

Going to Secondary School: What if? - Lewisham

Hearing pupil voices at KS2 and the Secondary Phases, June 2008



'Faith and Fun Together' was a two - day multi faith event for Year 6 children, organised by the Lewisham Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) with the backing of the many different faith groups within Lewisham and with the help and support of the governors of Christchurch School. It was a pilot project funded by a small grant from the Westhill Trustees in partnership with the National Association of Sacres (NASACRE). The Year 6 children were drawn from 5 primary schools within the local authority and from the local Mosque school. The Secondary panel comprised of two students from Forest Hill School, two from Catford High School, the Deputy Young Mayor and two of the Young Mayor's advisors.



One aim of the project was to explore with the children their hopes and fears about the transition to secondary school. It focused particularly on anxieties they had about practising their faith in this new environment. The children met a panel of Year 10 pupils from local secondary schools who answered questions about their own experience of starting secondary school. Questions could be asked anonymously.



The children raised serious concerns about many areas. Many anxieties and questions were on topics like bullying, violence, threatening behaviour, and racism, these included anxieties about faith issues.. Other key area were teachers who would be too strict or unkind, getting uniform right, work that would be too hard, or too much homework. There were others who were concerned over getting into unspecified 'trouble'. Many children were terrified that they would not 'fit in' and would be unable to make new friends. Others had great anxiety over the journey to school and the process of moving around the new building and finding lessons. Some worried about dinners and about 'scary dinner – ladies'. On the following pages you can read some of their expressed anxieties and concerns.

BULLYING / VIOLENCE

83 children identified this as a concern.



- I am worried about bullies because they beat you up
- I am worried I might be bullied because I am small
- Being bullied and forced to do things I don't want to
- Being bullied because I will be the youngest
- Getting laughed at
- Conflict between schools
- Being teased
- What if somebody threatens me?
- People stealing my things
- People will be rude to me
- Everyone will be taller than me
- Will I get rushed by year 8, 9, 10 and 11?
- Is it true that schools fight each other?
- Somebody getting me into something serious (queried - he meant extreme religious groups)
- Do people get bullied because they are religious?
- If you're struggling in school are you more likely to get bullied?
- What will happen if a year 7 gets beaten up by older children?

RACISM

12 children identified this as a concern



- People might call me white when I'm mixed race
- Is racism worse in a secondary school?

SCHOOL STAFF, UNIFORM, HOMEWORK AND WORK

39 children identified this as a concern

- Work that's too hard and then I'll be in trouble if I can't do it
- Scary teachers
- Dinner ladies that shout
- Will there be a place for prayer?
- Too much homework
- Science
- Can you express your opinions to secondary teachers?
- Lessons
- How hard will the work be?
- Can your religious jewellery be confiscated?
- I am an atheist – will I have to join in with prayers?
- Homework that's too hard
- What if I forget some of my uniform or my planner?
- Too many subjects to learn

ON DINNERS

5 children identified this as a concern.



- I might not like the dinners
- What if they don't have vegetarian food?
- Will I be able to eat halal?

FRIENDS

31 children identified this as a concern.

- Making friends from different primary schools
- Not seeing my old friends
- I am afraid I might not fit in and won't make friends
- Don't know if I'll have any friends
- Unfriendly people
- Are there religious groups? If there are will that mean I can't be friends with that person any more?
- I'm worried I'll feel left out
- Can faith groups destroy old friendships?
- I'm worried no one will like me
- Meeting people is hard

TROUBLE AND DETENTION

40 children identified this as a concern



- Getting detention
- Getting in trouble
- What do you get a detention for?

TRAVEL and FINDING (OR NOT) THEIR WAY AROUND

39 children identified this as a concern

- Is it hard to travel on buses and trains?
- Travelling further
- What will happen if I get lost and get late?
- How will I know what class is next and where it is?
- Being late and getting a detention
- It might get dark and my new school is on a big hill
- How to get there
- Will I get lost?
- Moving around from room to room
- If I get lost will somebody help me or do they just misdirect you?

The children who were able to attend 'Faith and Fun' were reassured about many of their anxieties and questions by the Year 10 students. The answers of some members of the Year 10 panel have been collected for you to share with your pupils:

'It's not only you that will be new at school so try not to worry but enjoy it instead. I was really scared because I was the only one from my primary school but I was absolutely fine. As the days go by you get to know lots of different people. I was never bullied even though I am a Hindu, so you don't need to be worried.'

Rajendra - Catford High School

Don't be worried about homework because teachers are not horrible to you about it in Year 7. You get a homework timetable so you don't end up with all your homework on one day. Just try to do it as soon as you get it. If you wear the right uniform, bring the equipment you've been told to bring and do your homework you won't get a detention.

It's really hard to get detentions in Year 7. Racism is really low in most secondary schools and they all have an anti – bullying policy.'

Naz Ramadan – Deputy Young Mayor of Lewisham

'Starting Year 7 is not as bad as you might think and other people tell you. You might be worried about people asking you for money. From experience I can tell you this might happen and my advice is just to say no. If it happens again, tell a teacher or your parents. Homework in Year 7 won't be as bad as you think because you are new. You get a homework timetable telling you when homework will be set and when it is due in. To the boy who was worried he might be forced to join in religious activities when he doesn't want to, I say don't be. Teachers like the fact that we're all different and they will mostly be sensitive to your beliefs. Some people today mentioned being worried about being asked to take off their religious jewellery. Your new school will respect your religion – the most you will be asked to do is tuck in your jewellery.'

David Davis – Forest Hill School'



The main piece of advice I can give you is to be assertive and have the confidence to say no. Most of the time people just walk away if you say no. I know it's hard going somewhere new but you just have to always try to be the very best you can. Reach for the moon, then if you fall at least you will fall among the stars.'

Donnisha Best – Sydenham School

'Don't worry about bullying, calm down and it won't be as bad as you think. Secondary school will be different to primary school and you won't know everyone but that's not always a bad thing.'

Don't worry what people will think of you, just be yourself and work hard so you get the most out of it. Don't worry about people judging you because of your appearance because everyone is different and that's what makes it and us special. Even if you are quiet and shy like I was you will still make friends – it just takes a bit longer. If you're worried about having a different religion, don't be. Just explain things to people and they will be interested.'

Safiyah **Kilby** – Catford High School

'Year 7 isn't going to be as worrying as you think. There are lots of rumours around like everyone is bad or there are lots of mean bullies, but it's not like that. When I started secondary school nobody was picking on me. The older kids who spoke to me were friendly and funny.'

Janice **Caramba** – Coker – Sydenham School

My first piece of advice is that you must be self – confident. Any bullies will be less likely to pick on you. Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself. Homework is not an issue for Year 7's because most teachers know how vulnerable you are and will be nice to you. Detentions are not scary –



sometimes they can even be fun because as long as you accept what the teacher is saying you can then get to know them a bit better.

My last piece of advice is to work out which teachers are most likely to give you a detention and try to make sure you do everything right in their lessons.'

Axel **Kaner** – Lidstrom – Forest Hill School

There will be many pupils transferring to secondary school who have not been able to discuss their fears with people who actually know what secondary school is like. Their anxieties may make their transition from primary to secondary a painful experience and may well act as a block to learning.

It is therefore very important that the



“What if’s?” in pupil voices at the end of Key Stage 2 are acknowledged, listened to and cared for as pupils move to secondary school.

We hope that “Faith and Fun Together” and this leaflet of outcomes will help you in your role within this important time of transition for all our children and young people of all faiths and of no faith in Lewisham.



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