence in the transition process. Early indicators show improved Year 7 attendance, engagement and behaviour, particularly among vulnerable groups.

Just as importantly, collaboration between primary and secondary staff has strengthened, supporting greater curriculum and cultural coherence across the Trust.



Project sustainability

The Festival is embedded within the Trust's strategic approach and funded through existing budgets and staff time rather than short-term grants. The Community of Practice model reduces reliance on individual leaders, supporting continuity as the work scales across phases and cohorts.



Measuring outcomes

Impact is tracked through a combination of attendance, behaviour and attainment data in Year 7, alongside pupil and parent feedback before and after transition. Staff reflections and joint planning provide further indicators of improved coherence and practice.



What we'd do differently/advice to others

Start somewhere and improve over time. Transition work does not need to be perfect to be powerful. Treat transition as a process, not a moment, and embed it within a wider vision rather than as a standalone initiative.

Above all, invest in relationships – between phases, with families, and with pupils. Transition is where belonging is either built or lost.

