



# A Smooth Transition

Focus on **Learning platforms**

Primary/whole school

## Top tips from Mortimer Comprehensive

- Introduce ideas in stages to see what works and what doesn't!
- Make sure you commit the time and energy needed to get these ideas off the ground
- Think about how communicating with other schools can enhance life in your school
- Consider how the platform can help you to involve and include the wider school community
- Take all the advice, support and guidance you can – your RBC or LA can help

Since July 2005 Mortimer Comprehensive School has been using its learning platform as a vehicle for communication and for sharing information. As all secondary schools know, supporting the new intake of pupils during the potentially difficult transition period is an important focus of every academic year. With a learning platform already in place, Mortimer saw the opportunity of using the platform to help integrate pupils into school life.

Having created the basic idea for the scheme, Mortimer decided to introduce the transition project on a trial basis by focusing on some simple and effective tactics that would help parents and new pupils find out about life at Mortimer. Firstly, a number of relevant websites to support transition were made accessible through the portal to provide some useful background information. Mortimer staff then created a FAQ section that provided answers to many of the typical concerns and worries that both parents and students have about moving up to 'big school'. For example "What is the routine for lunchtimes?" covers the whole system of using a swipe card, how students line up, where to sit and clearing away, meaning new pupils can familiarise themselves with the daily routines. A special transition video was also made available for download through the portal. Finally, a countdown to the first day of term was included to help build excitement about the new experiences that lay ahead.

Following the success of the trial, headteacher Claire Mullane worked with the rest of her team to develop the transition project for the academic year 2006/07. The platform has been rationalised to maximise use and access to the valuable information that is now available. One important addition is a weekly learning activity designed to prepare students for the transition. While the general FAQs remain an important feature of the portal, the opportunities for communication have been extended, thanks to a facility enabling parents to email specific questions to the school for individual responses. Parents and pupils find this facility an extremely useful source of information, particularly during school holidays when it can be difficult to contact the school directly for advice.

Want to find out more?  
[www.teachernet.gov.uk/  
learning-platforms](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/learning-platforms)



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*Claire Mullane, headteacher,  
Mortimer Comprehensive*

Mortimer’s experiences also highlighted some aspects of the project that did not work so effectively. The transition video has now been removed because, while the content was useful, the video was difficult for users without broadband internet access to download and so it posed the risk of becoming a barrier to use. Claire Mullane, comments, “The use of the portal to support transition has indirectly had a positive impact on the whole school. Students are now joining the school feeling more settled and more reassured which creates a better environment for staff, existing pupils and our new intake.”

“Being able to communicate directly with parents can ease a lot of fears. Through the portal, pupils and parents can get responses to their questions even during school holidays. I received one such enquiry during the summer break from a parent concerned that her child was feeling very nervous because he was the only student coming from a particular primary school. I was able to respond and explain that he wouldn’t be alone, that we concentrate on bonding the group that the form tutor will be aware of the situation and that past experience tells us that after a week he will have settled in fine. Being able to communicate directly can help to avoid many weeks of worry for both the pupils and parents.”

At Mortimer Comprehensive the platform will now be rolled out for use across other areas of the curriculum and is being trialed with the Senior Leadership Team as a mechanism for communication and transferring documents – creating a 'paperless' means of communication. Claire continues, “Setting up a learning platform takes time but it is worth it. An important point is to start with projects that are manageable and make sure that you can commit the energy required to make sure that they work. Remember it is better to have two or three areas of success than ten flops! Finally, make sure you take advantage of available support – we really couldn’t have done it without the support of the Local Authority and our Regional Broadband Consortium.”



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